

Yogic Anatomy in The Shiva Samhita: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract

The *Shiva Samhita* is one of the principal classical texts of *Haṭha Yoga*, presenting a detailed description of yogic anatomy through the concepts of *Nadis*,^[1] *Chakras*,^[2] *Prana*^[3] and *Kundalini*.^[4] These concepts form the basis of the subtle body and play a significant role in traditional yogic philosophy and practice. The present narrative review explores the concept of the subtle body as described in the *Shiva Samhita* and examines its possible correlations with modern physiological concepts. A narrative literature review was conducted using classical yogic texts, peer-reviewed scientific literature and standard physiology textbooks, with relevant literature identified using predefined search terms and synthesized thematically. The review highlights the functional significance of *Ida*, *Pingala* and *Sushumna Nadis* in maintaining physiological and psycho-spiritual balance and discusses their conceptual resemblance to the autonomic nervous system and mechanisms involved in homeostasis. Although these concepts belong to different knowledge systems, their comparative interpretation offers valuable insights into the integrative understanding of health. The *Shiva Samhita* provides a holistic model that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions and correlating its concepts with modern physiology may enhance the scientific understanding and clinical application of yoga-based interventions in integrative medicine.

Keywords: *Shiva Samhita*, Yogic Anatomy, *Nadi*, *Kundalini*, *Chakras*.

1. Introduction

The *Shiva Samhita* is one of the principal classical texts of *Haṭha Yoga*, believed to have been composed between 1300 and 1500 CE.^[5] Written as a dialogue between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, it presents a systematic exposition of yogic philosophy, spiritual discipline, and the concept of the subtle body (*Sukshma Sharira*). Unlike texts that focus primarily on yogic techniques, the *Shiva Samhita* provides a comprehensive description of yogic anatomy, explaining the body as a dynamic network of subtle energy channels (*Nadis*), vital force (*Prana*), energy centres and *Kundalini*.

A fundamental concept presented in the text is that the human body is a microcosm (*Pinda*) reflecting the macrocosm (*Brahmanda*), wherein all the elements and principles of the universe are believed to exist within the individual.^[6] This philosophical framework forms the basis for understanding the movement of *Prana* through the *Nadis*, the role of *Ida*, *Pingala* and *Sushumna* and the awakening of *Kundalini* in yogic practice.

In recent decades, increasing scientific interest in yoga has prompted attempts to interpret traditional yogic concepts in the light of modern physiology. However, the anatomical descriptions presented in the *Shiva Samhita* have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Therefore, this review aims to systematically describe the major components of yogic anatomy presented in the *Shiva Samhita*, with particular emphasis on the *Nadi* system, *Chakras*, *Kundalini* and *Amrutadhara*, and to critically examine their proposed correlations with contemporary physiological concepts.

Materials and Methods

A narrative literature review was conducted to examine the yogic anatomical concepts described in the *Shiva Samhita* and their possible correlations with contemporary physiological concepts. The literature was identified, selected and thematically synthesized according to the objectives of the review.

Primary Classical Source

The *Shiva Samhita* was considered the primary classical source for the present review. Relevant descriptions pertaining to *Pinda*, *Prana*, *Nadis*, *Chakras*, *Kundalini*, *Amrutadhara* and *Brahmarandhra* were reviewed from the text. Sanskrit descriptions and available translations were examined to understand the traditional framework of yogic anatomy.

Secondary Classical Sources

Relevant classical Yoga literature and available translated editions of traditional texts were consulted as secondary sources to supplement and cross-reference the descriptions found in the *Shiva Samhita*. These sources were used to provide contextual understanding and support the interpretation of classical concepts.

Contemporary Scientific Sources

Contemporary scientific literature was reviewed to examine proposed correlations between yogic anatomical concepts and modern physiological, neuroanatomical, autonomic and endocrine systems. Peer-reviewed research articles and standard physiology textbooks were considered for this purpose. Literature discussing the possible relationship of *Nadis* with autonomic functions and *Chakras* with neural plexuses, neuroanatomical structures and endocrine systems was reviewed.

