

# A Systematic Literary Review of *Sharira Trayam* (Ātmā, Mana, Sharīra) in *Ashtanga Hridaya* – *Sharira Sthana*

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## Abstract

This systematic literary review explores the classical Ayurvedic concept of Sharira Trayam—Ātmā (soul), Mana (mind), and Sharīra (body)—as elaborated in the Sharira Sthana of Ashtanga Hridaya. The review aims to provide a holistic understanding of the human being as envisioned in Ayurveda, emphasizing the interrelationship and interdependence of these three components in sustaining life, health, and consciousness. Following PRISMA guidelines, 31 scholarly sources were selected through a structured screening process from over 200 initially identified records. These included peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, classical text commentaries, and contemporary philosophical analyses.

Through detailed thematic analysis, the review examines the ontological and functional characteristics of Ātmā as the conscious principle, Mana as the psychical interface governed by Triguna, and Sharīra as the physical vehicle composed of Pancha Mahabhutas. The synthesis of literature highlights how these components are philosophically and functionally integrated in Ayurvedic diagnosis and therapy. Special attention is given to the relevance of Sharira Trayam in psychosomatic health, therapeutic models such as Sattvavajaya Chikitsa and Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa, and comparative analysis with Sankhya-Yoga philosophy.

This review contributes to academic Ayurveda by bridging classical doctrines with contemporary integrative approaches, offering a conceptual framework valuable to scholars, educators, and clinicians. The findings support further interdisciplinary research in Ayurvedic psychology, consciousness studies, and mind-body medicine. The Sharira Trayam model stands as a timeless and practical foundation for understanding human health and spiritual evolution.

**Keywords:** Sharira Trayam, Ātmā, Mana, Ashtanga Hridaya, Ayurveda Philosophy, Integrative Medicine

## 1. Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, offers a holistic view of health, blending physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. Central to this vision is the concept of *Sharira Trayam*—the triad of Ātmā (the soul), Mana (the mind), and Sharīra (the body)—which together form the complete human being. According to classical Ayurvedic philosophy, these three components are inseparable and interdependent, forming the basis of life, consciousness, and health. The *Ātmā* is the eternal, conscious

principle that animates the body and mind, while *Mana* acts as the internal sense organ coordinating perception, cognition, and volition. *Sharīra*, the gross physical body, serves as the medium for action, sensation, and interaction with the external world (Talikoti et al., 2022).

In Ayurvedic metaphysics, the harmonious balance and integration of these three elements are considered essential for sustaining health and achieving *purushartha* (the fourfold aims of life: dharma, artha, kama, moksha). Any disturbance in the equilibrium of *Sharira Trayam* can result in disease or psychological imbalance, thereby emphasizing the interdependent nature of body, mind, and consciousness. This triadic model of health contrasts with the Cartesian dualism in Western medicine, which often separates the mind and body, and rarely integrates spiritual dimensions.

*Ātmā*, considered *nitya* (eternal), *avyaya* (indestructible), and *nirguna* (attribute-less), serves as the substratum of consciousness and life. Its philosophical description, primarily inspired by *Sankhya* and *Vedanta* schools, plays a pivotal role in Ayurveda's approach to holistic diagnosis and treatment. *Mana*, endowed with the qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, acts as the link between *Atma* and *Indriyas* (sense faculties), enabling perception and cognition. *Sharīra*, composed of *Pancha Mahabhutas* (five great elements), is the field where the play of *Ātmā* and *Mana* is manifested (Madhukar et al., 2022).

The *Sharira Trayam* concept thus serves as a foundational framework not only for understanding health and disease but also for therapeutic interventions aimed at restoring harmony across all levels of human existence. Modern integrative medicine, especially psychosomatic and spiritual therapies, has increasingly recognized the relevance of this Ayurvedic triadic model.

Among the *Brihatrayee* (three major classical texts) of Ayurveda, *Ashtanga Hridaya* by Acharya Vagbhata holds a distinct position for its concise, systematic, and poetic exposition. Comprising eight sections—*Sthanas*—this text integrates the philosophical depth of *Charaka Samhita* and surgical insights of *Sushruta Samhita*. The *Sharira Sthana* in *Ashtanga Hridaya* specifically addresses the anatomical, embryological, and metaphysical dimensions of the human body. It elaborates not only on *Garbhavakranti* (embryological development) and *Sharira Rachana* (body structure) but also on the intrinsic roles of *Ātmā* and *Mana* in human physiology and consciousness (Talikoti et al., 2022).

*Sharira Sthana* provides a detailed blueprint of the body's constitution in terms of *Dhatus*, *Malas*, and *Srotas*, along with its connection to cosmic principles like *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. Importantly, it situates the body (*Sharira*) as a field (*kshetra*) for the soul's journey and moral evolution, making it a sacred instrument rather than a mechanistic entity. Through precise verses, it introduces metaphysical constructs like *Sharira Trayam*, *Chetana*, and *Sattva*, giving Ayurveda its distinctive approach to psychosomatic health.

