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PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN ANATOMY IN AYURVEDA AND TIBETAN MEDICINE

***Dr. Bhumi¹, Dr. Shridev Phondani²**

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Rachana Sharir, Desh Bhagat University, Gobindgarh, Punjab

²Principal/ Professor, Dept of Shalya Tantra, Saint Sahara Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, Bathinda, Punjab

***Corresponding Author** - Dr. Bhumi Ph.D., Ph.D. Scholar, Rachana Sharir, Desh Bhagat University, Gobindgarh, Punjab

Email id - drbhemicayurveda@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine are two ancient traditional medical systems that provide a holistic understanding of the human body. Both systems are deeply rooted in philosophical principles that explain human anatomy not merely as a physical structure but as a dynamic integration of body, mind, and consciousness. Ayurveda describes the body through concepts like *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Srotas*, while Tibetan medicine explains anatomy through elemental theory and the three humors (*Nyepa*). These philosophical foundations form the basis for understanding structure, function, and disease.

Aim To comparatively analyze the philosophical foundations of human anatomy in Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine. **Objectives** To study the philosophical concepts of human anatomy in Ayurveda. To explore the anatomical philosophy described in Tibetan medicine. To identify similarities and differences between both systems. To understand the relevance of these philosophies in clinical practice. **Materials and Methods** This study is a conceptual and comparative literary review based on classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, along with Tibetan medical literature including rGyud-bzhi. Relevant modern interpretations and published research articles were also

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reviewed to support comparative understanding. **Results** The analysis reveals that both Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine share a common holistic philosophy based on elemental theory and functional principles. Ayurveda explains anatomy through *Panchamahabhuta* and *Tridosha*, emphasizing structural and physiological balance, while Tibetan medicine uses five elements and three Nyepa (Lung, Tripa, Beken) to describe similar functional dynamics. Despite differences in terminology and textual presentation, both systems emphasize the integration of physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of the human body. **Conclusion** The philosophical foundations of human anatomy in Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine demonstrate strong conceptual similarities, reflecting a shared holistic worldview. Understanding these parallels enhances interdisciplinary knowledge and provides a broader perspective for integrating traditional medical systems with modern anatomy and physiology.

Keywords *Panchamahabhuta, Tridosha, Tibetan Medicine, Human Anatomy, Comparative Study, Holistic Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, provides a comprehensive understanding of the human body based on fundamental philosophical principles.¹ The concept of anatomy in Ayurveda is not limited to structural description but extends to functional and metaphysical dimensions. The human body is considered a microcosm of the universe (*Loka-Purusha Samya Siddhanta*²), and its structure is explained through the theory of *Panchamahabhuta*³ (five basic elements). These elements combine in specific proportions to form body tissues, organs, and physiological systems. Thus, Ayurvedic anatomy integrates structure with function and emphasizes the dynamic balance necessary for maintaining health.

Both Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine emphasize that understanding human anatomy requires more than mere physical observation. In Ayurveda, concepts like *Tridosha*, *Dhatu*⁴, and *Srotas*⁵ explain the organization and functioning of the body, while Tibetan medicine describes channels (Tsa), winds (Lung), and vital essences that sustain life. These frameworks highlight that the body is a network of interconnected systems rather than isolated structures. The philosophical approach ensures that anatomy is always studied in relation to function, pathology, and therapeutic application.⁶

In the present era, where modern anatomy focuses primarily on structural and microscopic details, revisiting these traditional philosophies provides a broader and more integrative perspective. A comparative analysis of Ayurvedic and Tibetan anatomical concepts helps in understanding their similarities, differences, and clinical relevance. Such an approach not only enriches academic knowledge but also opens new possibilities for integrative medicine by combining classical wisdom with contemporary scientific understanding.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To comparatively analyze the philosophical foundations of human anatomy in Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine.

