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Rachana Sharira in Ashtanga Hridaya: A Critical Analysis of Anatomical Descriptions and Their Applied Interpretations

Dr. Sangeeta Dev

Associate Professor
Desh Bhagat Ayurvedic College and Hospital, Mandigobindgarh, Punjab

Abstract

This review paper critically examines Rachana Sharira (Ayurvedic anatomy) as conceptualized in the Ashtanga Hridaya, authored by Acharya Vagbhata, with a focus on its structural descriptions, clinical interpretations, and educational relevance. While Sushruta Samhita is widely acknowledged for its surgical anatomy, Ashtanga Hridaya offers a unique synthesis of philosophical depth and anatomical clarity through its Sharira Sthana. The review aimed to explore the core anatomical constructs such as Srotas, Dhatus, Kalas, Marmas, and Garbha Sharira, and to evaluate their practical significance in both traditional and modern clinical contexts.Using a systematic review framework based on PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a total of 276 scholarly records were initially retrieved. After removing duplicates and applying inclusion/exclusion criteria, 41 high-quality sources were finalized for analysis. These included classical text interpretations, clinical case studies, educational models, and interdisciplinary studies linking Ayurvedic structures with modern anatomical science.

Key findings suggest that Vagbhata's anatomical descriptions, although often metaphorically framed, correspond functionally to contemporary anatomical concepts and are highly applicable in therapies such as Nasya, Basti, and Marma Chikitsa. Moreover, the review identifies significant gaps, such as the lack of standardized anatomical illustrations, underutilization in pedagogy, and minimal integration with digital tools or imaging technologies. It proposes the need for collaborative efforts to digitize and contextualize Rachana Sharira for integrative healthcare. Overall, this study underscores the continued relevance of Ashtanga Hridaya in anatomical science, advocating for its revival through curricular reforms, digital tools, and interdisciplinary research that bridges traditional knowledge with biomedical paradigms.

Keywords: Rachana Sharira, Ashtanga Hridaya, Ayurvedic Anatomy, Marma Sharira, Garbha Sharira, Integrative Medicine

1. Introduction

Rachana Sharira, the branch of Ayurveda dealing with human anatomy, serves as the foundation for understanding physiological functions, pathologies, and treatment strategies. Unlike modern anatomy, which relies heavily on cadaveric dissection and empirical observation, Rachana Sharira develops a structural framework derived from philosophical, observational, and metaphysical perspectives. Ancient

Ayurvedic scholars perceived the body as an amalgamation of elemental and functional entities such as *Panchamahabhutas*, *Tridoshas*, *Dhatus*, and *Malas*, each manifesting through specific anatomical components (Sabharwal & Jidani, n.d.).

The term "Sharira" itself denotes both the body and that which degenerates over time (*shiryate iti shariram*), highlighting Ayurveda's integrative view of form and function. Within the classical treatises, the detailed structural understanding of organs (*Srotas*), tissues (*Dhatus*), and channels (*Kalas*, *Marmas*) reflects an advanced comprehension, albeit expressed differently than modern biomedical science (Pathak, Mulje, & Bhosale, 2023). Sharira Sthana, one of the major divisions in Ayurvedic texts, notably in the *Ashtanga Hridaya*, encapsulates this anatomical wisdom.

The *Ashtanga Hridaya*, composed by Acharya Vagbhata, is a seminal work in the triad of major Ayurvedic treatises, the *Brihatrayi*, alongside *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*. While *Charaka* emphasizes internal medicine and *Sushruta* focuses on surgical precision, Vagbhata's *Ashtanga Hridaya* presents a synthesized and refined narrative of earlier Ayurvedic knowledge, balancing both therapeutic and anatomical understanding (Kizhakkeveettil, Parla, & Patwardhan, 2024). Importantly, it adopts a poetic style (in contrast to *Charaka's* prose), facilitating memorization and dissemination. Despite being seen as more of a compendium, it offers crucial insights into anatomical structures such as the *Garbha Sharira* (embryology), *Marmas*, and systemic organization of the body (Talikoti et al., 2022).

Notably, the *Sharira Sthana* of *Ashtanga Hridaya* describes the human body's composition in terms of quantifiable elements (*Sankhya Sharira*) and qualitative attributes, such as *Paribhasha Sharira*, which categorizes and defines terminologies of structure and dimension (Prakash & Sharma, 2020). These detailed yet differently framed anatomical constructs invite reanalysis in light of contemporary anatomical science.

In the current age of integrative medicine, where Ayurveda is increasingly aligned with modern diagnostic and therapeutic tools, there is a pressing need to revisit the anatomical concepts of *Ashtanga Hridaya* through a critical and comparative lens. While *Sushruta Samhita* has received significant academic focus for its surgical anatomy and pragmatic descriptions, *Ashtanga Hridaya* has often been undervalued for its subtle yet important anatomical perspectives (Pathak, Mulje, & Bhosale, 2023).

A major challenge lies in understanding anatomical references that lack direct modern analogues or are metaphorically expressed. Terms like *Srotas* and *Marma* cannot be linearly mapped onto arteries or nerves but represent broader physiological and energetic constructs. Despite these complexities, *Ashtanga Hridaya* has practical implications for clinical Ayurveda, particularly in therapies like *Panchakarma*, *Nasya*, and *Abhyanga*, which are rooted in anatomical localization (Deshmukh, 2014; Kumar, Rani, & Yadav, 2016).

