

DHEE AND DHRITI: CLASSICAL WISDOM TO COGNITIVE SCIENCE

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Article Received: 27 August 2026

Article Review: 17 September 2026

Article Accepted: 07 October 2026

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23433267>

How to cite this Article: Dr. Arunkumar B. Arali, Dr. Sinchana D. Nanda, Dr. Pratibha V. Kulkarni (2026). *DHEE AND DHRITI: CLASSICAL WISDOM TO COGNITIVE SCIENCE*. World Journal of Pharmacy and Medical Science, 2(10): 96-101.



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ABSTRACT

Background: Cognition enables understanding, retention, decision-making and behavioural regulation. Ayurveda describes these functions through *Prajna*, expressed by three interdependent faculties: *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti*. Their integrated role provides a basis for understanding cognition within Ayurveda and exploring its relevance to contemporary cognitive science. **Objective:** To examine the roles of *Dhee* and *Dhriti* in cognition and explore their relevance to contemporary cognitive science. **Materials and Methods:** Classical Ayurvedic texts, including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with their authoritative commentaries, were reviewed. Relevant contemporary literature on cognition, executive function, and self-regulation was also examined. A qualitative conceptual review was undertaken by analysing the Ayurvedic concepts of *Jnanotpatti*, *Triguna*, *Tridosha*, *Vibhramsha*, and *Prajnaparadha* and correlating them with contemporary understanding of cognitive functions. **Results and Conclusion:** *Dhee* represents active examination and discrimination, while *Dhriti* represents sustaining and regulatory capacity supporting appropriate action. Their disturbance may contribute to *Prajnaparadha* and *Sarvadosha Prakopa*. Functionally, *Dhee* relates to attention, reasoning and decision-making, while *Dhriti* relates to inhibitory control, persistence and self-regulation. These are functional parallels rather than direct anatomical or neurobiological equivalences. Ayurveda therefore presents cognition as an integrated process linking mental function, behaviour and health.

KEYWORDS: *Dhee*, *Dhriti*, *Jnanopathi*, *Prajnaparadha*, Cognitive neuroscience.

INTRODUCTION

Cognition refers to the processes through which knowledge is acquired, understood, retained and applied through thought, experience and the senses, and it includes attention, perception, memory, reasoning, judgement and decision-making.^[1] While contemporary neuroscience examines these as interacting domains supported by distributed neural networks, Ayurveda presents cognition as an integrated process involving *Manas*, *Indriya* and *Buddhi*, expressed through *Prajna* and its three interdependent faculties, *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti*.^[2] This view is consistent with the Ayurvedic concept of health, in which the proper functioning of *Atma*, *Indriya* and *Manas* is essential along with the equilibrium of *Dosha*, *Agni*, *Dhatu* and *Mala*.^[3]

The classics also recognise the clinical importance of these faculties. Their disturbance *Vibhrama* results in *Prajnaparadha*, which is regarded as a cause of *Sarvadosha Prakopa*.^[4] Cognition is therefore treated not

only as a mental function but also as a determinant of health and disease. Understanding what each faculty contributes is thus relevant to the physiology of the mind as well as to its pathology.

Among the three faculties, *Dhee* and *Dhriti* represent complementary dimensions of cognition, namely discrimination and regulation, and examining them together may clarify how understanding is carried into appropriate behaviour. Contemporary cognitive science studies related functions such as attention, reasoning, decision-making and self-regulation, and this offers a framework for examining their functional dimensions. The present review therefore analyses the classical concepts of *Dhee* and *Dhriti*, their roles within *Prajna* and *Jnanotpatti*, their disturbances, and their possible functional correlations with contemporary neurocognitive perspectives.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Classical Ayurvedic texts, including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with their authoritative commentaries, were reviewed. Relevant contemporary literature on cognition, executive function, and self-regulation was also examined. A qualitative conceptual review was undertaken by analysing the Ayurvedic concepts of *Jnanotpatti*, *Triguna*, *Tridosha*, *Vibhramsha*, and *Prajnaparadha* and correlating them with contemporary understanding of cognitive functions.

Concept of Dhee

Etymology and Definition

Dhee is derived from the root *Dhyai-Chintayam*, denoting contemplation, concentration and cognitive engagement. It is described as *Vastu Grahana Shakti*, the ability to apprehend and understand an object of knowledge. The term is associated with *Buddhi*, *Manisha*, *Prajna*, *Mati* and *Dheeshana*, reflecting its close relationship with cognition and understanding. Functionally, *Dhee* involves active engagement with an object through consideration, examination and discrimination as *Hita* or *Ahita*. Thus, *Dhee* may be understood as an active cognitive faculty involved in the processing and evaluation of knowledge.