According to Kumar et al. (2022), the *Hridaya* (heart) is described not merely as a physiological organ but as the seat of consciousness, integrating mind, soul, and body. This exemplifies how *Ashtanga Hridaya* merges the spiritual and anatomical perspectives. While anatomical understanding is essential for diagnosis and treatment, the underlying consciousness (*Ātmā*) and the channeling of perception and cognition through *Mana* are equally emphasized in maintaining health.

Moreover, unlike modern anatomical studies that rely heavily on cadaveric observation, *Sharira Sthana* adopts a philosophical, teleological, and functional approach. It addresses *causes of life*, *purpose of*

birth, and the evolution of embodied consciousness, making it a rich source for spiritual-anatomical inquiry.

Despite the profound integration of metaphysical and anatomical concepts in *Sharira Sthana*, contemporary scholarly exploration remains scattered, limited largely to commentaries and isolated thematic studies. A consolidated, systematic literary review focusing exclusively on the concept of *Sharira Trayam* is conspicuously absent in existing academic literature. Most available studies focus on individual components—such as *Mana* in mental health, or *Sharira* in anatomical contexts—without investigating their synergistic interrelations as conceptualized in *Ashtanga Hridaya*.

For instance, Madhukar et al. (2022) noted the lack of comprehensive analytical frameworks that examine how the three aspects of *Sharira Trayam* co-function within the Ayurvedic paradigm. Similarly, Bhatnagar et al. (2022) emphasized that even though concepts like *Hridaya* are pivotal in the text, they are often misunderstood when isolated from their spiritual and cognitive functions.

Furthermore, modern Ayurveda practitioners often face difficulty in aligning these classical constructs with evidence-based clinical models. A structured literary review can bridge this gap, offering a framework that allows traditional insights to inform contemporary therapeutic strategies, especially in psychosomatic and integrative health approaches.

In clinical practice, holistic treatment protocols such as *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (mind-control therapy) and *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* (spiritual therapy) are founded on the functional integration of *Sharira Trayam*. Without a consolidated literary foundation, there is a risk of reductionism—wherein these profound principles are either diluted or misinterpreted.

Hence, this review is not merely academic but essential for preserving the philosophical and therapeutic integrity of Ayurveda. It is also timely, considering the global shift toward integrative health paradigms that emphasize mind-body-soul coherence.

This review is undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To systematically explore references of Ātmā, Mana, and Sharīra in *Sharira Sthana* of *Ashtanga Hridaya*, focusing on their definitions, attributes, and roles as described in primary texts and commentaries.
2. To analyze their individual and collective roles in the context of Ayurvedic physiology, pathology, and therapeutic interventions, with an emphasis on their interconnectedness in maintaining health.
3. To establish a holistic conceptual framework that integrates philosophical, spiritual, and anatomical dimensions of human existence as envisioned in classical Ayurveda.
4. To bridge the gap between classical wisdom and modern clinical relevance, offering insights for scholars, educators, and practitioners seeking to understand or apply these concepts in a contemporary context.
5. To encourage interdisciplinary dialogue between Ayurveda, philosophy, psychology, and integrative medicine by highlighting how *Sharira Trayam* embodies a sophisticated, timeless model of human health.