Search Strategy

Relevant literature was searched through research gate, google scholar using combinations of the terms “*Shiva Samhita*,” “Yogic anatomy,” “*Nadi*,” “*Chakra*,” “*Kundalini*,” “*Prana*,” “autonomic nervous system,” “neuroanatomy,” and “endocrine system.”

Selection of Literature

Publications describing the classical concepts of yogic anatomy and contemporary studies proposing physiological or neuroanatomical correlations were considered relevant to the review. Sources unrelated to the objectives of the review or lacking relevant information on the selected yogic anatomical concepts or their proposed physiological correlations were excluded.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Information regarding the descriptions of *Nadis*, *Chakras*, *Kundalini*, *Amrutadhara* and *Brahmarandhra* was extracted from the selected sources and organized according to the major themes of yogic anatomy. Contemporary literature was subsequently examined to identify proposed physiological and anatomical correlations. These correlations were critically interpreted and distinguished from established anatomical or physiological evidence.

Yogic Anatomy in the *Shiva Samhita*

The *Shiva Samhita* presents a comprehensive description of yogic anatomy, describing the human body not merely as a physical structure but as a subtle energetic system that serves as the foundation for yogic practice and spiritual realisation. Unlike modern anatomy, which primarily focuses on gross anatomical structures, the yogic anatomical framework described in the *Shiva Samhita* emphasises the concepts of *Pinda* (microcosm),^[6] *Prana*,^[3] *Nadis*,^[1] *Kundalini*^[4] and *Brahmarandhra*. These subtle components are considered essential for maintaining harmony between the physical body, mind, and consciousness.

Microcosmic Representation of the Human Body

One of the fundamental principles described in the *Shiva Samhita* is that the human body (*Pinda*) is a reflection of the universe (*Brahmanda*).^[6] The text states:

"त्रैलोक्ये यानि भूतानि तानि सर्वाणि देहतः।"^[7]

This verse explains that all the elements existing within the three worlds (*Triloka*) are also present within the human body. The body is therefore regarded as a miniature representation of the cosmos, embodying the same fundamental principles that govern the external universe.

The *Shiva Samhita* further elaborates this concept by describing the presence of *Meru Parvata* (Mount Meru), *Sapta Dvipa* (the seven islands), rivers, oceans, *Kshetras* (sacred regions) and their presiding deities within the human body.^[8] These descriptions should not be interpreted as literal anatomical

structures but rather as symbolic representations of the body's multidimensional organization and its intimate relationship with the cosmic order. This philosophical concept forms the basis for understanding yogic physiology and the movement of *Prana* within the subtle body.

The *Nadi* System

The *Shiva Samhita* describes an extensive network of subtle energy channels known as *Nadis*, through which *Prana* (vital energy) circulates throughout the body. According to the text, there are 350,000 *Nadis*, among which fourteen are regarded as the principal channels responsible for the regulation and distribution of vital energy.^[1]

Among these fourteen, *Ida*, *Pingala* and *Sushumna* are considered the most significant. The *Shiva Samhita* regards *Sushumna Nadi* as the supreme channel and the principal pathway for the awakening and upward movement of *Kundalini Shakti*, while all other *Nadis* are described as depending upon it.^[9]

