

Comparative Literature Review of Sharir Sthana Across Brihatrayi Samhitas

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Abstract: *Sharir Sthana is an important section of Ayurvedic classical literature that explains the structural and functional aspects of the human body. The Brihatrayi—Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya—provide extensive discussions regarding embryology, anatomy, physiology, and philosophical determinants of body formation. Although these texts discuss similar concepts, their emphasis and presentation vary according to their objectives. Charaka Samhita primarily explains physiological and philosophical aspects of body formation, while Sushruta Samhita elaborates detailed anatomical descriptions relevant to surgical science. Ashtanga Hridaya presents a concise synthesis of earlier knowledge suitable for clinical practice. The present article aims to conduct a comparative literature review of Sharir Sthana across these classical Samhitas to understand similarities, differences, and their contributions to Ayurvedic understanding of the human body. The study is based on classical textual analysis of primary Ayurvedic sources and their commentaries*

Keywords: Sharir Sthana, Brihatrayi, Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, Ayurvedic anatomy, Garbhavakranti

I. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda considers the knowledge of the human body essential for understanding health and disease. Classical Ayurvedic literature describes the human body under the concept of Sharir, which encompasses anatomical, physiological, embryological, and philosophical dimensions. The study of Sharir is extensively discussed in the Sharir Sthana sections of the Brihatrayi texts.¹

Sharir Sthana describes various aspects such as embryological development (Garbhavakranti), factors influencing fetal formation, classification of body structures, dhatu formation, srotas, and marma points.² These descriptions demonstrate that ancient Ayurvedic scholars possessed systematic knowledge regarding the human body and its development.

Each Samhita presents Sharir concepts according to its primary objective. Charaka Samhita, which mainly deals with Kayachikitsa (internal medicine), emphasizes physiological and philosophical aspects of the body.³ In contrast, Sushruta Samhita, being a surgical text, elaborates structural anatomy in greater detail.⁴ Ashtanga Hridaya, composed later, integrates and simplifies knowledge from both texts to create a concise and clinically oriented presentation.⁵

A comparative literature review of Sharir Sthana across these texts provides a better understanding of the evolution of anatomical and physiological concepts in Ayurveda and highlights their relevance in contemporary Ayurvedic education and research.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a classical textual literature review. Primary Ayurvedic texts and their authoritative commentaries were used as the main sources of information. The following texts were reviewed:

- Charaka Samhita with Chakrapani commentary
- Sushruta Samhita with Dalhana commentary
- Ashtanga Hridaya with Arundatta commentary



Relevant chapters from the Sharir Sthana of these texts were analyzed and compared based on the following parameters:

- Number and structure of chapters
- Concepts of embryology (Garbhavakranti)
- Anatomical descriptions of body structures
- Physiological concepts of body formation
- Philosophical determinants of Sharir

Review of Sharir Sthana in Different Samhitas

1. Sharir Sthana in Charaka Samhita

Structure and Organization

Charaka Samhita contains eight chapters in Sharir Sthana that explain the origin, development, and constitution of the human body.⁶ The chapters primarily focus on theoretical and physiological aspects rather than detailed anatomical enumeration.

The first chapter, Katidhapurusha Sharira, describes the concept of Purusha and its components. It explains that the human body is formed by the combination of Panchamahabhutas, Atma, Manas, and Indriyas.⁷

Concept of Garbhavakranti (Embryology)

Charaka explains embryological development through the union of Shukra and Shonita in the presence of Atma.⁸ The embryo develops through nourishment derived from maternal rasa and is influenced by several determinants including maternal diet, psychological state, and environmental factors.⁹

The text also describes six determinants of fetal development, known as Shadbhava Sharira:

- Matrija Bhava
- Pitrija Bhava
- Atmaja Bhava
- Rasaja Bhava
- Satmyaja Bhava
- Sattvaja Bhava¹⁰

These determinants influence various physical and psychological attributes of the developing fetus.

Concept of Prakriti

Charaka Samhita also explains the concept of Prakriti (body constitution) based on the predominance of Doshas at the time of conception.¹¹ The constitution of an individual determines physical features, susceptibility to diseases, and response to treatment.

Physiological Perspective

The Sharir Sthana of Charaka places strong emphasis on physiological aspects such as dhatu formation, nourishment pathways, and functional organization of the body.¹² These explanations provide a theoretical framework for understanding disease pathogenesis and treatment.