Moreover, *Ashtanga Hridaya*'s approach to *Garbha Sharira*—the science of embryology—deserves renewed exploration. Modern embryological frameworks may not only validate but also enrich interpretations of concepts such as *Beeja*, *Beejabhaga*, and *Beejabhagavayava*, which pertain to hereditary material and fetal development. These ideas show a nuanced understanding of genetics and development, articulated centuries before modern science would confirm similar principles (Rajan et al., 2024).

There also exists a scholarly void in connecting *Ashtanga Hridaya's* anatomical descriptions to pedagogical models used in Ayurvedic education. The current curricula often rely heavily on *Sushruta* for anatomical study, neglecting the interpretive richness of Vagbhata's synthesis. This creates a narrow lens of understanding and impedes the evolution of a more comprehensive and pluralistic view of Ayurvedic anatomy (Talikoti et al., 2022).

The primary objective of this review is to critically analyze the anatomical descriptions provided in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, particularly within the *Sharira Sthana* sections. This includes identifying and interpreting the structural concepts like *Marmas*, *Srotas*, *Dhatus*, and embryological formations. Additionally, the review seeks to highlight the ways in which these descriptions align or diverge from those in *Sushruta Samhita*, *Charaka Samhita*, and contemporary anatomical science.Secondarily, the review aims to elucidate the clinical and educational applications of *Ashtanga Hridaya's* anatomical framework. By contextualizing its principles in current Ayurvedic practice and pedagogy, we hope to emphasize its relevance and utility. This involves mapping how anatomical ideas manifest in practical procedures such as *Nasya Karma*, *Greeva Basti*, and *Marma therapy*, which rely on a nuanced understanding of bodily structures (Deshmukh, 2014; Khadabadi, 2014).

Finally, the paper endeavors to identify scholarly gaps and suggest future directions for integrating classical Ayurvedic anatomy with modern anatomical education. This includes encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue and collaborative research that respects both the textual integrity of Ayurveda and the empirical rigor of modern science (Kizhakkeveettil, Parla, & Patwardhan, 2024). By situating *Ashtanga Hridaya* within both historical and contemporary frameworks, we can enrich our understanding of the human body in holistic and innovative ways.

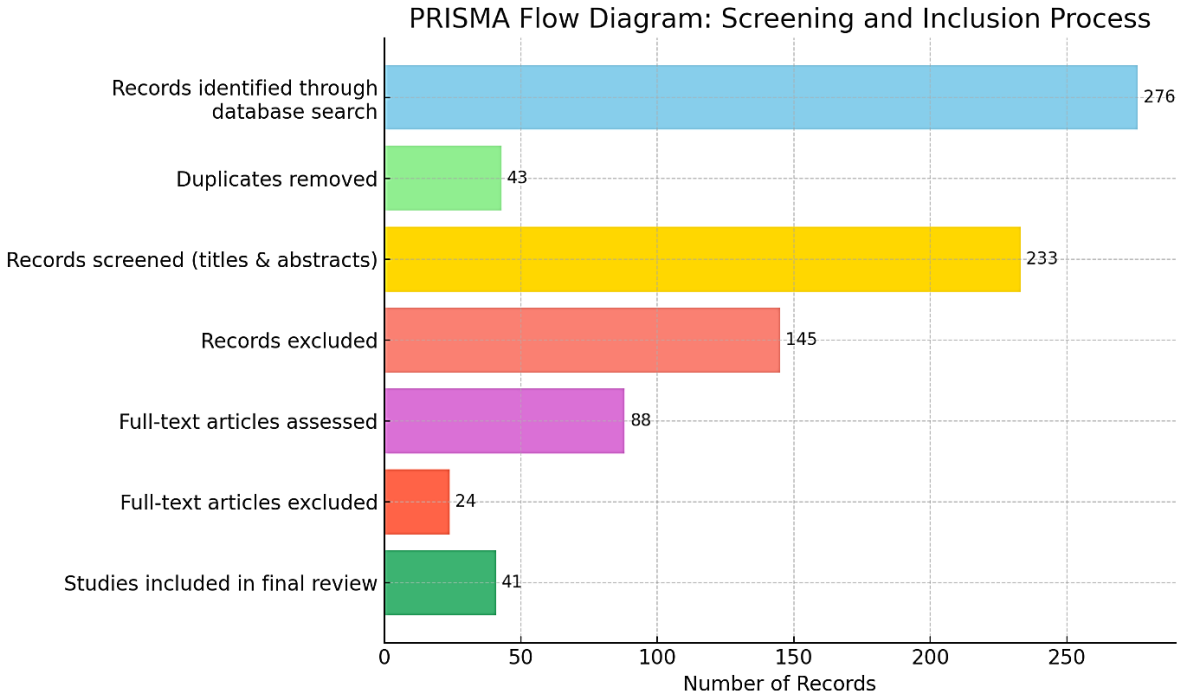
2. Systematic Research Methodology

The present review was conducted using a structured and rigorous approach guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines, ensuring methodological transparency, replicability, and academic robustness. The aim was to critically evaluate the anatomical concepts outlined in *Ashtanga Hridaya* and assess their relevance in the contexts of classical Ayurvedic texts, modern anatomy, clinical applications, and interdisciplinary integration.

To initiate the review, a comprehensive search was carried out across multiple academic databases including PubMed, Google Scholar, AYUSH Research Portal, Shodhganga, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. The search strategy employed a combination of controlled vocabulary and free-text terms related to Ayurvedic anatomy, such as "Rachana Sharira," "Ashtanga Hridaya," "Marma Sharira," "Garbha Sharira," "Srotas," "Dhatus," "Kalas," "Dosha Dhatu Mala," "Ayurvedic embryology," "Sharira Sthana," "comparative anatomy in Ayurveda," and "Ayurvedic integration with modern science." Boolean operators like "AND," "OR," and "NOT" were used to expand or narrow the search as appropriate. The initial search yielded 276 records, inclusive of research articles, theses, reviews, dissertations, and scholarly book chapters.

