



ISSN: 2456-4419

Impact Factor: (RJIF): 5.88

Yoga 2025; 10(2): 677-681

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www.theyogicjournal.com

Received: 10-11-2025

Accepted: 15-12-2025

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The seven chakras and their systemic influence on the human body: From traditional roots to modern perspectives

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.22271/yogic.2025.v10.i2i.1861>

Abstract

The Chakra system, originating in ancient Indian metaphysical thought, has undergone significant transformation in both meaning and application over centuries. Traditionally seen as centers of spiritual power located along the spine, Chakras have become integrated into modern disciplines such as psychology, energy medicine, and holistic wellness. The Chakra system conceptualizes the human body as an energetic network governed by seven primary centers of consciousness. Each Chakra corresponds to specific physiological organs, psychological states, and spiritual principles. This paper presents a comprehensive overview, tracing the origins of Chakras in Vedic and Tantric traditions, exploring their symbolic and metaphysical functions and how these Chakras influence bodily systems, integrating classical scriptural sources with modern interpretations from psychology, holistic health, and energy medicine. The aim is to create a nuanced understanding of Chakras as both historical constructs and evolving frameworks for personal and collective well-being.

Keywords: Chakra system, subtle energy, vedic and tantric traditions

1. Introduction

The chakra system has become a powerful and widely recognized model for understanding the dynamic interplay between the body, mind, and spirit. Traditionally rooted in ancient Indian spiritual and philosophical traditions, chakras are understood as subtle energy centers aligned along the spinal column. Each chakra governs specific aspects of physical health, emotional experience, psychological development, and spiritual evolution. As tools for inner transformation, the chakras are seen not merely as metaphysical ideas, but as central components of the human subtle anatomy designed to facilitate the flow of life force "Prana" through the body.

The earliest conceptual foundations of the chakra system can be traced to the Vedas and the Upanishads, sacred texts of Hindu philosophy composed between 1500 and 500 BCE. While these scriptures do not explicitly enumerate the seven chakras, they introduce the key concepts of Prana (life energy), nadis (energy channels), and kundalini (latent spiritual energy). The Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad, for instance, elaborates on the movement of kundalini energy through subtle pathways and describes the stages of spiritual awakening—a precursor to the fully developed chakra system seen in later Tantric texts.

The classical model of the seven chakras emerges prominently in Tantric literature between the 10th and 16th centuries CE. Texts such as the Shat-Chakra-Nirupana and the Padaka-Pancaka offer detailed descriptions of the chakras as lotus-like energy centers within the sushumna nadi—the central channel that runs along the spine. Each chakra is associated with a specific number of lotus petals, Bija mantras (vibrational seed syllables), deities, elements (such as earth, water, fire, air, and ether), and psychological functions. For example, Anahata, the heart chakra, is associated with the air element and symbolizes love, empathy, and emotional balance.

These early teachings laid the groundwork for the philosophical belief that chakras serve not only physiological or psychological purposes but also function as gateways for consciousness to ascend from material existence toward spiritual realization. From the base chakra (Muladhara), which governs survival instincts, to the crown chakra (Sahasrara), symbolizing divine unity and enlightenment, the chakra system maps the human journey from instinctual awareness to spiritual liberation (moksha).

Over the centuries, the chakra system has evolved across various Indian spiritual traditions, including Yoga, Ayurveda, and Tantra. It has also intersected with other energy systems found in world traditions. Tibetan Buddhist models include similar subtle body concepts but differ in chakra count and location. Chinese medicine describes a system of *qi* (life energy) moving through meridians, resonating with the chakra concept in terms of balancing energy for health. Even within India, variations in chakra numbers and symbolism can be found, depending on the school of thought or regional practice.

In modern times, particularly from the late 19th century onward, Western scholars, mystics, and psychologists began engaging with chakra teachings, adapting them to suit contemporary world views. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the chakra system and extending into its modern reinterpretation across disciplines. Special emphasis is placed on the systemic influence of chakras on the human body, including their proposed connections to major organs, endocrine glands, emotional states, and psychosomatic health. By bridging the ancient and the modern, the symbolic and the scientific, this review seeks to illuminate how chakras continue to offer a meaningful lens through which to understand the totality of human experience.