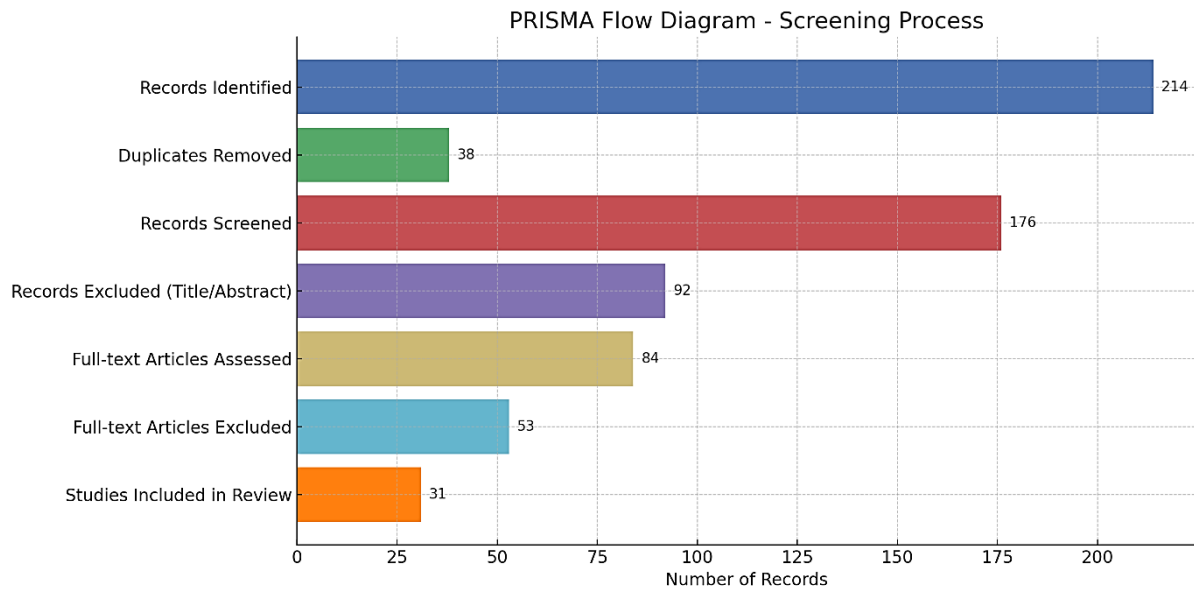
## 2. Systematic Research Methodology

To conduct this review on the concept of *Sharira Trayam* (Ātmā, Mana, Sharīra) in *Ashtanga Hridaya* – *Sharira Sthana*, a systematic approach grounded in the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework was adopted. The search process was structured to identify, screen, and include scholarly works that offered detailed insights into Ayurvedic philosophy, classical Ayurvedic texts, commentaries, and recent academic contributions relevant to the topic. The goal was to ensure a comprehensive synthesis of primary classical interpretations and contemporary scholarly analysis from multidisciplinary domains like Ayurveda, philosophy, psychology, and integrative medicine.

The initial literature search was conducted across major academic databases and repositories, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, PubMed Central (for allied research), Shodhganga (for dissertations), and institutional digital libraries such as those of Banaras Hindu University and the National Institute of Ayurveda. Keywords used during the search included “Sharira Trayam,” “Ātmā in Ayurveda,” “Mana in Sharira Sthana,” “Sharira in Ashtanga Hridaya,” “Tridanda Sharira Siddhanta,” “Ayurvedic psychology,” and “Ayurveda and Sankhya-Yoga philosophy.” Boolean operators and filters were used to refine the search to articles published in English or Sanskrit (with English translations), and those with a clear focus on Ayurvedic anthropology and philosophy.

The initial database search yielded a total of 214 potential articles and documents. After removing 38 duplicates and screening 176 remaining articles by reading titles and abstracts, 92 articles were excluded for being either off-topic (e.g., unrelated to classical Ayurvedic literature) or lacking scholarly rigor. This left 84 articles for full-text review. In the next phase, 53 of these were further excluded after detailed evaluation for lacking direct relevance to *Sharira Trayam*, insufficient citation of *Ashtanga Hridaya*, or over-reliance on generalized interpretations without anchoring in *Sharira Sthana*.

From the remaining 31 articles, each was thoroughly read and evaluated. Data extraction was conducted using a standardized format to ensure consistency in capturing the following elements: title, authorship, publication year, relevance to Ātmā, Mana, or Sharīra, textual basis (e.g., verse reference or commentary), interpretive depth, methodological clarity, and thematic alignment with the objectives of the present review. This method enabled the researchers to ensure that the selection of articles collectively addressed the philosophical, functional, and therapeutic dimensions of *Sharira Trayam* as outlined in classical and contemporary Ayurvedic discourse.



Quality assessment was performed to ensure inclusion of only high-standard, academically valid sources. Parameters for this assessment included peer-review status, clarity of argument, citation strength (particularly use of primary Ayurvedic texts like *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Sushruta Samhita*), and integration with related Indian philosophical systems such as *Sankhya* and *Yoga*. Dissertations and books were retained only if they demonstrated methodological rigor and had direct relevance to Ayurvedic anthropology. Out of 31 final sources included in this review, 22 were research articles from peer-reviewed journals or thesis repositories, 6 were classical text-based book chapters or translations, and 3 were theoretical expositions offering interdisciplinary perspectives connecting Ayurveda to psychology, metaphysics, and consciousness studies.

In summary, a structured and tiered PRISMA methodology facilitated the robust selection of 31 scholarly sources that offered depth, clarity, and scope for the exploration of *Sharira Trayam* in *Sharira Sthana*. These sources formed the evidentiary backbone of this literary review, enabling a holistic reconstruction and interpretation of Ayurvedic human anthropology in its original and applied forms.

### 3. Conceptual Exploration of Ātmā in *Sharira Sthana*

#### 3.1. Definition and Characteristics of Ātmā

In the classical Ayurvedic system, *Ātmā* is considered the substratum of consciousness, the indwelling spirit that enlivens the human being. Unlike modern biomedical approaches that focus exclusively on physical matter, Ayurveda proposes a trinity comprising the body (*Sharira*), mind (*Mana*), and soul (*Ātmā*), which together constitute the holistic identity of a person. *Ātmā* is described as *nitya* (eternal), *avyaya* (imperishable), *nirguna* (quality-less), and *chetana* (conscious). It is through *Ātmā* that the *Indriyas* (sense faculties) and *Mana* (mind) function, making it the central axis of life (Madhukar et al., n.d.).