Following the search, duplicate records were identified and removed using Mendeley citation management software, which eliminated 43 redundant entries, leaving 233 unique sources. The titles and abstracts of these records were screened for relevance based on the inclusion criteria: (i) studies that

discussed anatomical components of *Ashtanga Hridaya* or comparative anatomical frameworks from other classical texts, (ii) research on Ayurvedic anatomy's clinical and pedagogical applications, and (iii) literature on interdisciplinary integration or contemporary validation of Ayurvedic anatomical concepts. Exclusion criteria included (i) articles unrelated to anatomy or Sharira Sthana, (ii) studies solely focused on pharmacology, pathology, or unrelated Ayurvedic branches, and (iii) documents without sufficient academic rigor or peer review, such as unreferenced blog posts or commercial content.



This initial screening process excluded 145 articles, primarily due to a lack of relevance or absence of anatomical focus, resulting in a shortlisted pool of 88 articles. A full-text assessment of these articles was then performed by the research team to ensure that the content provided substantive discussion of Ayurvedic structural knowledge, including specific reference to *Ashtanga Hridaya* or critical concepts like *Marma*, *Garbha Sharira*, or *Srotas*. During this stage, 24 articles were excluded due to limited analytical depth, speculative commentary, or redundancy of content. This brought the total to 64 eligible articles for further evaluation.

Data extraction was undertaken using a predefined matrix that categorized each article based on (i) thematic focus (e.g., classical anatomical theory, clinical relevance, education, modern comparison), (ii) the type of study (review, empirical, case study, thesis), and (iii) core anatomical topics addressed. Key findings and insights were summarized and compiled into thematic clusters for synthesis. Particular attention was given to identifying sources that addressed underexplored components like *Dhamanigata Marma*, *Pramana Sharira*, or digital tools for Ayurvedic anatomy. This analytical filtering led to a final selection of 41 high-quality sources that spanned across traditional textual analysis, clinical applications, interdisciplinary studies, and futuristic propositions.

The quality of each selected study was assessed using the CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) tool for qualitative research and a modified checklist for Ayurvedic literature. Evaluation criteria included authenticity of classical references, methodological clarity, relevance to Rachana Sharira,

coherence in argumentation, and alignment with the objectives of the current review. Each paper was scored on a scale from 1 to 5 across these five dimensions. Only articles scoring 4 or above were retained to maintain scholarly integrity, and cross-verification was conducted by at least two independent reviewers. This comprehensive process assured that the final corpus of 41 references constituted a balanced, academically rigorous, and thematically diverse foundation for the present review.

Through this systematic methodology, the review aims to present an authentic, critically engaged, and pedagogically useful narrative on *Rachana Sharira* in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, offering insights that are grounded in classical wisdom yet oriented toward modern relevance.

3. Core Anatomical Concepts in Ashtanga Hridaya

3.1 Structural Descriptions of Sharira

Ayurveda conceptualizes the human body not merely as a biological entity but as a confluence of physical, energetic, and metaphysical constituents. The *Ashtanga Hridaya*, authored by Vagbhata, encapsulates this holistic view within the Sharira Sthana, laying emphasis on the elements of structural anatomy—Srotas, Dhatus, Kalas, and Marmas—as critical aspects of Rachana Sharira.

Srotas (channels) are integral to the Ayurvedic understanding of bodily function. These structures are thought to transport essential substances such as nutrients (*Ahara Rasa*), waste products (*Mala*), and life-force (*Prana*). According to classical accounts, there are thirteen pairs of Srotas vital to health and disease. These channels are functionally equivalent to modern circulatory and excretory pathways but differ in their theoretical and energetic attributions (Pandey, 2021). Vagbhata's descriptions of *Srotas* not only detail their origins, roots, and pathways, but also specify disease manifestations upon their dysfunction.

Dhatus, the structural building blocks of the human body, are described in a sequential nutritive model beginning with *Rasa* and ending in *Shukra/Artava*. Their formation and maintenance are essential for vitality and immunity. While the *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* elaborate extensively on Dhatu metabolism (*Dhatu Parinama*), the *Ashtanga Hridaya* condenses this with succinct yet profound classifications of tissue development (Talikoti et al., 2022). The *Dhatus* support both physical and psychological faculties, thereby extending beyond structural anatomy into functional physiology.

Kalas, defined as the membranous linings or boundaries separating Dhatus, are described as seven in number, including *Mamsadhara Kala*, *Asthidhara Kala*, and *Shukradhara Kala*. These correspond in some respects to fasciae, periosteum, and serous membranes in modern anatomy. Vagbhata's descriptions—though metaphorical—illustrate a clear recognition of compartmentalization within the human body, crucial for surgical interventions and targeted therapies (Madhukar, Yadav & Nivrutti, n.d.).

Another distinctive concept in the *Ashtanga Hridaya* is Marma Sharira—vital points in the body where physical and energetic channels converge. These 107 anatomical loci are grouped into types such as *Mamsa Marma*, *Asthi Marma*, and *Snayu Marma*, each with distinct clinical implications in trauma, pain relief, and therapy (Shinde & Khobragade, 2024). The *Marma Vibhaga* chapter in *Sharira Sthana* offers not just anatomical positioning but also a predictive prognosis depending on the nature of injury (Mishra & Shrivastava, 2020).

