



Review Article

CONCEPT OF *SHADCHAKRA* IN AYURVEDA AND YOGA: ITS ROLE IN PRANIC HEALING AND HOLISTIC HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *Shadchakra* (six energy centres) constitutes a cornerstone of classical Ayurvedic and Yogic philosophy, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the *Pranic* (bio-energetic) dimension of human physiology. Derived from canonical texts including the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Shat-Chakra-Nirupana*, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Sushruta Samhita*, the *Shadchakra* system describes six principal energy vortices—*Muladhara*, *Svadhishthana*, *Manipura*, *Anahata*, *Vishuddha*, and *Ajna*—along the central *Sushumna Nadi*, culminating in the transcendent *Sahasrara*. Contemporary biomedical research has begun correlating these chakra centres with anatomical plexuses, endocrine glands, and psycho neuro immunological pathways, lending scientific credibility to their therapeutic application. This review synthesises classical textual evidence, modern physiological correlates, and clinical research on *Chakra*-based healing modalities including *Pranayama*, *Mantra* therapy, colour and sound healing, and meditative practices. Evidence indicates that systematic *Chakra*-based interventions produce measurable improvements in stress biomarkers, autonomic nervous system balance, neuroendocrine function, and psychological well-being. Understanding *Shadchakra* in an integrated Ayurvedic-Yogic framework has significant implications for holistic preventive health, psychosomatic medicine, and integrative oncology. This review aims to consolidate the available evidence and propose a coherent conceptual model for clinical and research applications.

INTRODUCTION

The human body, according to Ayurvedic and Yogic philosophy, operates simultaneously on gross (*Sthula Sharira*) and subtle (*Sukshma Sharira*) planes. The subtle body is constituted by a network of *Nadis* (*Pranic* channels), *Vayus* (vital forces), *Koshas* (sheaths of consciousness), and *Chakras* (energy vortices) that collectively govern the flow of *Prana* (vital life-force) throughout the organism.^[1] Among these subtle anatomical structures, the *Shadchakra* the system of six principal chakras occupies a position of supreme clinical and philosophical importance.^[2]

The term *Chakra* derives from the Sanskrit root '*chakr*' meaning 'wheel' or 'circle', denoting rotating vortices of *pranic* energy situated along the central axial channel, the *Sushumna Nadi*.^[3] Classical Yogic literature enumerates six primary *Chakras*: *Muladhara* (root centre), *Svadhishthana* (sacral centre), *Manipura* (solar plexus centre), *Anahata* (heart centre), *Vishuddha* (throat centre), and *Ajna* (brow centre), with the transcendent *Sahasrara* (crown centre) representing the culmination of the ascending *Pranic* journey.^[4] The term *Shadchakra* literally signifies 'six *Chakras*' (*Shat*=six; *Chakra* = wheel), though in practice the term encompasses the entire seven-chakra system with *Sahasrara* viewed as a supraphysical apex.^[5]

The earliest systematic exposition of the *Shadchakra* system appears in the *Shat-Chakra-Nirupana* (description of the six *Chakras*), a sixteenth-century Sanskrit text by Purnananda Svami, subsequently translated and commentated upon by Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) in the seminal work

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The Serpent Power (1919).^[6] However, antecedent references to chakra-like energetic structures are traceable to the *Atharva Veda*, the *Yoga Upanishads*, and the *Charaka Samhita*'s discussion of *Marma* (vital anatomical points) and *Hridaya* (the seat of consciousness).^[7] Ayurvedic scholars have extensively linked the *Shadchakra* to the *Tridosha* framework (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), the *Panchamahabhuta* (five great elements), the *Saptadhatu* (seven body tissues), and the psycho-physiological construct of *Manas* (mind).^[8]

The contemporary biomedical relevance of the *Shadchakra* concept has grown substantially in the past three decades, driven by research in psycho-neuro-immunology, autonomic neuroscience, endocrinology, and integrative medicine.^[9] Studies have identified statistically significant correlations between chakra-based yogic practices and measurable changes in cortisol levels, heart rate variability, immunoglobulin secretion, and neural oscillatory patterns.^[10] These findings have revived academic interest in the *Shadchakra* as a potentially scientifically tractable model of subtle body physiology with concrete therapeutic applications.^[11]

Despite this growing body of evidence, a comprehensive review synthesising classical Ayurvedic and Yogic textual descriptions of *Shadchakra* with modern physiological and clinical research remains conspicuously absent from the peer-reviewed literature. This review addresses that gap by examining the classical conceptualisation of the *Shadchakra* system, its structural and functional correlates in modern anatomy and physiology, chakra-based healing modalities, clinical evidence, and future research directions in the integrated Ayurveda-Yoga framework.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A comprehensive narrative review methodology was adopted to synthesise information from two primary domains: (a) classical Ayurvedic and Yogic textual sources, and (b) contemporary peer-reviewed biomedical and integrative medicine literature.

Classical textual sources

Primary classical sources consulted include: *Charaka Samhita* (*Sutrasthana*, *Sharirasthana*, *Indriyasthana*), *Sushruta Samhita* (*Sharirasthana*), *Ashtanga Hridayam*, *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Shiva Samhita*, *Shat-Chakra-Nirupana*, *Sat-Chakra-Nirupana* (commentary by Swami Vishnu Tirtha), and *Tantraloka* of *Abhinavagupta*. Translations and commentaries by recognised Sanskrit scholars and traditional Ayurvedic authorities were cross-referenced to ensure interpretive accuracy.