Ayurveda incorporates the tripartite concept of the *Sharira*—*Sthula Sharira* (gross body), *Sukshma Sharira* (subtle body), and *Karana Sharira* (causal body). *Sthula Sharira* comprises the anatomical structure, visible and tangible; *Sukshma Sharira* contains the mind, sense faculties, and pranic energy;



while *Karana Sharira* is the seed body or potential form in which karmic imprints and the essence of individuality reside (Rautaray, 2022). These three layers interact dynamically, and it is *Ātmā* that provides cohesion and continuity across lifetimes. In this triadic model, *Ātmā* is never altered or harmed by disease—it is only the mind and body that undergo transformation or decay.

The *Ātmā* is *drashta* (witness), *anubhava* (experiencer), and *preraka* (initiator of action), yet is beyond *Karma* (action) itself. It interacts with *Sharira* and *Mana* through the interface of *Chetana Dhatu*—the conscious principle embedded in every living organism (Jyotsna, 2012). Indian philosophical traditions such as *Sankhya* and *Vedanta*, both of which heavily influenced Ayurvedic metaphysics, treat *Ātmā* as distinct from *Prakriti* (matter) and its manifestations, emphasizing liberation (*Moksha*) as the return of the *Ātmā* to its pure state.

### 3.2. Verses and Commentaries

The *Sharira Sthana* section of *Ashtanga Hridaya* offers profound insight into the metaphysical and physiological foundations of human life. While its anatomical expositions are well-recognized, its philosophical underpinnings—especially the role of *Ātmā*—have not received the attention they deserve. Vagbhata elucidates in *Sharira Sthana* 1 that no body or mind can exist without the *Ātmā*, and that all physiological functions are essentially expressions of conscious life force (*Chetana*). The *Atmajanana* (knowledge of self) is considered essential for true medical understanding, emphasizing the spiritual role of the physician (Shruthi, 2020).

Key verses such as "*Shariram chetanavat satvam atma samyogat*" (body is conscious due to the presence of *Ātmā*) underline this point. Commentators like Arundatta elaborate on such verses by asserting that the *Ātmā* must be presupposed in all living organisms, for it alone provides the basis for *Prajna* (wisdom), *Smriti* (memory), and *Buddhi* (intellect) (Harshitha, 2020). Hemadri further integrates Sankhya principles to explain how the *Ātmā*, despite being inactive (*Akarta*), becomes the motivator for bodily functions when associated with *Ahamkara* and *Buddhi* in the subtle body.

Additionally, the technique of *Tantrayukti* used in classical Ayurvedic texts, such as *Upama* (analogy), *Nirdesha* (definition), and *Uddesha* (statement), helps formulate structured arguments regarding the nature of *Ātmā*. Nagraj et al. (2024) emphasize that such literary techniques were essential in framing metaphysical ideas into applicable medical knowledge. In *Sharira Sthana*, *Ātmā* is not presented abstractly but is contextually linked to life processes, such as embryonic development (*Garbhavakranti*) and sensory integration.

### 3.3. Role of Ātmā in Life and Health

*Ātmā* is designated as the *Chetana Dhatu*, the conscious substance responsible for animation in living beings. Its relationship with *Mana* and *Indriyas* forms a triad essential for all perceptual, cognitive, and motor functions. The *Indriyadhishtana* (abode of the sense organs) is not localized in a single organ but facilitated by the presence of *Ātmā*, acting through the mind as the mediator. Without *Ātmā*, even a well-formed body remains inert, illustrating the primacy of consciousness in Ayurvedic biology (Sharma, n.d.; Giri et al., 2023).

In clinical Ayurveda, disturbances in the connection between *Ātmā*, *Mana*, and *Sharira* lead to various disorders—psychosomatic and somatopsychic. The imbalance of *Rajas* and *Tamas* qualities in *Mana* can

obstruct the influence of *Ātmā*, resulting in delusions, anxiety, and even lack of willpower (*Prayatna*). Thus, therapeutic modalities like *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (mind-strengthening therapy) and *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* (spiritual therapy) are employed to re-establish the clear channel between body, mind, and soul (Chowdhury et al., 2014).

Additionally, *Sharira Utpatti* (bodily genesis) as described in *Sharira Sthana* attributes its success not only to biological inputs like *Shukra* and *Artava*, but also to the participation of *Ātmā* through *Karma* and past life impressions (*Samskara*). This integrative view, combining metaphysics with embryology, is unique to Ayurveda and is foundational to its treatment philosophy (Dahanukar & Thatte, 2000).

