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SHAVA CHEDANA IN *RACHANA SHARIR*: AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL BRIDGING CLASSICAL WISDOM AND MODERN ANATOMY

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ABSTRACT

Shava Chedana (cadaveric dissection), described by *Acharya Sushruta*, forms the foundation of Rachana Sharir (Ayurvedic anatomy). Classical Ayurveda not only emphasizes the structural study of the human body but also frames *shava Chedana* as a means of experiential learning, combining direct perception (*pratyakṣa pramana*) with scriptural authority (*agama*) and logical inference (*anumana*). This article revisits the classical methodology of *shava Chedana*, explores its philosophical and pedagogical dimensions, and correlates it with modern anatomical education, including cadaveric dissection, plastination, and virtual dissection. Unlike earlier publications, this review positions *shava Chedana* as a holistic model of learning that continues to hold relevance in postgraduate Ayurveda education.

KEYWORDS: *Shava Chedana*, *Rachana Sharir*, Experiential Learning, Ayurveda Anatomy, *Sushruta*, Virtual Dissection.

INTRODUCTION

Anatomy is universally acknowledged as the bedrock of medical science.[8] In Ayurveda, Rachana Sharir serves this role, encompassing both structural and functional perspectives. Acharya Sushruta provided detailed guidelines for *shava Chedana* in Sarira sthana[1],

emphasizing that true mastery of surgery (shalya tantra) requires practical familiarity with the body's layers and internal structures.

While Charaka highlighted physiology (*kriya sharir*), Sushruta stressed direct anatomical observation.[2] Modern medical science also regards cadaveric dissection as the gold standard of anatomy education.[5]

The novelty of this article lies in reinterpreting *Shava Chedana* as an experiential learning model, consistent with modern pedagogical frameworks such as Kolb's cycle[6], while situating it firmly in the Ayurvedic tradition.

CLASSICAL BACKGROUND

Selection of Cadaver (*Shava Sangraha*)

The cadaver should be free from trauma, deformity, chronic disease, poisoning, or infectious causes of death.[1] Age between 25–40 years was considered ideal, representing tissues in their optimal condition.

Preservation (*Shava Sthapana*)

The body was immersed in flowing water or herbal decoctions, covered with grass, and protected in a cage.[1] This process softened tissues, allowing gradual study. Unlike formalin preservation, Ayurveda employed eco-friendly maceration methods, inspiring research into modern "green embalming".[7]

Dissection Technique (*Shava Chedana Vidhi*)

Dissection was performed by scraping with *munja grass*, *kusa* reeds, or sand.[1] This ensured a layer-by-layer approach, paralleling the careful stepwise dissection protocols followed in modern anatomy.[8]

SHAVA CHEDANA AS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Ayurveda emphasizes *pratyakṣa pramana* (direct perception) as the highest form of valid knowledge.[2] *Shava Chedana* operationalizes this by giving students first-hand experience of human structures.

- Modern pedagogy mirrors this in Kolb's experiential learning cycle[6]:
- Experience: Handling the cadaver directly.
- Reflection: Comparing findings with textual descriptions.
- Conceptualization: Understanding *srotas, marmas, and sira-dhamani*.

- Application: Using anatomical knowledge in clinical practice and surgery. Thus, Ayurveda anticipated modern learning theory centuries earlier.

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Correlation with Modern Dissection

Modern anatomy uses formalin embalming, plastination[9], and increasingly, virtual dissection tables.[10] While these provide clarity and longevity, *Sushruta's* maceration preserved natural tissue texture. An integrated approach—combining Ayurveda's tactile authenticity with modern visual precision—creates a more holistic model.

Philosophical Dimension

Unlike modern anatomy, Ayurveda attaches philosophical meaning. A cadaver is not only a specimen but also a teacher, reminding students of life's impermanence.[11] This reflective aspect can deepen medical professionalism and empathy.

Future Integration

Ayurveda colleges may experiment with traditional preservation alongside modern formalin-free methods.[7]

Virtual anatomy platforms can integrate Ayurvedic nomenclature for bilingual pedagogy.[10]

Marma points may be digitally mapped on 3D models to correlate classical and modern anatomy.

DISCUSSION

Shava Chedana demonstrates that Ayurveda was rooted in empirical science. *Sushruta's* methods ensured anatomical precision necessary for surgical expertise. When reinterpreted today, Shava Chedana is not merely a dissection method but:

- A scientific procedure (cadaver selection, preservation, dissection).
- A pedagogical framework (experiential learning).
- A philosophical exercise (cultivating humility and ethics).
- Modern education can benefit by harmonizing these aspects in postgraduate Ayurveda teaching.

CONCLUSION

Shava Chedana remains an indispensable pillar of *Rachana Sharir*. Its eco-friendly

preservation, layer-wise methodology, and experiential nature provide unique contributions even today. By integrating classical practices with modern dissection, plastination, and virtual tools, *Ayurveda* education can evolve into a holistic model that is both scientifically rigorous and ethically grounded.

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