2. The Chakras as a Psychophysiological System

In contemporary mind-body frameworks, the chakra system has been reinterpreted as a model for understanding the deep interconnection between physiological functions, psychological development, and energetic balance. Originally rooted in the spiritual sciences of Yoga and tantra, the chakras are now often viewed in a psychophysiological light—seen as centers that correspond with specific nerve plexuses, endocrine glands, emotional processes, and stages of human development.

Rather than being isolated to esoteric spiritual traditions, chakras have entered modern discourse through their integration with psychological theory and therapeutic practice. The reinterpretation of chakras in this context provides a somatic map for understanding how unresolved psychological issues might manifest in physical or emotional dysfunction.

2.1 Carl Jung's Symbolic and Archetypal Interpretation

Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung is one of the earliest Western psychologists to engage directly with the chakra system. In his 1932 seminar on Kundalini Yoga, Jung interpreted the chakras as archetypal symbols representing stages of consciousness and psychological development. He proposed that as kundalini energy rises through the chakras, it reflects the process of individuation—the journey of integrating unconscious content into conscious awareness and achieving psychic wholeness.

Jung identified the lower chakras (Muladhara and Svadhisthana) as symbolic of basic instincts, survival, and emotional impulses, while the higher chakras (Ajna and

Sahasrara) represented expanded states of perception, intuition, and spiritual unity. Though he did not claim a physiological basis for chakras, Jung believed their symbolic power provided a meaningful structure for understanding the evolution of human consciousness.

2.2 Anodea Judith's Developmental Chakra Psychology

Anodea Judith, a contemporary psychologist and Yoga therapist, has built one of the most comprehensive bridges between the chakra system and Western psychological theory. In works such as *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, she explicitly aligns each chakra with a specific stage of psychosocial development, drawing parallels with theories from Erik Erikson, Wilhelm Reich, and object relations theory but always in direct relation to the chakra system. Judith's work integrates bioenergetics, trauma psychology, and somatic awareness, providing a practical therapeutic model that uses chakra imbalances to identify emotional wounds and restore energetic coherence. The psychophysiological model of the chakras has found direct expression in the work of thinkers like Carl Jung and Anodea Judith, both of whom grounded their theories in chakra symbolism and development. Their contributions show that chakras can serve as a legitimate conceptual framework for bridging body, mind, and spirit while maintaining coherence with psychological theory and therapeutic practice. This integration makes the chakra system not just a spiritual map, but a viable psychotherapeutic tool in modern holistic health.

3. Chakra and Body System Connections: A Scientific and Physiological Interpretation

The chakra system, while rooted in spiritual traditions, aligns intriguingly with many known physiological systems of the body. Each chakra is positioned along the spine and is believed to influence nearby organs, endocrine glands, and nerve plexuses. Below is a detailed exploration of how each chakra connects to specific body systems in both traditional and scientific terms.

3.1 Muladhara (Root Chakra) and the Survival Systems

Located at the base of the spine, the Muladhara chakra governs the body's foundation and survival mechanisms, including the skeletal, eliminative, and lower nervous systems. Physiologically, it corresponds to the sacral and coccygeal nerves and the adrenal glands, which release cortisol and adrenaline during stress. These adrenal hormones regulate the body's "fight or flight" response—a survival mechanism deeply rooted in evolutionary biology. The root chakra also relates to the pelvic floor muscles, legs, feet, and spine, supporting physical stability and mobility. Any imbalances here may reflect in issues like chronic fatigue, sciatica, lower back pain, or elimination disorders (e.g., constipation), all of which are controlled by structures in this anatomical region.

3.2 Svadhisthana (Sacral Chakra) and the Reproductive-Urinary Systems

The Svadhisthana chakra, located in the lower abdomen near the sacrum, governs sexuality, creativity, and fluid balance. Physiologically, it is associated with the reproductive system (ovaries in females, testes in males), urinary bladder, and kidneys. These organs are regulated by the hypogastric and pelvic nerve plexuses, which manage autonomic control of urination and reproductive function. Endocrine correspondence lies in the secretion of sex hormones—

estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone-essential for reproductive health and libido. Additionally, the sacral chakra influences the body's fluid regulation and pleasure-response mechanisms, which are closely tied to both hormonal and neurological feedback loops. Disorders of this chakra may manifest as sexual dysfunction, urinary issues, menstrual irregularities, or infertility.