Dhee and Buddhi: Functional Relationship

Dhee and *Buddhi* are closely related and are often used synonymously in classical literature. Functionally, however, *Dhee* emphasizes contemplation, examination and discrimination, particularly in relation to *Hita* and *Ahita*, whereas *Buddhi*, derived from *Budh-Avagamane*, denotes understanding and discernment and is described as *Nishchayatmika Antahkarana Vritti*. Thus, *Dhee* may be considered primarily involved in active cognitive engagement, while *Buddhi* represents the determinative aspect of understanding. This distinction is functional rather than absolute.

Dhee in the process of cognition

In the Ayurvedic process of cognition, *Indriya* apprehends the object, *Manas* engages with it, *Ahankara* relates the experience to oneself, and *Buddhi* establishes definite understanding through *Adhyavasaya*. Within this process, *Dhee* represents active cognitive engagement involving attention, examination, reasoning and discrimination. It contributes to understanding without constituting a separate stage.^[5]

Dhee and Mano Vishaya

The cognitive activity of *Dhee* can be understood through the five *Mano Vishaya*:^[6]

1. *Chintya* – consideration of what should be done or avoided.
2. *Vicharya* – examination and evaluation.
3. *Uhya* – reasoning and consideration of possibilities.
4. *Dhyeya* – focused attention and contemplation.
5. *Sankalpa* – final determination or resolve.

Sensory and Mental Cognition

Dhee manifests in two forms, *Manobuddhi* and *Indriyabuddhi*. *Indriyabuddhi* refers to knowledge arising through the respective *Jnanendriya*, such as *Chakshur Buddhi* in visual cognition, while *Manobuddhi* refers to cognition associated with *Manas*. Sensory information becomes available for consideration, examination and determination. Thus, *Dhee* functions within the interaction between sensory input and internal cognitive processing.^[7]

Integrated Basis of Cognition

Cognition does not depend on *Buddhi* alone or on any single faculty. It begins with the *Indriya*, each of which is made mainly of one *Mahabhuta* and is known by its function, and *Buddhi* arises from them the senses are therefore the starting point of knowledge. Charaka then explains that *Buddhi* arises through *Sannikarsha*, the meeting of *Atma*, *Indriya*, *Manas* and *Artha*. He gives the example of sound, which arises when the fingers and thumb strike the palm, or when the nail strikes the strings of a *Veena*. Sound does not come from one part alone, and it appears only when all its parts come together. In the same way, cognition appears only when all its factors come together. *Dhee* and *Buddhi* therefore do their work within this joint process and not on their own.^[8]

Dhee Vibhramsha

Dhee Vibhramsha involves faulty discrimination between *Nitya-Anitya* and *Hita-Ahita*. It reflects disturbed evaluation of what is beneficial or harmful and what is permanent or temporary. Thus, it represents disturbed cognitive discrimination rather than merely an absence of knowledge and may contribute to *Prajnaparadha*.^[9]

Neurocognitive Perspective of Dhee

From a contemporary neurocognitive perspective, *Dhee* may be viewed as an integrated sequence of higher-order cognitive processes involving coordinated prefrontal and parietal networks rather than a single anatomical region.^[10]

1. Grahana – Parietal-Prefrontal Networks

Represents initial apprehension and comprehension. Parietal regions support information selection and integration, while prefrontal regions support attention and interpretation.

2. Chintya-Vicharya – Prefrontal Cortex

Involves cognitive-control mechanisms, particularly the Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex, supporting information maintenance, comparison and evaluation.

3. Uha – Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex and Frontopolar Cortex

Involves reasoning, inference, alternatives and problem-solving. DLPFC supports working memory and cognitive manipulation, while the frontopolar cortex supports complex reasoning.

4. *Dhyeya* – Frontoparietal Network

Represents focused mental engagement, supported by DLPFC–parietal interaction for sustained attention and goal maintenance.

5. *Sankalpa*–*Vyavasaya* – Orbitofrontal and Ventromedial Prefrontal Regions and Anterior Cingulate Cortex

Involves determination, discrimination, judgement and response selection. OFC and vmPFC contribute to evaluation of choices and consequences, while Anterior Cingulate Cortex contributes to conflict monitoring.