Modern thinkers and integrative physicians have begun to appreciate these dimensions for their relevance in holistic healing. By addressing not just the physical and mental dimensions but also the spiritual, Ayurveda aligns with contemporary frameworks like consciousness-based medicine and mind-body therapies.

#### 4. Discussion on *Mana* (Mind) in *Sharira Sthana*

##### 4.1. Definition, Attributes, and Functions

In Ayurvedic philosophy, *Manas* (mind) is regarded as one of the three essential components sustaining life, known as *Tridanda*—*Sharira* (body), *Atma* (soul), and *Manas* (mind). It is the subtle organ of consciousness responsible for perception, cognition, and volition. Though considered *dravyatmaka* (substantive) in nature, it is highly dynamic and intimately linked to sensory and motor activities. Its key functions include *Indriyabhigraha* (regulation of sense organs), *Svasyanigraha* (self-restraint), and *Uha* (reasoning) (Mavinkurve, 2019).

*Manas* is characterized by the presence of *Triguna*—*Sattva* (purity and clarity), *Rajas* (activity and restlessness), and *Tamas* (inertia and ignorance). These *gunas* determine the psychological temperament and behavioral responses of individuals. A predominance of *Sattva* fosters mental clarity, calmness, and virtuous behavior, whereas *Rajas* and *Tamas* contribute to emotional instability and psychosomatic disorders. Ayurvedic texts assert that an individual's *Prakriti* (constitution) is significantly influenced by the dominance of these *gunas* in the *Manas* (Rajeev, 2014; SHIRODHARA, 2013).

Interestingly, Ayurveda notes that although *Manas* is constantly active, it remains unconscious by itself and can only function effectively under the illumination of *Chetana*—a quality bestowed by *Ātmā* (Dutt, n.d.). Therefore, *Manas* is both a bridge and a barrier, depending on its alignment with the soul and the sensory faculties.

##### 4.2. Literary References in *Sharira Sthana*

In *Sharira Sthana* of *Ashtanga Hridaya*, direct and indirect references to *Manas* help explain its physiological and philosophical roles. One key verse highlights: “*Indriyartheshu pravritti nivritti svasya nigraha uhanam cha manasah karmani*”—outlining its functions in sense regulation, decision-making, and control. Vagbhata's verses further describe *Manas* as *ekam* (singular), *anubandhi* (conjoined to action), and *ubhayendriyarth grahi* (able to perceive both internal and external stimuli).

Shankar (n.d.) emphasizes that classical Ayurvedic commentaries discuss controversies regarding the physical seat (*sthana*) of *Manas*. Some scholars place it in the heart (*Hridaya*), while others locate it in

the brain. Yet, they agree that its functional spread is systemic. The commentator Arundatta associates *Manas* with *Sadhaka Pitta* in the heart, giving it a psycho-physiological identity crucial in emotion and cognition. This interpretation is essential for understanding psychosomatic illnesses (*Manasika Vyadhi*).

Literary techniques such as *Tantrayukti* (logic-based structuring of Ayurveda texts) enable the comprehension of *Manas* as both a metaphysical and functional principle (de Jahnsen, 2024). Vagbhata's structured use of analogy (*Upama*) and purpose (*Prayojana*) aligns with the function of *Manas* as the instrument of perception (*Darshana*), evaluation (*Vichara*), and judgment (*Nischaya*).

#### 4.3. Psycho-Physiological Role

The dual role of *Manas*—as both observer and processor—makes it a pivotal link between the body (*Sharira*) and soul (*Ātmā*). It serves as the inner organ (*Antahkarana*) responsible for receiving, synthesizing, and acting upon sensory inputs. This bridge function allows coordination between conscious awareness (*Chetana*) and physical response mechanisms. *Manas*, through its interaction with the five *Jnanendriyas* (sense organs) and five *Karmendriyas* (action organs), governs both perception and execution (Dubey, 2015).

Disturbances in this coordination are identified in *Manasika Vyadhi*—psychological disorders that may also manifest physically. Common examples include anxiety, depression, insomnia (*Anidra*), and psychosomatic sexual dysfunctions (*Klaibya*). Madhusudhana (2018) and Khan (2018) report that these conditions arise from the disruption in the flow between *Manas*, *Indriyas*, and *Sharira*, often due to the dominance of *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

Ayurveda proposes therapeutic interventions like *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (mental fortification) and *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* (spiritual therapy), both aiming to cleanse and elevate the *Manas* to *Sattva* dominance. For instance, vegetarian diets and ethical living practices are emphasized to enhance *Sattvika* qualities (SHIRODHARA, 2013).

The mind's role in pathogenesis is supported by neuropsychological evidence suggesting psychosomatic correlations—highlighting Ayurveda's centuries-old awareness of this connection. For example, stress-induced hormonal imbalances can affect both cognitive and reproductive functions, as seen in clinical studies on *Vajeekarana* therapy (Rajeev, 2014).