3.3 Manipura (Solar Plexus Chakra) and the Digestive-Metabolic Systems

Situated in the upper abdomen, the Manipura chakra is the center of metabolic energy, willpower, and personal autonomy. It anatomically corresponds with the solar (celiac) plexus, a dense network of sympathetic nerves that innervate most of the digestive organs-including the stomach, liver, pancreas, gallbladder, and intestines. The endocrine gland linked with this chakra is the pancreas, which secretes insulin and glucagon, hormones vital for regulating blood sugar and metabolism. Functionally, Manipura governs digestion, nutrient absorption, and gut motility. It is also associated with the gut-brain axis, where neurotransmitters like serotonin play a role in both digestive and emotional regulation. Imbalances in this chakra are commonly seen in digestive disorders (such as IBS or ulcers), metabolic syndromes, and psychological issues related to self-worth and control.

3.4 Anahata (Heart Chakra) and the Circulatory-Immune Systems

The Anahata chakra, located in the center of the chest, governs the energetic and physiological functions of love, compassion, and emotional integration. It aligns with the heart, lungs, blood vessels, and upper thoracic spine, as well as the thymus gland-a key immune organ in early life that supports T-cell production. Neurologically, it is influenced by the cardiac plexus and the vagus nerve, which modulates parasympathetic tone, heart rate, and emotional regulation. Physiologically, this chakra integrates the circulatory and respiratory systems, essential for sustaining life and distributing oxygen and nutrients. An imbalance in the heart chakra may manifest as cardiovascular issues, respiratory dysfunction, or emotional detachment and grief-related illnesses.

3.5 Vishuddha (Throat Chakra) and the Respiratory-Endocrine-Communication Systems

The Vishuddha chakra, located at the throat, is the center of communication, expression, and truth. It corresponds with the larynx, pharynx, trachea, thyroid gland, and vocal cords. The thyroid-an important endocrine gland located in this region-secretes thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3), hormones that regulate metabolism, growth, and temperature. The throat chakra is neurologically influenced by the cervical plexus and

cranial nerves, including the vagus, glossopharyngeal, and hypoglossal nerves, all of which support speech, swallowing, and breathing. Issues with this chakra often present as thyroid imbalances (hypo- or hyperthyroidism), voice or communication disorders, chronic throat infections, or feelings of being silenced.

3.6 Ajna (Third Eye Chakra) and the Neuroendocrine System

The Ajna chakra, or third eye, located between the eyebrows, is associated with intuition, cognition, and mental clarity. It correlates with the pituitary gland, often called the "master gland" because it regulates multiple endocrine functions including growth, reproduction, and adrenal activity. The Ajna chakra is also linked with the pineal gland, which secretes melatonin and regulates the sleep-wake cycle (circadian rhythm). Anatomically, it relates to the frontal lobes, optic chiasm, and visual cortex, governing vision, insight, and higher cognitive functions. Dysfunctions in this chakra may present as migraines, visual disturbances, hormonal irregularities, or cognitive impairments, and are also connected to feelings of confusion or disconnection from purpose.

3.7 Sahasrara (Crown Chakra) and the Higher Nervous-Endocrine Integration

Located at the top of the head, the Sahasrara chakra is considered the center of pure consciousness, spiritual awareness, and universal connection. Physiologically, it corresponds with the cerebral cortex, corpus callosum, and central nervous system, and is sometimes linked to the pineal or pituitary gland depending on interpretation. It does not govern a specific organ system but is believed to coordinate all physiological and energetic systems, functioning as the integrative point for body and mind. Neurologically, it may be tied to the reticular activating system (RAS), responsible for consciousness, alertness, and the regulation of arousal. Imbalances in this chakra may show as psychosomatic disorders, spiritual detachment, or chronic fatigue syndromes with no identifiable medical cause. Each chakra, though rooted in subtle energy systems, maps closely onto real anatomical and physiological structures. These associations offer a meaningful framework for understanding how emotional, psychological, and physical health are interwoven. From endocrine balance and nervous regulation to immune strength and cognitive clarity, the chakras provide a symbolic yet functional guide to the body's integrated systems.