Dhriti: Conceptual and Functional Perspectives Etymology and Definition

Dhriti is derived from *Dhri*, meaning “to hold,” “to sustain” or “to maintain,” with the suffix *Ktin*. It denotes firmness, steadiness, resolution, endurance and restraint. Sushruta describes *Dhriti* in relation to *Manassantushti* and *niyamathmikatushti*,^[11] while Charaka describes it as *Manasoachanchalyam*,^[12] indicating steadiness of mind. Its *Niyamathmika* nature emphasizes regulation and restraint, while *Svasyanigraha* indicates restraint from inappropriate objects and activities.^[13]

Classical Contexts of *Dhriti*

1. *Dhriti* within *Prajna*

Dhriti is described along with *Dhee* and *Smriti* as a component of *Prajna*, representing the regulatory dimension that maintains steadiness of *Manas* and supports appropriate behaviour.^[14]

2. *Dhriti* as an *Atmaja Bhava*

It is included among qualities originating from *Atma*, suggesting an inherent capacity for mental stability and regulation.^[15]

3. *Dhritimanta* and the Expression of *Dhriti*

Dhritimanta denotes firmness, endurance, patience and constancy despite difficulties.^[16]

4. *Dhriti* in *Mamsa Dhatu Sara*

Dhriti, together with *Kshama* and *Alaulya*, indicates stability, tolerance and freedom from excessive wavering.^[17]

5. *Para Dhriti*

Represents higher regulation of *Manas* and restraint from excessive sensory involvement, extending towards *Moksha*.^[18]

Functional Role of *Dhriti* in Cognition

Dhriti is described along with *Dhee* and *Smriti* as a component of *Prajna*. While *Dhee* facilitates understanding and discrimination, *Dhriti* sustains and regulates the mental response, and *Smriti* supports retention and recollection.

Its functions include:

- **Sustenance:** maintains engagement with the chosen object or goal.
- **Restraint:** prevents inappropriate sensory or behavioural responses.
- **Regulation:** supports action according to appropriate understanding.

Dhriti as a Regulatory Faculty of *Manas*

Manas can move towards different sensory objects and is susceptible to attraction, aversion and distraction. *Dhriti* helps maintain appropriate mental direction. Charaka's description of *Dhriti* as *Niyamathmika*, together with its association with *Indriyabhigraha* and *Svasyanigraha*^[19] indicates this regulatory role.^[20]

Thus, *Dhriti* does not suppress cognition but regulates the direction, continuity and behavioural expression of mental engagement.

Dhriti in Learning and Behavioural Regulation

Dhriti is included among the desirable characteristics of an ideal learner, where firmness and persistence support continued learning and tolerance of difficulty. It helps maintain an appropriate course of action despite distraction, difficulty or competing impulses, linking understanding with consistent behaviour.^[21]

Neurocognitive Correlation of *Dhriti*

Contemporary neurocognitive functions related to *Dhriti* may be discussed in terms of inhibitory control, planning, goal maintenance, conflict monitoring, behavioural regulation and persistence.^[10]

1. Prefrontal Cortex – Regulation and Inhibitory

Control: Supports inhibitory control, planning and behavioural-goal maintenance, providing a functional basis for *Niyamana* and *Svasyanigraha*.

2. Anterior Cingulate Cortex – Conflict Monitoring:

Monitors competing responses and signals the need for cognitive control.

3. Orbitofrontal and Ventromedial Prefrontal Regions – Evaluation and Decision Regulation:

Evaluate rewards, consequences and behavioural choices, providing a functional basis for regulating behaviour according to *Hita* and *Ahita*.

4. Limbic and Reward-Related Systems – Emotion and Impulse Generation:

Influence emotion, motivation, attraction and reward-seeking behaviour, generating impulses requiring regulation.

5. Integrated Function – Self-Regulation:

Interaction of these systems supports self-regulation, impulse control, attentional stability, persistence and goal-directed behaviour, which may be considered functional parallels of *Dhriti*.

Dhriti Vibhramsa

Dhriti represents the regulatory dimension of *Prajna*, enabling discrimination to be translated into appropriate action. *Dhriti Vibhramsa* may therefore be understood as impaired regulatory capacity in which emotional,

motivational or reward-driven impulses override appropriate behaviour.^[22]

Functional And Physiological Basis of *Prajna*

Triguna: The Mental Basis

Manas is *Trigunaatmaka*, composed of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Their predominance influences cognition.^[23]

- ***Sattva*** promotes clarity, awareness and understanding, supporting clear *Dhee* and steady *Dhriti*.
- ***Rajas*** produces activity and instability, leading to restlessness and reduced regulation.
- ***Tamas*** causes dullness and obscuration of understanding.