Overall, Charaka's description of Sharir focuses more on functional anatomy and philosophical interpretation rather than structural details.

2. Sharir Sthana in Sushruta Samhita

Structure and Scope

Sushruta Samhita contains ten chapters in Sharir Sthana and is considered the most detailed source of anatomical knowledge in classical Ayurveda.¹³ The text explains body structures in relation to surgical practice.



Embryological Concepts

Sushruta also describes embryological development through the combination of Shukra, Shonita, and Atma, similar to Charaka.¹⁴ However, the description emphasizes structural differentiation of body parts during fetal development. The stages of fetal growth and formation of organs are explained systematically, showing early understanding of embryological processes.

Anatomical Enumeration

One of the most significant contributions of Sushruta Samhita is the detailed enumeration of anatomical structures. Sushruta describes:

300 bones (Asthi) in the human body¹⁵

500 muscles (Mamsa)¹⁶

700 vessels (Sira)¹⁷

24 Dhamanis (arterial structures)¹⁸

These numerical descriptions indicate an attempt to classify and quantify anatomical components.

Marma Sharir

A unique feature of Sushruta Samhita is the detailed explanation of Marma points, which are vital anatomical locations where injury may cause serious complications or death.¹⁹

The text describes 107 Marma points, categorized based on structural dominance such as muscle, vessel, ligament, bone, and joint.²⁰ These descriptions are highly relevant in surgical procedures and trauma management.

Surgical Relevance

Since Sushruta Samhita is primarily a surgical treatise, the anatomical knowledge presented in Sharir Sthana is directly applicable to surgical interventions. Detailed descriptions of body structures help in avoiding vital points during surgical procedures.

3. Sharir Sthana in Ashtanga Hridaya

Structure and Content

Ashtanga Hridaya contains six chapters in Sharir Sthana and presents a concise summary of Sharir concepts described in earlier Samhitas.²¹ Vagbhata aimed to simplify and systematize the knowledge of Charaka and Sushruta.

Embryological Explanation

The text describes the process of Garbhavakranti in a simplified manner.²² The formation of the embryo is explained through the interaction of Shukra, Shonita, Atma, and Panchamahabhutas.

The stages of fetal development and nourishment through maternal rasa are also discussed.

Prakriti and Body Constitution

Ashtanga Hridaya elaborates the concept of Prakriti and its classification based on Dosha predominance.²³ The text highlights the clinical importance of Prakriti in diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment planning.

Integration of Earlier Knowledge

The Sharir Sthana of Ashtanga Hridaya integrates the physiological concepts of Charaka and the anatomical descriptions of Sushruta, presenting them in a concise and practical format.²⁴ This synthesis makes the text particularly useful for clinical practitioners.

III. DISCUSSION

The concept of Sharir occupies a central position in Ayurvedic literature because understanding the structure and function of the human body is essential for interpreting the principles of health, disease, and treatment. The Sharir Sthana sections



of the Brihatrayi—Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya—provide detailed explanations of the origin, development, and composition of the human body. Although these classical texts discuss similar themes, their perspectives differ according to the objectives of each text. A comparative review highlights how ancient Ayurvedic scholars developed a multidimensional understanding of human anatomy and physiology.

One of the fundamental concepts discussed in Sharir Sthana is the philosophical understanding of the body. Ayurveda describes the human body as a complex entity composed not only of physical structures but also of psychological and spiritual components. The body is considered an integrated system formed by the interaction of Panchamahabhuta, Atma, Manas, and Indriya. This holistic perspective distinguishes the Ayurvedic view of the body from purely structural interpretations and emphasizes the interconnected nature of physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Another important subject discussed in Sharir Sthana is Garbhavakranti, or embryological development. Classical Ayurvedic scholars described the formation of the embryo as the result of the union of male and female reproductive elements in the presence of consciousness. The development of the fetus is influenced by several factors including parental contributions, maternal nutrition, environmental conditions, and psychological influences. These explanations demonstrate that Ayurvedic scholars recognized the importance of heredity, maternal health, and environmental influences in fetal development.