Ida Nadi, situated on the left side, is associated with the lunar principle (*Chandra*), representing cooling, nourishment and mental tranquillity. In contrast, *Pingala Nadi*, situated on the right side, is associated with the solar principle (*Surya*), symbolising heat, activity, vitality, and metabolic functions.^[10] The balanced functioning of *Ida* and *Pingala* is considered essential for directing the flow of *Prana* into *Sushumna Nadi*, thereby facilitating higher states of meditation and spiritual awareness. Within *Sushumna Nadi* there lies the *Chitra Nadi*, an extremely subtle (*Sukshma*) channel that serves as the innermost pathway for the ascent of *Kundalini Shakti*. The *Shiva Samhita* describes *Chitra Nadi* as radiant and associated with the subtle energy centres (*Chakras*), which shine in five distinct colours, signifying different levels of subtle consciousness.^[11] At its superior end lies the *Brahmarandhra*, situated at the crown of the head, as the divine opening through which the liberated *Prana* exits the body. The departure of the life force through the *Brahmarandhra* is regarded as leading to *Moksha* (liberation) in the yogic tradition.^[12] Thus, *Sushumna*, together with the subtle *Chitra Nadi*, constitutes the principal pathway for spiritual awakening and the realization of higher states of consciousness.

According to the *Shiva Samhita*, the *Muladhara* serves as the origin of the extensive network of *Nadis* that permeate the entire body. From this central point, the *Nadis* extend to various organs and regions, including the tongue (*Rasanendriya*), genital organ (*Medhra*), testes (*Vṛashana*), great toe (*Padangushta*), abdomen (*Kukshi*), eyes (*Netra*), and anus (*Guda*), and return to their point of origin at the *Muladhara*. This intricate network is described as facilitating the movement of *Prana* throughout the body, thereby maintaining the functional integration of the subtle body. All the *Nadis* are considered to arise from the *Muladhara* and spread throughout the body, forming an interconnected system responsible for the circulation of vital energy.^[13,14]

Concept of *Chakras*

The *Shiva Samhita* provides a detailed description of the *Chakras* in the *Panchama Patala*. The *Chakras* are described as subtle energy centres associated with the *Nadi* system and the ascent of *Kundalini Shakti*. The text describes their location, number of petals, associated *Bijaksharas*, colour, *Siddha*, presiding Goddess and the effects attributed to continuous *Dhyana* (meditation) upon each *Chakra*.

Muladhara Chakra

The *Muladhara Chakra* is situated approximately two *Angulas* above the *Guda* (anus) and one *Angula* below the *Medhra* (genital organ), with a total extent of four *Angulas*. It is described as the site where *Kundalini Shakti* remains dormant. *Kundalini* is represented as a serpent coiled three and a half coils, with her tail held in her mouth, covering the opening of the *Sushumna Nadi*.^[15] *Kundalini* is radiant like molten gold. The primordial source from which the three fundamental qualities *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* originate.^[16]

The *Muladhara* is described as red in colour, resembling the *Bandhuka* flower and consists of four petals bearing the *Bijaksharas* व, श, ष and स. *Dviranda* is described as the associated *Siddha*, while *Dakini* is the presiding Goddess.^[17] According to the text, continuous *Dhyana* upon the *Muladhara Chakra* is associated with the attainment of *Kanti* (lustre), enhancement of *Jatharagni*, *Arogya*, and knowledge of the past, present and future (*Trikala Jnana*).^[18]

Svadhishtana Chakra

The *Svadhishtana Chakra* is situated at the root of the *Linga* (Genitals) and is described as having six petals. The six petals bear the *Bijaksharas* ब, भ, म, य, र and ल. The *Chakra* is reddish in colour. *Baala* is mentioned as the associated *Siddha* and *Rakini* as the presiding Goddess.^[19,20]

According to the *Shiva Samhita*, continuous *Dhyana* upon the *Svadhishtana Chakra* is described as conferring fearlessness, freedom from disease, spontaneous knowledge of *Shastras* even without their prior study, and mastery over *Mrutyu*. It is further said to promote the unobstructed movement of *Prana* and increase *Rasa* and *Ojas*, thereby contributing to longevity.^[21]

Manipura Chakra

The *Manipura Chakra* is situated in the region of the *Nabhi* (navel). It is described as having ten petals, with the associated *Bijaksharas* ड, ढ, ण, त, थ, द, ध, न, प and फ.^[22] The *Chakra* is described as having a golden or *Hema*-like colour. *Rudra* is mentioned as the associated *Siddha* and *Lakini* as the presiding Goddess.^[23,24]