Tridosha: The Physiological Support^[24]

Table 1: Functional role of *Dosha* in *Dhee* and *Dhriti*.

<i>Dosha</i>	Role in cognition
<i>Prana Vata</i>	Supports <i>Manas</i> and <i>Buddhi</i>
<i>Udana Vata</i>	Associated with <i>Smriti</i> and <i>Dhriti</i>
<i>Sadhaka Pitta</i>	Has its abode in <i>Hridaya</i> ; supports <i>Buddi</i> , <i>Manas</i> , <i>Medha</i> and <i>Prajna</i> , including understanding, discrimination and judgement ^[25]
<i>Kapha</i>	Provides <i>Sthairya</i> , <i>Bala</i> and mental stability, particularly <i>Dhriti</i>
<i>Tarpaka Kapha</i>	Situated in <i>Shiras</i> and protects and nourishes the sense organs ^[26]

*Hridaya and Shiras: The Seat of *Buddhi**

Charaka Samhita and *Ashtanga Hridaya* describe the seat of *Buddi* in the *Hridaya*, whereas *Bhela Samhita* places it in the *Shiras*. *Hridaya* is associated with *Manas*, *Buddi*, *Prana* and *Chetana*. Since *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti* are functions of *Prajna*, their proper functioning depends on the coordinated operation of these mental and vital components. *Hridaya* may therefore be described as a supporting basis for their integrated functioning rather than as a structure that directly integrates them.^[27]

Prajnaparadha

Proper functioning of *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti* are essential for appropriate thought and action. Caraka describes their simultaneous impairment as the basis of *Prajnaparadha*, resulting in inappropriate thought, speech and action. Thus, *Prajnaparadha* denotes harmful behaviour arising from impaired *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti*. It is an important etiological factor for *Sarvadoshaprakopa*⁴ and may manifest through *Asatmyendriyārtha Samyoga*, *Lobha*, *Shoka*, *Bhaya* and *Krodha*, inappropriate speech and improper physical activities. Dietary and lifestyle practices such as *Gramya*

Ahara,^[28] *Viruddha Ahara*^[29] and *Madya*^[30] may further contribute. Thus, *Prajnaparadha* links disturbed *Prajna* with disease development through inappropriate thought and behaviour leading to *Dosha* aggravation.

DISCUSSION

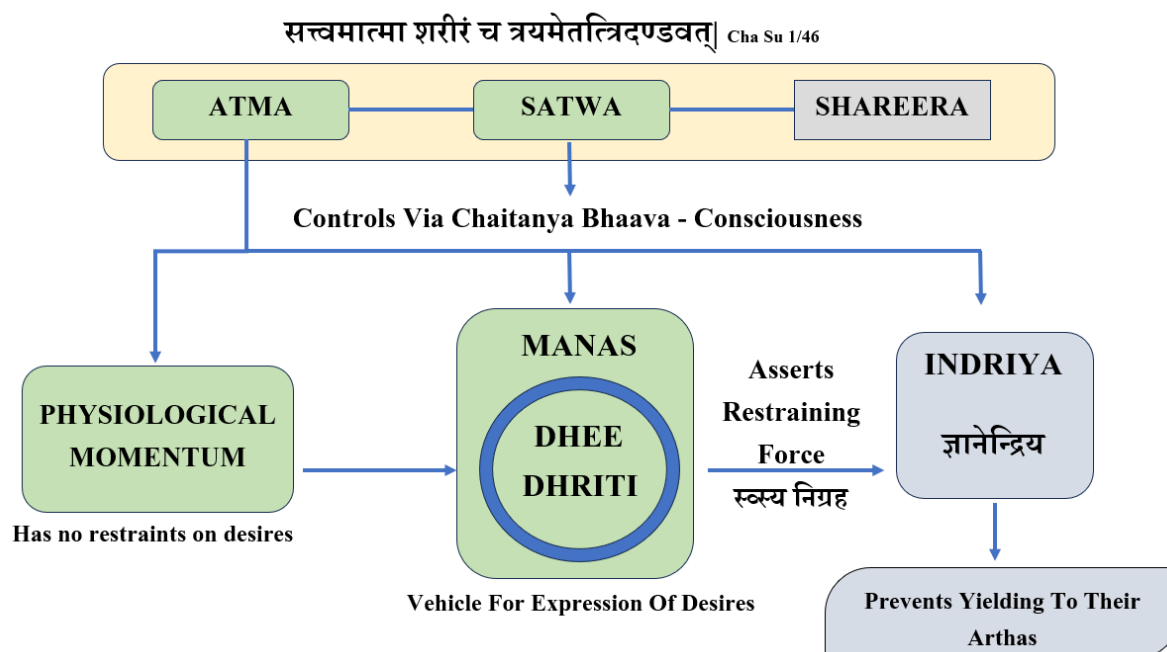
The present review indicates that Ayurveda conceptualizes cognition as an integrated process in which *Dhee* and *Dhriti* function as complementary faculties within *Prajna*. In *Jnanotpatti*, *Indriya*, *Indriyārtha*, *Manas* and *Buddi* participate in the progression from sensory apprehension and mental engagement to definitive determination. *Dhee* is associated with understanding, examination and discrimination, while *Dhriti* supports steadiness, restraint and regulation. Thus, Ayurvedic cognition extends beyond knowledge acquisition to its appropriate application in behaviour.