Moreover, *Manas*'s function is affected by chronic stressors like digital addiction, as noted in recent interdisciplinary studies (Dutt, n.d.). These modern patterns reaffirm classical Ayurvedic insights that disturbances in *Manas* lead to neurochemical and behavioral disorders.

Thus, *Manas* not only interprets reality but also colors perception, intention, and health outcomes. It holds the power to liberate or imprison the individual depending on its *Guna* alignment and spiritual direction.

### 5. Analysis of Sharira (Body) in Sharira Sthana

#### 5.1. Types and Constituents

In *Sharira Sthana*, Vagbhata articulates a holistic framework of the human body (*Sharira*) not merely as anatomical matter but as a confluence of physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Ayurveda



describes the body through a three-tiered lens: *Sthula Sharira* (gross body), *Sukshma Sharira* (subtle body), and *Karana Sharira* (causal body). The *Sthula Sharira* comprises tangible components—organs, tissues, and systems—while *Sukshma Sharira* contains the mind (*Manas*), sense faculties (*Indriyas*), and life force (*Prana*) (Madhukar et al., n.d.). The *Karana Sharira*, though not elaborated with anatomical specificity, holds the karmic impressions and is regarded as the blueprint of human life (Dornala & Dornala, 2016).

These levels of embodiment are governed by the *Pancha Mahabhuta Siddhanta*—the doctrine of five great elements (*Akasha*, *Vayu*, *Tejas*, *Apas*, *Prithvi*). Each bodily structure is considered a permutation of these elemental principles, imparting properties like liquidity (*Apas*) in plasma or solidity (*Prithvi*) in bones. This elemental perspective is further extended to *Dhatus* (tissues), *Malas* (wastes), and *Srotas* (channels) which form the substratum of the body's function and health. The *Dhatus*—like *Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, and *Shukra*—are not merely structural but dynamically metabolized (Talikoti et al., 2022).

The classification of bodies in Ayurveda includes *Nara Sharira* (human body), *Purusha-Stree Bheda* (gender classification), and the prenatal development described through *Garbhavakranti* (embryogenesis). These classifications are deeply interwoven with physiological, ethical, and karmic contexts. Vagbhata systematically outlines the formation of the fetus from *Shukra* and *Artava*, influenced by the presence of *Ātmā*, Karma, and past life impressions (Vasudev, 2020).

Furthermore, Ayurvedic anatomical references are not limited to empirical observation but are deeply imbued with teleological meaning. Organs are described not only by function but by their interaction with consciousness, thereby blending physiology with metaphysics (Herswani et al., n.d.).

## 5.2. Development and Functions

Ayurveda proposes that the primary purpose of the *Sharira* is to serve as an instrument of *Karma* (action) and *Dharma* (righteous conduct). In *Sharira Sthana*, Vagbhata asserts that embodiment is a result of one's past karmic impressions and offers the field for their fruition and resolution. This aligns with the Sankhya-based dualism in Ayurveda where *Purusha* (pure consciousness) interacts with *Prakriti* (matter) through the body to attain experiential learning and spiritual maturity (Svoboda, 1992).

The role of the *Sharira* extends beyond physical sustenance—it is also essential for cognitive, emotional, and moral functions. For example, the *Hridaya* is not merely a pump but the seat of *Chetana* (consciousness) and *Manas* (mind). The *Srotas*, while physiologically representing channels, are metaphysically seen as conduits of consciousness and pranic energy (Bhangare et al., 2016).

Health in Ayurveda is defined not only by the balance of *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, and *Malas*, but also by spiritual well-being—an idea reflected in the concept of *Swastha* (healthy being). Sharma (n.d.) argues that Ayurveda's health model predates and exceeds WHO's definition by integrating the spiritual component. Proper alignment of the body's energies ensures clarity in perception, moral behavior, and pursuit of life goals (*Purusharthas*).

Moreover, the body's functioning is said to be governed by the balance of inner faculties (*Indriyas*, *Manas*) and its receptivity to the soul's directive. Without this balance, the *Sharira* is reduced to a lifeless shell. Therefore, understanding the *Sharira* also involves analyzing its mental and spiritual interfacing systems.

### 5.3. Sharira as a Vehicle for Moksha

Perhaps the most profound declaration in Ayurvedic metaphysics is the assertion that the human body is a *Sadhana Sharira*—a vehicle for liberation (*Moksha*). The very purpose of human birth, according to *Sharira Sthana*, is to utilize the body to overcome ignorance, perform righteous deeds, and realize the self. Ayurveda does not promote ascetic rejection of the body but upholds it as sacred and instrumental in the journey of the soul (Tendulkar & Dwivedi, 2010).