According to the *Shiva Samhita*, the yogi who always meditates on the *Manipura Chakra* attains the *Paataala Siddhi*, which brings happiness. And this (practice) destroys sorrow and disease in this world, deceives time (death), and also enables entry into another body.^[25]

Anahata Chakra

The *Anahata Chakra* is situated in the region of the *Hrudaya* (heart) and consists of twelve petals. The twelve petals bear the *Bijaksharas* क, ख, ग, घ, ङ, च, छ, ज, झ, ञ, ट and ठ. The *Chakra* is described as dark red in colour.^[26,27] *Pinaki* is mentioned as the associated *Siddha* and *Kakini* as the presiding Goddess.^[28]

The *Shiva Samhita* describes continuous *Dhyana* upon the *Anahata Chakra* is described as conferring incomparable knowledge of the three periods of time (*Trikala Vishaya Jnana*), encompassing the past, present, and future. The practitioner is also said to attain clairaudience and clairvoyance, enabling the perception of distant sounds and objects.^[29]

Vishuddha Chakra

The *Vishuddha Chakra* is situated in the *Kantha Pradesha* (throat region). It is described as possessing the colour of a pure lotus and is associated with the sixteen vowels (*Svaras*): अ, आ, इ, ई, उ, ऊ, ऋ, ॠ, ए, ऐ, ओ, औ, अं and अः. *Chaghalanda* is described as the associated *Siddha* and *Shakini* as the presiding Goddess.^[30,31]

According to the *Shiva Samhita*, continuous *Dhyana* upon the *Vishuddha Chakra* is associated with a transformation in the body's strength and firmness. The text describes the practitioner's body as becoming hard like *Vajra*, or even harder than *Vajra*.^[32]

Ajna Chakra

The *Ajna Chakra* is situated between the two eyebrows (*Bhrumadhya*). It is described as having two petals bearing the *Bijaksharas* ह and क्ष. *Mahakala* is mentioned as the associated *Siddha* and *Hakini* as the presiding Goddess.^[33,34]

The *Shiva Samhita* describes the effect of continuous *Dhyana* upon the *Ajna Chakra* as the attainment of a state in which the *Yogi* becomes comparable or equal to *Shiva*. Thus, the *Ajna Chakra* represents an important stage in the progressive ascent of consciousness within the yogic framework.^[35]

Sahasradala Padma

The *Shiva Samhita* describes the *Sahasradala Padma* or thousand-petalled lotus at the region of the *Brahmatalu* (palate). The *Brahmatalu* (*Talumula*) is described as the root of the *Sushumna Nadi*, which extends downwards towards the *Muladhara*. Near the *Muladhara* lies the *Kanda*, which is described as the *Yoni*, or the origin of all the *Nadis*. The *Sushumna* contains a subtle *Randra* (aperture) extending towards the *Muladhara*, and the *Muladhara Padma* associated with this aperture is described as the *Brahmarandhra*. Thus, the *Sahasradala Padma*, *Sushumna*, *Kanda* and *Brahmarandhra* are presented as interconnected components of the subtle yogic anatomical framework.^[36]

Concept of *Amrutadhara*

The *Shiva Samhita* describes *Amrutadhara*, a stream of nectar associated with the lunar region (*Chandra*) situated at the upper part of the *Merudanda*. The nectar descends through *Ida Nadi* and is described as spreading throughout the body, thereby nourishing the bodily constituents.^[37] At the lower region, *Prajapati* is described in relation to the consumption of this descending nectar. From this region, the solar rays (*Surya Rashmi*) ascend through *Pingala Nadi*.^[38] The description therefore presents complementary

lunar and solar movements within the subtle body-the downward flow of *Amruta* through *Ida* and the upward movement of *Surya Rashmi* through *Pingala*.