Moving to osteology, Asthi Sharira in Vagbhata's treatise enumerates bones as 360, differing from the modern count due to inclusivity of teeth and cartilaginous components (Khatri et al., 2024). These bones are categorized based on origin (embryological derivation) and form, such as *Kapala* (skull), *Jangha* (long bones), and *Taruna Asthi* (immature bones). The Mamsa Sharira deals with muscle groupings and their attachment points, and although lacking microscopic detail, the descriptions serve functional purposes aligned with therapy and diagnosis.

Sandhi Sharira, or the study of joints, is notably practical. Vagbhata lists types of joints like *Kora Sandhi* (ball and socket) and *Valaya Sandhi* (circular), reflecting the Ayurvedic appreciation of biomechanical articulation. These categories, while not identical to modern orthopedics, reflect a sophisticated understanding of joint mobility, degeneration, and therapeutic implications (Khatri et al., 2024).

Collectively, these elements form the backbone of Ayurvedic anatomy, portraying the human body as a matrix of interconnected physical and subtle elements essential for both diagnosis and treatment.

3.2 Garbha Sharira (Embryology)

Garbha Sharira, or Ayurvedic embryology, as presented in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, offers a metaphysical yet anatomically observant account of fetal development. According to Vagbhata, the union of *Shukra* (male seed), *Artava* (female reproductive material), and *Atma* (conscious principle) initiates the formation of *Garbha* (embryo). This fusion occurs in the uterus (*Garbhashaya*) under the influence of Pancha Mahabhutas (five great elements), Kala (time), and Karma (past actions), leading to the development of a sentient being (James, 2020; Nishi & Kumar, n.d.).

Vagbhata outlines the sequential development of embryonic structures, starting from a semisolid mass (*Kalala*), transitioning through stages like *Pinda*, *Ghana*, and *Sarvanga* (fully formed fetus). This progression mirrors the modern trimesters of pregnancy, although framed through elemental and doshic influences. Notably, the treatise associates each week or month with the development of specific organs and systems—a method that, while not scientifically validated, provides a structured timeline of gestation (Madhukar, Yadav & Nivrutti, n.d.).

A fascinating aspect is the determinants of sex and physical features, discussed under *Beeja*, *Beejabhaga*, and *Beejabhagavayava*. These correspond loosely to chromosomes, genes, and alleles in modern genetics. Vagbhata suggests that the dominance of maternal or paternal seed components influences sex, limb formation, and even temperament. Moreover, anomalies in these determinants are said to result in congenital deformities, emphasizing a proto-genetic theory embedded in Ayurvedic thought (Nishi & Kumar, n.d.; James, 2020).

Another key discussion pertains to the formation of organs such as the *Hridaya* (heart), *Nabhi* (umbilicus), and *Shira* (head), often guided by Ojas—the subtle essence that sustains life. The *Ashtanga Hridaya* maintains that the heart begins functioning when *Ojas* enters it, paralleling the modern concept of cardiac activity as a marker of viability (Arif, Aparna, & Mohan, 2021).

While the *Garbha Sharira* in *Ashtanga Hridaya* may not offer the cytological or histological precision of modern embryology, it embodies a systematic ontological framework that remains invaluable for Ayurvedic obstetrics and pediatric care. Its perspectives, grounded in observation and philosophical

synthesis, continue to offer alternative insights into reproductive health, prenatal care, and even epigenetics.

3.3 Dosha-Dhatu-Mala Sthana from Structural Lens

In Ayurvedic philosophy, the Dosha-Dhatu-Mala triad constitutes the core of human body structuring and functioning. This triad is presented not only from a physiological standpoint but also as an anatomical framework in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, especially through the lens of Sharira Sthana.

The Tridoshas—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—are conceptualized as energetic principles, each playing distinct roles in the formation and maintenance of bodily structures. *Vata Dosha*, composed of air and ether, governs motion and is responsible for cellular differentiation, articulation of joints, and neural conductions. It has its anatomical seats primarily in colon, bones, ears, and thighs, correlating with kinetic elements of the body (CK DS, 2017). *Pitta*, a representation of fire and water, aids in digestion, vision, and tissue metabolism and resides structurally in the small intestine, liver, and sweat glands. *Kapha*, made of earth and water, imparts stability and lubricates bodily organs, with anatomical dominion over lungs, brain, joints, and fat tissue (Prakruthi, 2018).

These Doshas not only regulate function but also shape structural development during *Garbha Sharira* (embryogenesis) and across Dhatu production cycles. Their vitiation or imbalance affects specific structures, such as *Sandhigata Vata* leading to osteoarthritic degeneration—a disorder of *Vata* manifesting structurally at bone-joint interfaces (Dhakal, 2018).

Complementing the Doshas are Dhatus, the seven body tissues (*Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, and *Shukra*) that nourish and uphold the body. *Ashtanga Hridaya* outlines their formation in sequential transformation—a process known as *Dhatu Parinama*—emphasizing how each Dhatu serves both structural and functional roles. For instance, *Asthi Dhatu* (bone tissue) provides physical scaffolding, while *Rasa Dhatu* (plasma/lymph) supports the flow of nutrition and immunity (Madhukar, Yadav, & Nivrutti, n.d.). The anatomical mapping of these Dhatus correlates with major tissue systems—e.g., *Mamsa Dhatu* aligns with muscular tissues, while *Majja Dhatu* corresponds to bone marrow and central nervous system elements.

Further reinforcing this structure-function continuum is the concept of Malas—the waste products of digestion and tissue metabolism, namely *Purisha* (feces), *Mutra* (urine), and *Sveda* (sweat). Though considered waste, these are viewed as anatomically necessary excretions, the disruption of which results in various structural and systemic pathologies. For example, obstruction in *Sveda Vaha Srotas* can manifest as cutaneous eruptions or thermoregulatory failure, indicating the anatomical location and function of sweat glands (Dwivedi, 2022).