The theory of multiple determinants responsible for fetal development further explains the diversity of physical and psychological characteristics among individuals. Factors derived from the mother, father, nutrition, mental attributes, and environmental adaptability collectively influence the formation of body structures and functions. This concept reflects an early understanding of biological variation and developmental influences.

The concept of Prakriti, or body constitution, is also closely associated with Sharir Sthana. According to Ayurvedic principles, the predominance of specific Doshas at the time of conception determines an individual's constitutional type. This constitution influences physical features, metabolic tendencies, psychological traits, and susceptibility to diseases. Therefore, the concept of Prakriti plays a significant role in individualized diagnosis and treatment in Ayurvedic practice. While Charaka Samhita emphasizes the physiological and philosophical aspects of the human body, Sushruta Samhita provides a more elaborate description of structural anatomy. Since Sushruta Samhita is primarily a surgical text, its Sharir Sthana focuses on the identification and classification of body structures relevant to surgical procedures. Detailed descriptions of bones, muscles, vessels, and organs indicate the systematic anatomical knowledge of ancient Ayurvedic surgeons.

A remarkable contribution of Sushruta Samhita is the concept of Marma, which refers to vital anatomical points where injury can result in serious functional disturbances or death. The classification of marma points based on structural dominance such as muscle, vessel, ligament, bone, and joint demonstrates a profound understanding of the relationship between anatomical structures and physiological functions. This knowledge was essential for safe surgical practice and trauma management.

The Ashtanga Hridaya, composed later, represents a synthesis of earlier Ayurvedic knowledge. Vagbhata integrated the teachings of Charaka and Sushruta and presented them in a concise and systematic manner. The Sharir Sthana of Ashtanga Hridaya explains embryology, body constitution, and structural organization of the body in a simplified format suitable for clinical practice.

Another important feature of Sharir Sthana across the Brihatrayi is the emphasis on the relationship between structure and function. Ayurvedic scholars understood that anatomical components must be interpreted along with their physiological roles. This integrated approach reflects the holistic nature of Ayurvedic medical science.

Overall, the comparative analysis of Sharir Sthana demonstrates that each Samhita contributes unique insights into the understanding of the human body. Charaka Samhita provides the theoretical and physiological foundation, Sushruta Samhita elaborates structural anatomy and surgical relevance, and Ashtanga Hridaya synthesizes these concepts in a concise and practical format.

From a modern perspective, many concepts described in Sharir Sthana remain relevant, particularly in relation to embryology, constitutional variability, and personalized healthcare. Thus, the comparative study of Sharir Sthana not



only enhances the understanding of classical Ayurvedic anatomy but also highlights its continuing relevance in contemporary Ayurvedic education and research.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present comparative literature review of Sharir Sthana across the Brihatrayi Samhitas highlights the depth and systematic development of anatomical and embryological knowledge in classical Ayurvedic literature. Although Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya address similar themes related to the human body, each text approaches the subject from a distinct perspective based on its objective and clinical orientation.

Charaka Samhita emphasizes the philosophical and physiological aspects of the human body, describing Sharir as an integrated entity formed through the interaction of Panchamahabhuta, Atma, Manas, and Indriya. Its explanations of embryological development, determinants of fetal growth, and the concept of Prakriti reflect a holistic understanding of human constitution and individual variability, forming a theoretical basis for understanding health and disease.

In contrast, Sushruta Samhita provides a more detailed and structured description of human anatomy, reflecting its orientation toward surgical science. The systematic description of anatomical structures and the concept of Marma demonstrate the practical application of anatomical knowledge in surgical procedures and trauma management.

Ashtanga Hridaya presents a concise synthesis of the concepts described in earlier texts. By integrating the theoretical insights of Charaka and the anatomical clarity of Sushruta, Vagbhata organized the knowledge of Sharir in a systematic and clinically applicable format.

Thus, the Sharir Sthana of the Brihatrayi collectively provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the structure, development, and functional organization of the human body in Ayurveda. These classical texts complement one another and together present a multidimensional perspective of human biology that integrates physical, physiological, psychological, and philosophical aspects.

From a contemporary viewpoint, the concepts described in Sharir Sthana continue to remain relevant in Ayurvedic education, research, and clinical practice. The comparative study of these texts not only enhances the understanding of classical Ayurvedic anatomy but also supports the integration of traditional knowledge with modern scientific perspectives for future advancements in Ayurvedic medicine.

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