Kundalini and Spiritual Awakening

Although the *Shiva Samhita* discusses several aspects of yogic practice, it places particular emphasis on *Kundalini Shakti*, described as a subtle spiritual force associated with the awakening of higher states of consciousness. According to the yogic framework, the awakening of *Kundalini* and its ascent through *Sushumna Nadi* towards the *Brahmarandhra* are associated with higher states of awareness, ultimately leading towards self-realisation and liberation. Such advanced practices are traditionally undertaken under the proper guidance of a competent Guru, who provides appropriate instruction according to the practitioner's capacity and stage of practice.^[39] The *Shiva Samhita* also describes specific yogic practices, including *Mudras*, as important means in the process of regulating *Prana* and facilitating the awakening and upward movement of *Kundalini*.^[40] Therefore, the yogic anatomical framework presented in the *Shiva Samhita* is closely integrated with practical methods of *Haṭha Yoga* rather than being limited to a theoretical description of the subtle body.

Correlation with Modern Physiology

The *Shiva Samhita* describes *Ida*, *Pingal* and *Sushumna* as the three principal *Nadis* responsible for the movement of *Prana* within the subtle body. In recent years, these concepts have been discussed in relation to modern physiological functions, particularly the autonomic nervous system, to facilitate an integrative understanding of yogic anatomy. However, these associations remain interpretative rather than established anatomical equivalences.

Among the three principal *Nadis*, *Ida Nadi* is traditionally associated with lunar qualities such as cooling, mental calmness, and nourishment. These characteristics have been conceptually compared with the parasympathetic nervous system,^[41,42] which is responsible for conserving energy, promoting digestion, reducing heart rate, and facilitating restorative physiological processes.^[43] Conversely, *Pingala Nadi*, associated with solar qualities including activity, heat, and vitality, has been compared with the sympathetic nervous system,^[41,42] which prepares the body to respond to physical or psychological stress by increasing heart rate, blood pressure, and metabolic activity.^[43] These proposed correlations are based on functional similarities rather than structural correspondence.

The balanced functioning of *Ida* and *Pingala* is considered essential in yogic philosophy for directing the flow of *Prana* through *Sushumna Nadi*, the central channel associated with higher states of consciousness and spiritual awakening. From a physiological perspective, this harmonious interaction may be viewed as analogous to the coordinated regulation of sympathetic and parasympathetic activities that maintains homeostasis.^[41,42] However, this comparison is interpretative and should not be considered an exact physiological equivalence.

The *Shiva Samhita* also describes *Amrutadhara*, a nectar-like substance originating from the lunar region that nourishes the body through the subtle channels. Some contemporary authors have suggested that this concept may symbolically resemble neuroendocrine regulation, particularly hormonal secretions involved

in maintaining physiological balance.^[41] Such interpretations remain speculative, as no direct scientific evidence establishes an anatomical or physiological correspondence between *Amruta* and endocrine secretions, including those of the pituitary gland. Therefore, these correlations should be understood as conceptual models intended to facilitate dialogue between traditional yogic philosophy and contemporary biomedical science rather than as definitive scientific explanations.

Several researchers have proposed correlations between the traditional concept of *Chakras* and modern neuroanatomical, autonomic and endocrine systems. Proposed correlations are primarily based on anatomical location and functional similarities, with some authors relating the *Chakras* to neural plexuses and endocrine glands. For example, the *Ajna Chakra* has been conceptually correlated with the hypothalamic region and its associated neural networks.^[44] Other literature has proposed relationships between the *Shatchakras* and corresponding endocrine glands; however, these associations remain interpretative rather than established anatomical equivalences.^[45] Maxwell proposed a theoretical physiological model in which *Chakras* may be associated with interconnected physiological systems involving autonomic plexuses, the central nervous system and glandular functions. He suggested that intercellular gap junctions and their associated electrical conductance could provide a possible physiological mechanism underlying the subtle energy phenomena described in *yogic* traditions. The model further proposes that autonomic and central nervous system interactions, together with embryologically derived neural crest structures, may contribute to the physiological basis of subjective *Chakra* experiences. However, Maxwell emphasized that no broadly accepted physiological explanation for the influence of *Chakras* on physiological function had been established.^[46] Therefore, the *Chakras* described in the *Shiva Samhita* may be discussed in relation to modern physiology as conceptual or hypothetical correlations, and not as directly identifiable anatomical structures.