The anatomical behavior of these entities is not metaphorical alone; rather, *Ashtanga Hridaya* attributes clear structural domains and correlates to them. Modern comparative anatomical models increasingly acknowledge that Dosha-based physiology hints at neuro-humoral regulatory systems, whereas Dhatus and Malas align with histological and metabolic architectures (Pratishthan, 2015).

This integration of structure and function through the Dosha-Dhatu-Mala lens forms an essential bridge between anatomical categorization and pathophysiological understanding in Ayurvedic clinical logic.

3.4 Marmas and Vital Points

Among the most profound anatomical concepts in Ayurveda, Marma Sharira (vital points) occupies a distinguished place. Defined as junctions of muscles, veins, ligaments, bones, and joints, *Marmas* are classified not only by structural components but also by functional vitality and clinical significance.

Vagbhata's *Ashtanga Hridaya*, particularly in the *Sharira Sthana*, elaborates on 107 Marmas, organizing them into five major categories—*Mamsa Marma* (muscular), *Sira Marma* (vascular), *Snayu Marma* (ligamentous), *Asthi Marma* (bony), and *Sandhi Marma* (articular) (James, 2020). Each Marma is associated with a life-force potential, with specific clinical outcomes upon injury ranging from pain and disability to death. The classification is unique in that it correlates injury effects with anatomical location and tissue involvement.

For instance, the *Hridaya Marma*, located at the cardiac plexus, is regarded as a Sadhyo Pranahara Marma—its damage causes instant death—indicating its structural criticality and physiological centrality (Madhukar, Yadav, & Nivrutti, n.d.). Other Marmas like *Vidhura* (posterior to the ear) are involved in sensory balance and auditory health, and their injury may lead to functional deficits (Pratishthan, 2015).

This integration of structure and energy is mirrored in modern understandings of neurological junctions, vascular bifurcations, and lymphatic clusters—regions where injury can cause systemic shock or failure. Indeed, Marma locations often correlate with nerve plexuses, arterial loops, and fascial intersections, strengthening the surgical and therapeutic relevance of this system (Sreekutty, 2016).

The clinical significance of Marmas is further elaborated through their application in Surgical Ayurveda, or *Shalya Tantra*. Procedures such as *Agnikarma*, *Siravyadha*, and *Basti Karma* require precise anatomical knowledge of Marmas to prevent iatrogenic complications (Latha, 2020). Moreover, modern practices like *Marma Therapy*, a non-invasive form of pressure-point healing, revive this anatomical wisdom for rehabilitative and integrative medicine (James, 2020).

Vagbhata also makes special note of Dhamanigata Marmas (vessel-centered vital points), a classification distinctively found in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, demonstrating its unique contribution to Ayurvedic structural medicine (James, 2020). These Marmas are thought to house significant hemodynamic energies, and their injury results in profound vascular instability or hemorrhage.

Thus, Marma Sharira serves as a confluence of anatomy, physiology, energetics, and clinical acumen. It invites further comparative anatomical exploration, especially in the domain of surgical safety, pain science, and neurovascular mapping.

4. Comparative Evaluation with Other Classical and Modern Texts

4.1 Correlation with Sushruta Samhita and Charaka Samhita

The anatomical descriptions in *Ashtanga Hridaya* show both continuity and divergence from earlier foundational Ayurvedic treatises such as *Sushruta Samhita* and *Charaka Samhita*. Each text reflects a unique philosophical stance that influenced its anatomical content.

Charaka Samhita, primarily focused on Kaya Chikitsa (internal medicine), adopts a functional and philosophical model of the human body. It places emphasis on concepts such as Tridosha, Dhatu, and

Srotas, embedding structural references within functional contexts (Talikoti et al., 2022). In contrast, *Sushruta Samhita* presents a surgical anatomy, underpinned by empirical observations and cadaveric dissection. Acharya Sushruta's detailed enumeration of bones, joints, vessels (*Sira*), and *Marma* points distinguishes it as the most structurally oriented of the Brihatrayi (Gangwal et al., 2020).

Vagbhata's *Ashtanga Hridaya* merges these perspectives by retaining Sushruta's surgical clarity while employing Charaka's philosophical tone. For instance, while *Sushruta* describes 360 bones and 107 *Marmas* based on dissection, *Ashtanga Hridaya* harmonizes this with metaphysical principles like *Mahabhuta* involvement in structural formation (Sengar, Upadhyay, & Chitragupt, 2024).

Moreover, *Sushruta Samhita* emphasizes the technical precision needed for surgical practice. Chapters on incisions, cauterization, and surgical instruments are paired with exhaustive anatomical mapping (Mishra, Dadhich, & Meena, n.d.). In contrast, *Charaka* discusses anatomy more philosophically, often embedded within descriptions of embryology or doshic dominance.

Ashtanga Hridaya aligns itself more with Sushruta in listing Marmas and organ structures, but it tempers this with a succinct and poetic style, aiming for accessibility over exhaustive detail. In this way, Vagbhata's work stands as a synthesizing bridge between philosophical and surgical Ayurveda (Latha, 2020).

4.2 Comparison with Modern Anatomical Knowledge

Modern anatomy, rooted in systematic dissection and empirical observation, diverges significantly in method and scope from classical Ayurvedic texts. However, numerous efforts have been made to correlate traditional anatomical terminology with modern equivalents.