This philosophical lens differentiates Ayurveda from purely biomedical systems. The body is not merely to be maintained or optimized but to be spiritualized through ethical living, knowledge acquisition, and conscious detachment. Each sensory experience and action performed by the body holds the potential for spiritual evolution if aligned with *Dharma*.

In their metaphysical analysis, Chowdhury et al. (2014) note that even dreams (*Swapna*)—as experienced by the body-mind complex—are viewed as spiritual messages or reflections of *Samskaras*. Similarly, the function of bodily desires, reflexes, and actions are not random but karmically and spiritually informed. Thus, the *Sharira* becomes a bridge—not a barrier—to transcendental wisdom.

In spiritual praxis, the body is to be honored, nourished, and purified—not out of vanity but reverence for its divine function. Rituals like *Dinacharya* (daily routine), *Panchakarma*, and *Sadvritta* (ethical code) reflect this philosophy, making Ayurveda not just a science of life but a roadmap to liberation.

## 6. Interrelation among *Sharira Trayam*

### 6.1. Philosophical Integration

The triadic concept of *Sharira Trayam*—*Ātmā* (soul), *Mana* (mind), and *Sharīra* (body)—is deeply rooted in classical Ayurvedic philosophy and integrates seamlessly with the *Sankhya* and *Yoga* schools of thought. According to Ayurveda, human life is an interplay of consciousness (*Ātmā*), cognition (*Mana*), and material existence (*Sharīra*), each being indispensable to the other. The Ayurvedic doctrine of *Tridanda Sharira Siddhanta* aligns with *Sankhya-Yoga Darshana* in portraying the embodied self (*Purusha*) as the center of experience that interacts with *Prakriti* (nature) through the body and mind complex (Madhukar et al., n.d.).

*Ātmā* is considered immutable and eternal, akin to *Purusha* in *Sankhya*, whereas *Mana* acts like *Ahamkara* (ego), binding it to the body and senses. In *Yoga*, this dynamic is addressed through eightfold disciplines to calm the mind and realize the self, which Ayurveda incorporates in its therapeutic arsenal for mental and spiritual wellness. Timilsina (2023) notes that such trinary frameworks are embedded across Eastern metaphysics, symbolized by the *Trishul* (trident), reflecting body-mind-soul unity.

Lahange et al. (2022) highlight that Ayurvedic seers viewed these three components not as isolated phenomena but as co-dependent entities. This view reflects a non-dualistic ontology, emphasizing that health is not the absence of disease in the body alone, but the harmonious integration of all three aspects of the self. Ayurveda thus transcends physicalism, embedding spiritual purpose in its anatomical and therapeutic discourse.

## 6.2. Functional Interdependence

The functional harmony among *Sharira*, *Mana*, and *Ātmā* is considered a precondition for optimal health in Ayurveda. Disruption in this harmony manifests as disease—whether physical (*Sharirika*), mental (*Manasika*), or spiritual (*Adhyatmika*). For instance, imbalances in *Mana* through excess *Rajas* or *Tamas* can influence somatic functions, leading to conditions such as insomnia, anxiety, or even infertility (Lahange et al., 2022).

Conversely, physical afflictions such as chronic inflammation or digestive disorders can affect mental clarity, decision-making, and spiritual receptivity. Reddy & Kapoor (2024) state that Ayurveda's constitutional approach (*Prakriti Siddhanta*) acknowledges such interdependencies, where *Sharira Prakriti* (body constitution) and *Manasa Prakriti* (mental disposition) co-determine disease patterns and recovery.

The *Mana*, as the psychical interface, links *Indriya* (senses) to both body and soul. When the mind is agitated, it disrupts sensory intake and motor response, affecting overall homeostasis. Similarly, a spiritually disconnected person (*Atma-anubhava-rahita*) may exhibit apathy, disinterest in wellness, or lack of purpose, all of which exacerbate illness.

Thus, Ayurvedic health care does not treat the body in isolation but evaluates it in conjunction with mental behavior and spiritual orientation. The *Tridanda* thus stands as a diagnostic and therapeutic lens, guiding everything from lifestyle advice to pharmacological interventions (Lahange et al., 2022).

## 6.3. Therapeutic Relevance

Ayurveda prescribes a tripartite treatment strategy that mirrors the *Sharira Trayam* framework—*Yuktivyapashraya* (rational therapy), *Daivavyapashraya* (spiritual therapy), and *Sattvavajaya* (mind-control therapy). Each component of *Sharira Trayam* requires specific modes of healing, yet their coordination ensures holistic health.

*Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*, as discussed by Madhukar et al. (n.d.), is a psychotherapeutic approach aiming to restrain the mind from unwholesome thoughts and cultivate emotional resilience. It includes *medhya rasayanas* (nootropic herbs), counseling, spiritual affirmations, and mindfulness—methods that promote *Sattva Guna* and suppress *Rajas-Tamas*. This is crucial in treating psychosomatic conditions and mental disorders.

*Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* invokes spiritual remedies like mantra chanting, pilgrimage, rituals, and devotion (*Bhakti*) to harmonize the soul's frequency. Reddy & Kapoor (2024) emphasize that these are not religious practices per se but psycho-spiritual interventions meant to invoke trust, release subconscious blocks, and realign the individual with a transcendent order.

*Yuktivyapashraya* targets bodily imbalances through herbs, diet, panchakarma, and exercise. Yet even these therapies work best when *Mana* and *Ātmā* are properly aligned. For example, detoxification procedures like *Vamana* (emesis) or *Basti* (enema) are more effective when administered with proper emotional preparation and spiritual orientation (Lahange et al., 2022).

This therapeutic convergence of body, mind, and soul not only treats symptoms but transforms consciousness—a goal far beyond the scope of conventional medicine. Lahange et al. (2022) argue that

this is Ayurveda's unique contribution to global healthcare: a model where healing is synonymous with wholeness.

## 7. Conclusion and Future Directions

The conceptual framework of *Sharira Trayam*—*Ātmā*, *Mana*, and *Sharīra*—as elucidated in *Sharira Sthana* of *Ashtanga Hridaya* offers a uniquely holistic and timeless understanding of human existence. This review has systematically examined the literary and philosophical basis of these three fundamental components, emphasizing their interdependent roles in sustaining life, health, and consciousness. The *Ātmā*, or the eternal soul, emerges as the core animating principle that imparts consciousness (*Chetana*) to the otherwise inert body and mind. It acts as the ultimate experiencer and witness, distinct from yet integrally linked to the psychophysical system. The review highlights that without the presence of *Ātmā*, no biological or cognitive function is possible. The *Mana* serves as the subtle link between the senses and the soul, governing perception, cognition, and volition. Its functional identity is shaped by the three *gunas*—*Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*—which determine its role in health and disease. Finally, *Sharīra* is not merely an anatomical vessel but a sacred medium for experiencing life and executing *karma*, *dharma*, and ultimately *moksha*.

Each of these components has been shown to function within an integrated framework, resonating strongly with classical Indian philosophical systems like *Sankhya* and *Yoga*. The interdependence of the three is not only philosophical but functional: disruption in one aspect invariably influences the others. For instance, psychosomatic disorders and spiritually rooted illnesses find a coherent explanatory model within this triad. As reviewed, Ayurvedic scriptures consistently link disturbances in *Mana*—such as emotional turbulence caused by *Rajas* or ignorance associated with *Tamas*—to both physiological and spiritual decline. Similarly, ailments of the *Sharira* can disturb mental stability and spiritual clarity. This dynamic interplay is addressed in classical Ayurvedic therapy through the threefold approach of *Yuktivyapashraya*, *Daivavyapashraya*, and *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*, reflecting Ayurveda's comprehensive grasp of human wellness.

This review significantly contributes to the academic understanding of Ayurveda by drawing attention to the depth and coherence of its anthropological model. It revisits neglected classical commentaries, organizes them thematically, and bridges them with contemporary interpretations. As such, it opens up new pathways for integrative medicine and interdisciplinary research, especially in areas like psychosomatic medicine, mind-body interventions, and consciousness studies. By highlighting how *Sharira Sthana* integrates spiritual philosophy with embryology, anatomy, and behavioral sciences, the review reasserts Ayurveda's potential to contribute meaningfully to global health discourse. Furthermore, the analysis challenges the reductionist tendencies in biomedicine by offering a non-dualistic model where health is not limited to physical metrics but extended to moral, emotional, and spiritual integrity.

Future research should focus on comparative literary analysis of *Sharira Trayam* across classical Ayurvedic texts, particularly *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*. Such comparative studies can help identify variations and enrich our understanding of classical thought across different traditions. Another fruitful direction is the integration of Ayurvedic concepts with modern neuroscience and psychology. The understanding of *Mana* as a cognitive-psychic entity regulated by *gunas* can be explored in relation to neurotransmitter systems, cognitive-behavioral frameworks, and mindfulness practices. Similarly, the

concept of *Sharira* informed by *Pancha Mahabhuta* and *Srotas* can offer novel insights into somatic therapies, holistic diagnostics, and preventive healthcare. Lastly, philosophical studies can delve deeper into the concept of *Ātmā* from the standpoint of phenomenology, metaphysics, and consciousness studies, linking Ayurvedic insights with contemporary debates in philosophy of mind and cognitive science.

Thus, this review provides a robust platform for interdisciplinary dialogues and encourages both classical scholars and contemporary researchers to explore the multidimensional nature of human existence as envisioned in *Sharira Sthana*. The ancient wisdom of *Sharira Trayam* continues to offer not only metaphysical depth but also practical relevance for understanding, diagnosing, and healing the complex human organism.

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