Objectives

- To study the philosophical concepts of human anatomy in Ayurveda
- To explore the anatomical philosophy described in Tibetan medicine
- To identify similarities and differences between both systems
- To understand the relevance of these philosophies in clinical practice

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study is a conceptual and comparative literary review based on classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, along with Tibetan medical literature including rGyud-bzhi. Relevant commentaries and modern research articles were also reviewed to support interpretation and correlation. Data were systematically collected, analyzed, and compared under key philosophical domains such as *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha*, elemental theory, and three humors (Nyepa). A qualitative comparative approach was adopted to identify conceptual similarities, differences, and their relevance to the understanding of human anatomy.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

HUMAN ANATOMY IN AYURVEDA

The fundamental basis of human anatomy in Ayurveda lies in the concept of *Panchamahabhuta*⁷ (five basic elements) namely *Prithvi*,⁸ *Ap*,⁹ *Teja*,¹⁰ *Vayu*,¹¹ and *Akasha*¹².

These elements are considered the building blocks of the human body as well as the entire universe. Each element contributes specific *Guna* and structural attributes such as solidity (*Prithvi*), liquidity (*Ap*), transformation (*Teja*), movement (*Vayu*), and space (*Akasha*). All anatomical structures including tissues, organs, and channels are formed by different combinations of these elements, making the body a miniature representation of the universe.

Principle of *Loka-Purusha Samya Siddhanta*¹³

Ayurveda explains human anatomy through the principle of *Loka-Purusha Samya Siddhanta*, which states that whatever exists in the universe (*Loka*) is also present in the human body (*Purusha*). This philosophical concept establishes a direct relationship between macrocosm and microcosm. The anatomical structure of the body is thus seen as a reflection of universal elements and forces. This principle helps in understanding that changes in the external environment can influence internal body structure and function.

Role of *Tridosha*¹⁴ in Anatomical Organization

The concept of *Tridosha*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—plays a crucial role in organizing and maintaining the structural and functional integrity of the body. *Vata* governs movement and neural activities, *Pitta* is responsible for metabolic and transformative processes, and *Kapha* provides stability and structural cohesion. These Doshas are not physical entities but functional principles that influence the development, maintenance, and degeneration of anatomical structures.

Concept of *Dhatu*¹⁵ (Body Tissues)

Ayurveda describes the body as being composed of seven fundamental tissues known as *Sapta Dhatu*—*Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, and *Shukra*. These Dhatus are responsible for nourishment, growth, and structural integrity of the body. Each Dhatu has specific functions and contributes to the formation of subsequent tissues through the process of *Dhatu Parinama*¹⁶. This sequential nourishment reflects a dynamic and functional view of anatomy.

Concept of *Srotas* (Channels)

The anatomical framework in Ayurveda includes an intricate network of channels known as *Srotas*. These channels are responsible for the transportation of nutrients, waste products, and biological substances throughout the body. *Srotas*¹⁷ represent both gross and subtle

pathways, emphasizing that the body functions as an interconnected system rather than isolated organs. The integrity of these channels is essential for maintaining structural and functional balance.

Concept of *Agni* in Structural Maintenance

*Agni*¹⁸ (digestive and metabolic fire) plays a vital role in maintaining anatomical integrity by regulating digestion, absorption, and tissue metabolism. Proper functioning of *Jatharagni*¹⁹ and *Dhatvagni*²⁰ ensures proper formation and nourishment of tissues. Impairment of *Agni* leads to improper tissue formation and structural abnormalities, highlighting its importance in both physiology and anatomy.

Concept of *Sharira Rachana*

Ayurvedic anatomy, or *Sharira Rachana*,²¹ is not merely descriptive but functional and philosophical. It includes detailed descriptions of body parts such as *Asthi* (bones), *Snayu* (ligaments), *Sira* (vessels), and *Dhamani* (arteries). However, these structures are always interpreted in relation to their function and role in maintaining life processes. Thus, anatomical study is closely linked with physiology and pathology.

Integration of Body, Mind, and Consciousness

A unique feature of Ayurvedic anatomical philosophy is the integration of body (*Sharira*²²), mind (*Manas*²³), and consciousness (*Atma*²⁴). The body is not considered an isolated entity but part of a larger psycho-spiritual system. Anatomical structures are influenced by mental and emotional states, and health is achieved through harmony among these three components.