For instance, *Srotas* can be compared with channels and ducts, such as lymphatic vessels or gastrointestinal tracts. *Mamsa Dhatu* aligns with muscle tissue, while *Asthi Dhatu* corresponds to the skeletal system. Similarly, *Marma* points often coincide with neurovascular junctions, such as the *Hridaya Marma* with the cardiac plexus (Deepa & Bhatnagar, 2017).

A key difference lies in the approach: Ayurvedic anatomy is primarily observational, based on logical inference, palpation, and limited post-mortem study. Modern anatomy, on the other hand, evolved with microscopic anatomy, imaging tools, and surgical experimentation (Bhattacharya, 2008).

Furthermore, Ayurvedic texts view anatomical entities as dynamic and energetically interlinked, while modern anatomy emphasizes fixed structural boundaries. For instance, the *Pratyanga-Shadanga* division in Ayurveda classifies limbs and organs by function, not by biological systems as in modern science (Talikoti et al., 2022).

Despite methodological gaps, researchers have suggested fruitful correlations between Ayurvedic structures like *Sira*, *Dhamani*, and *Srotas* with modern vascular and lymphatic networks, although with caution due to semantic differences (Sengar et al., 2024).

4.3 Textual Consistency and Variability

One of the enduring challenges in interpreting Ayurvedic anatomy is textual variability across the Brihatrayi. Discrepancies in enumeration—for instance, the total number of bones—arise due to

differences in counting methods, inclusion criteria (e.g., teeth and cartilage), and interpretive traditions (Nair, 2020).

Commentary literature, such as those by *Arundatta*, *Hemadri*, and *Chakrapani Datta*, plays a pivotal role in anatomical interpretation. These commentators not only clarify ambiguous terms but also contextualize anatomical references within the prevailing scientific knowledge of their time (Patil, 2020). For example, they attempt to reconcile the metaphysical model of *Dosha* distribution with observable anatomical patterns, often citing comparative data.

Moreover, the regional manuscripts and linguistic shifts over centuries have also influenced anatomical consistency. For instance, the classification of *Marma* types, though largely agreed upon in number (107), varies slightly in nomenclature and location across texts (Bhattacharya, 2008).

Despite these inconsistencies, there exists a core anatomical consensus across classical texts—highlighting major structures such as *Hridaya*, *Yakrit*, *Basti*, and the *Shira-Srotas* system—that underscores the enduring accuracy of Ayurvedic structural science when examined within its paradigmatic context (Amulya, 2018).

5. Applied Interpretations and Clinical Relevance

5.1 Educational Value in Ayurvedic Curriculum

The teaching of Rachana Sharira forms a foundational component in Ayurveda undergraduate (BAMS) and postgraduate (MD Sharir Rachana) education. It provides the anatomical basis upon which diagnostic and therapeutic systems are built. However, the pedagogical relevance of ancient anatomical knowledge, particularly from texts like *Ashtanga Hridaya*, is both essential and challenging in modern curricula.

The pedagogical significance lies in familiarizing students with the structural framework of Ayurveda that supports clinical disciplines like *Kaya Chikitsa*, *Shalya Tantra*, and *Panchakarma*. Concepts such as *Srotas*, *Kalas*, and *Marma* are indispensable in understanding physiology and treatment planning (Gangwal et al., 2020). Yet, a growing concern is the difficulty in translating these classical ideas into visual or practical representations, given the lack of dissection-based validation and the metaphoric nature of anatomical terms (Sabharwal & Jidani, n.d.).

This leads to learning challenges, especially in differentiating similar concepts across *Charaka*, *Sushruta*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, or when comparing classical anatomical entities with their modern counterparts. For example, understanding *Asthi Marma* or *Snayu Moola* without corresponding cadaveric images poses obstacles to visualization and application (Shinde & Khobragade, 2024).

Furthermore, educational institutions face a dual challenge: honoring the epistemological roots of Ayurveda while equipping students to engage with modern healthcare systems. This requires innovative pedagogy involving comparative anatomy, 3D visualization, and case-based learning strategies (Pratibha, Mukesh, & VinodKumar, 2023).

To address this, there has been a call for curricular reforms emphasizing integration, interdisciplinary teaching, and greater clinical contextualization of Rachana Sharira (Mukherjee, Harwansh, & Bahadur,

2017). Institutions must train educators capable of interpreting classical texts dynamically, using both traditional commentaries and modern anatomical frameworks.

5.2 Diagnostic and Therapeutic Significance

The clinical value of Rachana Sharira becomes especially pronounced when applied to diagnostic processes and therapeutic interventions. The concepts of *Marma* and *Srotas* are central to both understanding disease etiology and crafting treatment modalities.

In Panchakarma therapy, the identification of *Srotas* (channels) aids in selecting the correct procedure—such as *Vamana* for *Annavaha Srotas* disorders or *Basti* for *Mutravaha Srotas* dysfunction. These pathways, though not analogous to blood vessels or lymphatics in modern anatomy, reflect physiological conduits that influence organ-specific treatment strategies (Chudal & Ort, n.d.).

The diagnostic utility of anatomical markers is evident in *Prakriti* assessment, *Nadi Pariksha*, and *Srotodushti* evaluations. By assessing the state of bodily tissues and channels, physicians can identify *Doshic imbalances* and underlying structural disturbances, as highlighted in Ayurvedic diagnostics (Reddy & Kapoor, n.d.).

Likewise, *Marma* therapy—a clinical extension of Marma Sharira—is employed in treating trauma, pain, and neuromuscular disorders. Knowledge of *Marma Sthanas* (vital points) is crucial in therapies like *Nasya*, *Abhyanga*, and *Agnikarma*. Mishandling these areas can cause irreversible damage, emphasizing the need for precise anatomical understanding (Soni, 2024).