Discussion

The *Shiva Samhita* presents a comprehensive description of yogic anatomy based on the concepts of *Pinda* (microcosm), *Prana*, *Nadis*, *Kundalini* and *Brahmarandhra*. According to the text, the human body is regarded as a reflection of the universe and the harmonious functioning of these subtle components is considered essential for physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

The descriptions of *Ida*, *Pingal* and *Sushumna Nadis* have been discussed by several contemporary authors in relation to modern physiological concepts, particularly the autonomic nervous system. The functional characteristics attributed to *Ida* and *Pingala*, such as their association with calming and activating influences, have been conceptually compared with parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system activities, respectively. Similarly, the balanced interaction of these two *Nadis* has been interpreted as analogous to the physiological mechanisms involved in maintaining homeostasis. However, these comparisons are interpretative and should not be considered direct anatomical or physiological equivalences.

The concept of *Amrutadhara* described in the *Shiva Samhita* has also been interpreted by some researchers as a symbolic representation of physiological processes involved in maintaining internal balance. Although such interpretations provide an integrative perspective for understanding yogic concepts, there

is currently insufficient scientific evidence to establish direct correlations with specific neuroendocrine or anatomical structures. Therefore, these concepts are better understood as philosophical and functional models rather than literal anatomical descriptions.

Similarly, contemporary literature has proposed possible correlations between *Chakras* and neuroanatomical, autonomic and endocrine systems. These proposed associations are largely based on anatomical proximity and functional similarities and remain hypothetical rather than established anatomical equivalences. The physiological basis of these subtle centres therefore requires further investigation.

This review has certain limitations. The classical descriptions are based primarily on textual sources and traditional interpretations, whereas the proposed modern correlations are derived from limited and heterogeneous contemporary literature. Direct anatomical or physiological equivalence cannot therefore be established. In addition, variations in descriptions across different Yoga texts and differences in terminology and interpretative frameworks may influence comparative analysis.

Overall, the yogic anatomical framework described in the *Shiva Samhita* offers a holistic perspective on the relationship between the body, mind, and consciousness. Integrating these traditional concepts with contemporary physiological knowledge may contribute to a broader understanding of yoga and its potential applications in integrative healthcare. There is a need for interdisciplinary research using neurophysiological, autonomic, neuroendocrine and psychophysiological measures to investigate whether specific yogic practices associated with these concepts produce measurable physiological changes. Such research may help clarify the relationship between traditional yogic concepts and measurable physiological processes while maintaining a distinction between classical descriptions and scientifically established anatomical structures.

Conclusion

The *Shiva Samhita* presents a systematic description of yogic anatomy through the concepts of *Pinda*, *Prana*, *Nadis*, *Kundalini* and *Brahmarandhra*, providing a holistic framework for understanding the relationship between the body, mind, and consciousness. The text emphasizes that the balanced functioning of these subtle components is fundamental to yogic practice and spiritual development.

Contemporary attempts to relate these traditional concepts to modern physiological mechanisms, particularly the autonomic nervous system, offer a conceptual perspective for understanding yoga within the context of integrative medicine. However, these correlations should be interpreted with caution, as they are based on functional similarities rather than on established anatomical or physiological evidence.

The concepts described in the *Shiva Samhita* continue to provide valuable insights into the holistic principles of health and well-being. Future research should therefore focus not on establishing one-to-one anatomical equivalence, but on investigating measurable physiological and psychophysiological changes associated with practices traditionally linked to *Nadi* regulation, *Chakra Dhyana* and *Kundalini*-oriented practices. Further interdisciplinary research integrating classical yogic literature with contemporary

scientific approaches may contribute to a deeper understanding of the physiological basis and potential therapeutic applications of yoga.

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