Concept of *Prakriti* and Individual Anatomy

Ayurveda recognizes individual variation in anatomy through the concept of *Prakriti*²⁵ (body constitution). The dominance of specific Doshas determines the structural and functional characteristics of an individual. This explains variations in body build, tissue strength, and physiological tendencies, making Ayurvedic anatomy personalized rather than uniform.

Ayurvedic View of Human Anatomy²⁶

Overall, the philosophical foundations of human anatomy in Ayurveda emphasize a holistic, dynamic, and functional approach. The body is seen as an integrated system formed by

elemental principles, governed by *Doshas*, sustained by *Dhatus*, and regulated by *Agni* and *Srotas*. This approach provides a deeper understanding of structure in relation to function, environment, and consciousness, which remains highly relevant even in modern integrative medical sciences.

HUMAN ANATOMY IN TIBETAN MEDICINE

Tibetan medicine (Sowa Rigpa²⁷) explains human anatomy on the basis of five fundamental elements—Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space. These elements are not just physical substances but represent qualities and functional principles that form the structural basis of the body. Earth provides solidity and form, Water maintains cohesion and fluidity, Fire governs transformation and heat, Air is responsible for movement, and Space provides cavities and channels. Every anatomical structure, from tissues to organs, is formed through the combination of these elements, making the human body a reflection of universal composition.

Theory of Three Humors (Nyepa²⁸)

The functional aspect of anatomy in Tibetan medicine is governed by three humors known as Lung²⁹ (wind), Tripa³⁰ (bile), and Beken³¹ (phlegm). Lung controls movement, respiration, and nervous functions; Tripa regulates metabolism, digestion, and body temperature; and Beken provides structural stability, lubrication, and nourishment. These humors are not visible anatomical entities but functional forces that influence the formation, maintenance, and degeneration of bodily structures. Balance among these three is essential for maintaining normal anatomical integrity.

Concept of Channels (Tsa)

Tibetan medicine describes an extensive network of channels called *Tsa*³², which are responsible for the circulation of energy, blood, and vital substances throughout the body. These channels are comparable to anatomical pathways but include both gross and subtle aspects. The body is visualized as an interconnected system where these channels maintain communication between different organs and tissues. Proper functioning of *Tsa* ensures nourishment and coordination, while their obstruction leads to disease.

Concept of Vital Energies (Lung)

A key philosophical aspect of Tibetan anatomy is the role of *Lung*³³ (wind or vital energy), which governs all movements within the body. It controls respiration, circulation, nerve impulses, and even mental activities. Anatomically, *Lung* is associated with the dynamic functioning of structures rather than their physical form. It reflects the idea that anatomy cannot be separated from physiological activity and that movement is essential for sustaining life.

Concept of Bodily Constituents and Essence

Tibetan medicine recognizes different bodily constituents such as nutritive essence, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and reproductive essence. These are formed through digestion and metabolic processes and contribute to the structural organization of the body. The concept of vital essence (similar to life-sustaining energy) plays an important role in maintaining tissue integrity and vitality. Proper nourishment and transformation of these constituents are essential for healthy anatomical development.³⁴

Relationship Between Body and Mind

In Tibetan medicine, anatomy is closely linked with mental and emotional states. The three humors are influenced not only by physical factors but also by mental states such as desire, anger, and ignorance. These mental factors can alter physiological balance and eventually affect anatomical structures. Thus, the body is seen as a psychosomatic unit where mind and body continuously interact.³⁵

Embryological Perspective

Tibetan medicine provides a detailed account of embryological development, explaining how the union of parental factors and consciousness leads to the formation of the fetus. The five elements and three humors play a role in shaping different organs and tissues during development. This approach emphasizes that anatomical formation begins at conception and is influenced by both physical and subtle factors.³⁶

Integration of Spiritual Philosophy

The philosophical foundation of Tibetan anatomy is deeply influenced by Buddhist thought. The body is considered impermanent and constantly changing, and its structure is seen as a temporary aggregation of elements. Understanding anatomy in this way encourages a

holistic view that includes spiritual awareness. The aim is not only to understand structure but also to promote harmony between body, mind, and spiritual well-being.³⁷