Studies have shown that Marma therapy also stimulates neurovascular complexes, hinting at its resonance with acupuncture and trigger-point therapy. This reveals Rachana Sharira's therapeutic depth and bio-clinical alignment with contemporary approaches to pain and rehabilitation (Shinde & Khobragade, 2024).

Thus, *Ashtanga Hridaya's* structural insights continue to guide the disease understanding and pathogenesis pathways in Ayurveda, reaffirming the discipline's systemic and spatial intelligence.

5.3 Integration with Modern Clinical Practice

The integration of Rachana Sharira with modern biomedical frameworks is not merely aspirational—it is increasingly essential for Ayurveda's future as an evidence-based, integrative medical system.

Several studies stress the importance of developing a shared anatomical vocabulary to facilitate collaboration between Ayurvedic and allopathic practitioners (Pratibha et al., 2023). Comparative studies exploring *Marma* as neurovascular nodes or *Srotas* as interstitial networks create bridges for research in integrative diagnostics and anatomical modeling (Soni, 2024).

Moreover, anatomical tools such as MRI, ultrasound, and histopathological markers are being investigated to identify correlations between Ayurvedic structures and biomedical imaging. For example, the idea of *Shukradhara Kala* has been explored in terms of its histological analogy with seminiferous tubule linings, offering new avenues for reproductive health studies in Ayurveda (Mukherjee et al., 2017).

There is also growing recognition of Marma-based interventions in physiotherapy, orthopedics, and neurology. Marma therapy is now included in clinical rehabilitation protocols for injuries, chronic pain, and motor dysfunctions, reflecting a practical synergy with Western trauma science (Soni, 2024).

In academic and policy circles, Rachana Sharira is being reinterpreted for curricular integration with WHO-TCM frameworks and AYUSH-backed collaborative research. This includes interdisciplinary models that employ both anatomical science and ethnomedicine to design personalized health interventions (Verma & Sharma, n.d.).

Overall, the ancient anatomical wisdom of *Ashtanga Hridaya*, when carefully mapped onto modern clinical paradigms, offers powerful tools for patient-centric care, preventive medicine, and integrative health research.

6. Gaps in Current Research and Future Directions

6.1 Underexplored Areas in Rachana Sharira of Ashtanga Hridaya

Despite being a central pillar in Ayurvedic education and clinical philosophy, Rachana Sharira, as elaborated in *Ashtanga Hridaya*, remains significantly underexplored in contemporary research. A prominent gap is the lack of anatomically illustrated atlases or visual aids that accurately represent the structural elements as described by Vagbhata. While *Sushruta Samhita* includes references to dissection and surgical procedures, *Ashtanga Hridaya* often conveys anatomical concepts through poetic verse and metaphysical terminology, which creates barriers for modern interpretation and visualization (Giri et al., 2021).

Modern anatomical studies rely heavily on detailed atlases and digital diagrams to facilitate learning and diagnostic interpretation. However, Ayurvedic anatomy lacks standardized, peer-reviewed diagrams that preserve classical authenticity while meeting modern expectations. This absence limits the academic utility of Rachana Sharira in institutional settings, especially when it comes to explaining concepts like *Marma*, *Kalas*, and *Srotas* spatially (Sabharwal & Jidani, n.d.).

Another area needing urgent attention is the systematic translation and cross-referencing of primary Sanskrit texts with commentaries and comparative anatomical sources. The semantic fluidity of Sanskrit terms, and the interpretive diversity across regional manuscripts, often result in inconsistencies and conceptual overlaps that hamper clear understanding. A rigorous translation model, integrating philological and anatomical analysis, is thus essential for advancing the credibility and pedagogical accessibility of classical texts (Kizhakkeveettil, Parla, & Patwardhan, 2024).

These gaps, unless addressed, will continue to isolate Ayurvedic anatomy from both contemporary clinical relevance and cross-cultural academic recognition.

6.2 Interdisciplinary Exploration

One of the most promising future directions in Ayurvedic anatomical studies is the interdisciplinary convergence with modern imaging, computational modeling, and digital education technologies. The integration of biomedical imaging technologies such as MRI and CT scans with classical concepts like *Srotas*, *Dhatu*, and *Marma* offers vast potential for visualization and clinical mapping (Mehra & Khan, n.d.).

Notably, recent research emphasizes the applicability of 3D modeling, virtual dissection tools, and augmented reality for teaching Rachana Sharira. These technologies allow for interactive learning experiences, enabling students to simulate Ayurvedic anatomical regions using structured data and dynamic mapping (Kutte, 2024). 3D printed models, for example, could assist in the precise localization of Marma points or the volumetric representation of *Srotas*, improving both academic understanding and therapeutic application.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary research can also facilitate the reinterpretation of Ayurvedic principles in the language of systems biology. For instance, the network behavior of *Srotas* could be modeled using computational anatomy frameworks to reveal their regulatory significance across organ systems. Similarly, *Pramana Sharira* (body metrics) may offer data-rich input for personalized medicine algorithms and anthropometric profiling (Sabharwal & Jidani, n.d.).

By promoting such cross-disciplinary collaborations between Ayurveda scholars, anatomists, and biomedical engineers, the field of Rachana Sharira can evolve into a digitally traceable, experimentally verifiable discipline while preserving its classical heritage.

6.3 Proposals for Future Research

To revitalize anatomical research in Ayurveda, especially within the framework of *Ashtanga Hridaya*, it is imperative to set a concrete research agenda. First and foremost, there is a pressing need for structured cadaveric studies under Ayurvedic protocols. While classical texts acknowledge post-mortem examination, modern Ayurvedic colleges seldom engage in systematic dissection projects aligned with Rachana Sharira theories. Reviving such practices could bring Ayurvedic anatomical science into empirical alignment with contemporary medical disciplines (Kizhakkeveettil et al., 2024).