4. Mapping the Seven Chakras to Human Body Systems

The following table summarizes the systemic influence of the seven Chakras across anatomical, endocrine, and psychological domains:

Table 1: Systemic Influence of the Seven Chakras

Chakra	Beej Mantra	Location	Associated Organs/Body Parts	Endocrine Gland	Physical Functions	Emotional & Psychological Traits
Muladhara (Root)	ॐ (Lam)	Base of spine (perineum)	Legs, feet, bones, colon, adrenal cortex	Adrenal glands	Grounding, survival, elimination, basic physical stability	Security, survival instincts, trust, fear, sense of belonging
Svadhisthana (Sacral)	梵 (Vam)	Below navel (pelvic region)	Reproductive organs, kidneys, bladder	Ovaries / Testes	Reproduction, fluid balance, sexual function	Emotions, creativity, intimacy, pleasure, emotional flow
Manipura(Solar Plexus)	羯 (Ram)	Navel region	Digestive organs (stomach, liver, pancreas, intestines)	Pancreas	Digestion, metabolism, personal power	Self-esteem, willpower, confidence, autonomy, control
Anahata (Heart)	ॐ (Yam)	Center of chest	Heart, lungs, arms, hands, thymus	Thymus gland	Circulation, immune function, respiration	Love, compassion, forgiveness, grief, emotional healing
Vishuddha(Throat)	हूँ (Ham)	Throat region	Throat, mouth, vocal cords, ears	Thyroid gland	Communication, thyroid function, metabolism	Expression, truth, creativity, communication, fear of judgment
Ajna(Third Eye)	ॐ (Om)	Between eyebrows	Brain, eyes, sinuses, pineal pathway	Pineal gland	Vision, sleep cycles, nervous system coordination	Intuition, perception, imagination, wisdom, clarity
Sahasrara (Crown)	ॐ (Om)	Top of the head	Brain, nervous system, scalp	Pituitary gland	Consciousness, neuroendocrine integration	Spirituality, enlightenment, connection to divine, higher purpose

This framework links the energetic system with modern understandings of health, suggesting that imbalances in specific Chakras may correlate with emotional issues, hormonal dysfunction, or somatic symptoms.

5. Discussion

The chakra system, while rooted in ancient spiritual and metaphysical thought, continues to find relevance in contemporary discussions of health, psychology, and integrative medicine. Though modern science has not confirmed the existence of chakras as physical entities, their conceptual framework increasingly overlaps with physiological and psychological models. Anatomically, each chakra's location aligns with specific clusters of nerve plexuses, endocrine glands, and vital organs, providing a plausible physiological context. For example, the root chakra correlates with the adrenal glands and the pelvic plexus, closely tied to survival functions and stress regulation, while the solar plexus chakra connects with the celiac plexus and pancreas, key players in digestion and metabolic control.

Psychologically, the chakra system has found particular resonance through Carl Jung's interpretations, wherein he viewed the chakras as symbolic representations of archetypal stages in human development. Jung proposed that the ascent through the chakra system mirrors the process of individuation, in which the individual integrates unconscious material to achieve psychological wholeness. This symbolic reading continues to influence contemporary therapeutic frameworks, particularly in somatic and transpersonal psychology. Anodea Judith further developed this approach by aligning chakras with stages of psychological and emotional development, bridging chakra theory with Western developmental models and trauma-informed practices.

The popularization of the chakra model has also extended into wellness culture and lifestyle practices. Mobile apps, online meditation platforms, and Yoga studios regularly incorporate chakra-based content to promote self-awareness and emotional balance. While these uses are sometimes criticized for cultural oversimplification, they also reflect a growing interest in holistic frameworks that integrate body, mind, and spirit. The symbolic language of chakras offers individuals a way to contextualize internal experiences, encouraging practices of self-regulation and inner inquiry.

Overall, the modern relevance of chakras lies not in their literal validation, but in their function as an integrative model one that connects the physiological with the psychological, the ancient with the contemporary, and the individual with broader systems of meaning and health. As integrative and mind-body medicine continue to evolve, the chakra system remains a valuable interpretive tool, offering a bridge between subjective experience and systemic understanding.

6. Conclusion

Understanding chakras through the lens of human physiology offers a compelling framework for exploring the deep interconnection between body, mind, and energy. Rooted in ancient yogic and tantric traditions, the chakra system aligns symbolically and functionally with various physiological processes, including nervous regulation, endocrine activity, and organ function. By examining each chakra alongside the systems it influences, this perspective underscores how traditional concepts can resonate with modern scientific interpretations. As holistic approaches to health continue to evolve, the chakra system remains a valuable and integrative tool-bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary practices

and offering insights into the layered nature of human well-being.

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