Functional Approach to Anatomy

Tibetan medicine does not separate anatomy from physiology. Structures are always described in relation to their functions and interactions. Organs and tissues are understood based on their role in maintaining balance among the humors and elements. This functional approach highlights that the body is a dynamic system rather than a static arrangement of parts.³⁸

RESULT AND FINDINGS

- Both Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine are based on a common elemental philosophy, where the human body is formed from five basic elements, showing a shared foundational concept of anatomy.
- Ayurveda explains anatomy through *Panchamahabhuta*, while Tibetan medicine uses a similar five-element theory, indicating conceptual similarity with difference in presentation.
- Functional regulation of the body is governed by *Tridosha* in Ayurveda and three humors (Lung, Tripa, Beken) in Tibetan medicine, reflecting parallel physiological control systems.
- Structural organization in Ayurveda is described through *Dhatu* and *Srotas*, whereas Tibetan medicine explains it through bodily constituents and *Tsa* (channels), showing analogous anatomical frameworks.
- Both systems consider the body as a dynamic and interconnected network, rather than isolated organs or structures.
- Ayurveda emphasizes *Agni* for tissue formation and metabolism, while Tibetan medicine highlights metabolic transformation through humor balance, indicating functional equivalence in metabolic concepts.
- The concept of body–mind relationship is strongly present in both systems, where *Manas* in Ayurveda and mental factors in Tibetan medicine influence anatomical and physiological states.

- Embryological understanding in both systems includes the role of parental factors and elemental contribution, showing early scientific thinking about development of the body.
- Both traditions adopt a holistic view of anatomy, integrating physical, functional, and psychological dimensions of the human body.
- Despite differences in terminology and textual style, both systems ultimately aim at maintenance of balance and health through anatomical harmony.

DISCUSSION

The present comparative analysis highlights that both Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine share a deeply rooted philosophical approach toward understanding human anatomy. In Ayurveda, the body is explained through principles like *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha*, and *Dhatu*, which provide a combined structural and functional framework. Similarly, Tibetan medicine describes the body through five elements and three humors (Lung, Tripa, Beken), reflecting a comparable conceptual model. Although the terminology differs, both systems emphasize that anatomical structures cannot be studied in isolation but must be understood in relation to their functions and dynamic interactions.³⁹

Another important observation is the holistic integration of body, mind, and consciousness in both traditions. Ayurveda incorporates concepts like *Manas* and *Atma*, while Tibetan medicine strongly links anatomy with mental states influenced by Buddhist philosophy. This psychosomatic approach suggests that structural integrity of the body is directly influenced by emotional and mental balance. In contrast to modern anatomy, which focuses primarily on physical structures, these traditional systems provide a broader perspective where mental and environmental factors play a crucial role in shaping anatomical and physiological conditions.⁴⁰

Furthermore, both systems demonstrate a functional orientation rather than a purely descriptive anatomical approach. Concepts like *Srotas* in Ayurveda and *Tsa* in Tibetan medicine indicate that the body is viewed as a network of channels facilitating movement and communication. The emphasis on balance—whether through *Tridosha* or the three humors—highlights that health depends on maintaining harmony within this interconnected system. This comparative understanding not only enriches traditional knowledge but also

opens pathways for integrating these ancient insights with modern biomedical sciences for a more comprehensive approach to human anatomy and healthcare.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of philosophical foundations of human anatomy in Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine reveals that both systems provide a holistic, dynamic, and integrative understanding of the human body. Ayurveda explains anatomy through concepts like *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Srotas*, while Tibetan medicine uses elemental theory, three humors, and channel systems to describe similar structural and functional relationships. Despite differences in terminology and literary style, both traditions emphasize the interconnection of body, mind, and environment, and highlight the importance of balance for maintaining health. This shared philosophical approach offers a broader perspective beyond structural anatomy and supports the relevance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern medical science.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST -NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT -NONE

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