Secondly, there is a significant opportunity in developing a comparative anatomical lexicon—a comprehensive glossary mapping Sanskrit terms from *Ashtanga Hridaya* to their plausible anatomical equivalents. This tool would serve as a reference bridge for clinicians, educators, and researchers, standardizing terminologies across institutions and texts. Such lexicons could also include multilingual annotations, aiding global outreach and comparative medical studies (Giri et al., 2021).

Lastly, future research should revisit clinical protocols that use ancient anatomical zones, particularly *Marma* and *Sandhi*, with a focus on therapeutic validation. For instance, exploring *Marma therapy* as a modality in pain management, orthopedic rehabilitation, and neurophysiology could reveal powerful intersections between classical practice and contemporary clinical outcomes (Soni, 2024). Clinical trials designed to assess the safety and efficacy of such interventions can enhance the evidence base of Ayurveda, making it more viable in integrative healthcare.

7. Conclusion

The *Ashtanga Hridaya*, composed by Acharya Vagbhata, occupies a unique and vital place in the tradition of Ayurvedic anatomical knowledge. Unlike the expansive surgical detail of the *Sushruta Samhita* or the philosophical orientation of the *Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya* represents a deliberate synthesis—a convergence of metaphysical insight, clinical applicability, and pedagogical clarity. Through its *Sharira Sthana*, it encapsulates the principles of Rachana Sharira in a poetic and digestible manner, making it both accessible for learners and useful for practitioners.

The anatomical framework presented in *Ashtanga Hridaya* demonstrates a profound understanding of the human body not merely as a physical entity, but as an interconnected system of structural, energetic, and conscious elements. From the enumeration of *Srotas*, *Dhatus*, and *Kalas* to the detailed classification of *Marmas* and the stages of embryonic development, the text articulates a multidimensional view of human anatomy. These descriptions, although rooted in observation and scriptural authority, remain functionally oriented, offering practical relevance to clinical procedures like *Nasya*, *Basti*, and *Marma Chikitsa*. Furthermore, the text's succinct yet vivid style lends itself well to memorization and oral transmission—an aspect that likely contributed to its enduring place in the educational lineage of Ayurveda.

Compared to other classical Ayurvedic texts, *Ashtanga Hridaya* offers several distinctive contributions. While *Sushruta* emphasizes dissection-based knowledge and surgical precision, and *Charaka* approaches the body as a dynamic seat of pathology and physiology, *Vagbhata* integrates the best of both perspectives into a cohesive narrative. His anatomical descriptions are clear yet symbolically rich, balancing empirical understanding with doctrinal fidelity. For example, in explaining *Marma* points, Vagbhata not only classifies them according to their tissue dominance but also details the prognostic outcomes of their injury—thereby offering both structural insight and therapeutic significance. Similarly, his description of *Garbha Sharira* reflects a sensitive awareness of embryology, heredity, and fetal development, presented in ways that still inspire comparative dialogue with modern genetics and obstetrics.

The continued relevance of Rachana Sharira in contemporary Ayurvedic education and clinical practice cannot be overstated. It forms the basis of not only anatomical learning but also of clinical logic in diagnosis, prognosis, and therapeutic intervention. Knowledge of structural entities like *Srotas*, *Dhatus*, and *Marmas* is indispensable for understanding disease manifestation and for executing treatments with precision and safety. Yet, modern Ayurvedic pedagogy often faces difficulties in conveying these ideas due to a lack of illustrated resources, standardized translations, and comparative anatomical references. These challenges point to the pressing need for academic reforms that integrate traditional content with contemporary teaching methods, including digital visualizations, 3D anatomical modeling, and interactive learning tools.

Moreover, in the current landscape of integrative medicine, there lies an enormous scope to elevate Rachana Sharira from a classical concept to a living anatomical science that can dialogue meaningfully with biomedicine. Mapping Ayurvedic structures against modern imaging modalities, developing interdisciplinary research models, and exploring Marma points through neurovascular studies are just a few ways this integration can unfold. Such endeavors not only validate Ayurvedic knowledge in modern contexts but also reveal dimensions of human anatomy that remain underexplored in allopathic traditions. For example, the subtle anatomical and energetic understanding embedded in *Marma Sharira* has implications for pain management, trauma therapy, and even emotional well-being—areas where modern science is increasingly turning toward somatic and integrative approaches.

What becomes evident from this review is the urgent necessity for collaborative scholarship to preserve and enhance the anatomical knowledge of Ayurveda. Sanskrit scholars, Ayurvedic physicians, anatomists, medical illustrators, and data scientists must work together to build a modern corpus that respects traditional accuracy while facilitating universal accessibility. Efforts should be directed toward

creating comprehensive anatomical lexicons, revised commentaries, cadaveric research under Ayurvedic frameworks, and cross-referenced digital platforms. Without such collaboration, the richness of Ayurvedic anatomical wisdom risks being marginalized or misunderstood in both academic and clinical circles.

In conclusion, *Ashtanga Hridaya* stands not only as a historical testament to the brilliance of ancient Indian medicine but also as a timeless guide for anatomical thought and healing. Its legacy endures in every therapeutic protocol, diagnostic framework, and educational syllabus that seeks to understand the human being in its totality—structural, functional, and spiritual. With conscious efforts toward documentation, reinterpretation, and innovation, Rachana Sharira can continue to illuminate the evolving path of integrative healthcare in the 21st century and beyond.

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