Neurochemical Modulation

Dopamine, Acetylcholine, Serotonin and Noradrenaline influence attention, working memory, cognitive control, reasoning and decision-making.^[10]

Table 2: Dimensions of *Dhee* in relation to contemporary cognitive process.

Functional dimension of <i>Dhee</i>	Contemporary cognitive process	Major neural networks/regions	Principal neurotransmitter systems
<i>Grahaṇa</i>	Attention and information integration	Parietal–prefrontal networks	Acetylcholine, noradrenaline
<i>Chintya–Vichara</i>	Information maintenance, comparison and evaluation	DLPFC and prefrontal networks	Dopamine, noradrenaline
<i>Uhya</i>	Reasoning, inference and alternatives	DLPFC, frontopolar cortex	Dopamine, acetylcholine
<i>Dhyeya</i>	Sustained attention and goal-directed engagement	Frontoparietal network	Acetylcholine, noradrenaline
<i>Sankalpa</i>	Evaluation, decision-making and response selection	OFC, vmPFC, ACC	Dopamine, serotonin, noradrenaline



Ayurveda further integrates cognitive functioning with *Manas*, *Buddi*, *Triguna* and *Tridosha*. *Dhee Vibhramsha* and *Dhriti Vibhramsha* describe disturbances in discrimination and regulation, while *Prajnaparadha* links impaired cognition with inappropriate behaviour

and disease. The descriptions of *Hridaya* and *Shiras* should be interpreted within their classical contexts rather than directly equated with modern anatomical structures.

Table 3: Dimensions of Dhriti in relation to contemporary cognitive process.

Ayurvedic aspect of Dhriti	Primary cognitive/behavioural function	Major neurocognitive regions / systems	Relevant neurochemical modulation
<i>Niyamathmika</i>	Self-regulation and behavioural control	Prefrontal cortex, particularly DLPFC	Dopamine, noradrenaline, GABA
<i>Svasyanigraha</i>	Inhibitory control	Prefrontal cortex, ACC	Dopamine, noradrenaline, GABA
<i>Manasoachanchalya</i>	Mental steadiness and sustained attention	DLPFC, parietal cortex, frontoparietal networks	Acetylcholine, noradrenaline, dopamine
<i>Alaulya</i>	Freedom from excessive attraction and wavering	Prefrontal-parietal networks	Acetylcholine, noradrenaline
<i>Para Dhriti</i>	Higher-order self-regulation	vmPFC, OFC, prefrontal-reward circuits	Dopamine, serotonin, GABA

From a contemporary perspective, *Dhee* and *Dhriti* can be discussed in relation to attention, reasoning, decision-making, executive control, persistence and self-regulation. These relationships represent conceptual and functional parallels rather than direct neuroanatomical or neurochemical equivalents. Further research using validated cognitive, behavioural and neurophysiological measures may help examine these relationships while retaining the Ayurvedic framework.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda presents *Dhee*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti* as interconnected faculties of *Prajna*, integrating understanding, regulation, memory, behaviour and health. Their association with *Manas*, *Buddhi*, *Triguna*,

Tridosha and *Hridaya* reflects the multidimensional nature of cognition in Ayurveda. Functional parallels with contemporary executive functioning, self-regulation and memory provide a basis for interdisciplinary exploration without implying direct anatomical equivalence. Thus, *Prajna* provides a comprehensive framework for understanding cognition in relation to behaviour, adaptation and overall well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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