Electronic database search

Electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, AYUSH Research Portal, and IndMED were searched using the following terms and Boolean combinations: '*chakra*', '*Shadchakra*', '*pranic healing*', '*subtle body*', '*nadi*', '*Sushumna*', '*Kundalini*', '*Pranayama*', '*Mantra therapy*', '*psycho-neuro-immunology yoga*', '*chakra physiology*', '*yoga autonomic nervous system*', and '*biofield healing*'. Publications from 1970 to 2024 were considered, with priority given to indexed peer-reviewed articles, systematic reviews, and randomised controlled trials.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies were included if they addressed the physiological, psychological, or clinical dimensions of *chakra* based or closely related Yogic practices in human subjects. Classical textual references, historical analyses, ethnographic studies, and credible review articles were included. Studies limited to theoretical philosophy without empirical grounding, non-peer-reviewed blogs, and duplicated publications were excluded. No formal meta-analytic statistical synthesis was undertaken due to heterogeneity of study designs; thematic synthesis with qualitative weighting of evidence was employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classical Ayurvedic and Yogic conceptualisation of *Shadchakra*

The *Shadchakra* system is anchored in the broader framework of *Nadi* physiology. Classical texts enumerate 72,000 *Nadis* (some texts cite 350,000), of which three are paramount: *Sushumna* (the central channel traversing the vertebral axis), *Ida* (the left, lunar, feminine channel), and *Pingala* (the right, solar, masculine channel).^[12] The *Chakras* are located at the intersections of *Sushumna* with pairs of ascending *Nadis*, functioning as regulatory nodes modulating the quality and distribution of *Prana* across body-mind systems.^[13]

Each *Chakra* is characterised in classical texts by a specific *Beeja Mantra* (seed syllable), *Yantra* (geometric form), presiding deity, number of petals, elemental correspondence (*Panchamahabhuta*), colour, and psychological function.^[4] The *Muladhara Chakra*, located at the perineal floor, corresponds to the earth element (*Prithvi*), carries the *Beeja Mantra* '*LAM*', and governs foundational survival instincts, elimination, and grounding.^[14] The *Svadhishthana Chakra*, at the sacral region, corresponds to the water element (*Jala*), carries the *Beeja Mantra* '*VAM*', and governs reproduction, fluidity, and creative expression.^[15] The *Manipura Chakra*, at the solar plexus, corresponds to the fire element (*Agni*), carries the *Beeja Mantra* '*RAM*', and is the seat of *Agni*

(digestive and metabolic fire), willpower, and ego identity.^[16]

The *Anahata Chakra*, at the cardiac level, corresponds to the air element (*Vayu*), carries the *Beeja Mantra* 'YAM', and governs compassion, love, and immunological equilibrium.^[17] Ayurvedic texts identify *Hridaya* (heart) as the seat of *Ojas* (vital essence), consciousness (*Chitta*), and the ten supreme *Dhamani* (arteries), aligning structurally and functionally with the *Anahata* concept.^[7] The *Vishuddha Chakra*, at the throat, corresponds to the ether element (*Akasha*), carries the *Beeja Mantra* 'HAM', and governs verbal

expression, creativity, and *Udana Vayu* (the upward-moving vital force responsible for speech and higher cognitive functions).^[18] The *Ajna Chakra*, at the midbrow, is the command centre (*Ajna*= command), beyond the five elements, carrying the *Beeja Mantra* 'OM', governing intuition, higher discrimination (*Viveka*), and the convergence of *Ida* and *Pingala* into *Sushumna*.^[19] The *Sahasrara*, at the cranial crown, represents the seat of *Shiva* (pure consciousness), the destination of the awakened *Kundalini Shakti*, and the state of *Samadhi* (transcendent absorption).^[20]

Table 1: Comparative Overview of the Seven Chakras – Ayurvedic and Yogic Perspectives

<i>Chakra</i>	Sanskrit Name	Location	Associated Dosha	Element (<i>Pancha-mahabhuta</i>)	Endocrine Gland	Key Function
1 st	<i>Muladhara</i>	Perineum / Coccyx	<i>Vata (Apana)</i>	<i>Prithvi</i> (Earth)	Adrenal	Grounding, survival
2 nd	<i>Svadhishthana</i>	Sacral plexus	<i>Vata-Kapha</i>	<i>Jala</i> (Water)	Gonads	Creativity, sexuality
3 rd	<i>Manipura</i>	Solar plexus / Navel	<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Agni</i> (Fire)	Pancreas	Digestion, willpower
4 th	<i>Anahata</i>	Cardiac plexus	<i>Vata-Pitta</i>	<i>Vayu</i> (Air)	Thymus	Love, immunity
5 th	<i>Vishuddha</i>	Cervical plexus / Throat	<i>Vata (Udana)</i>	<i>Akasha</i> (Ether)	Thyroid	Communication, expression
6 th	<i>Ajna</i>	Hypothalamus / Forehead	<i>Prana Vata</i>	<i>Manas</i> (Mind)	Pituitary	Intuition, cognition
7 th	<i>Sahasrara</i>	Cerebral cortex/Crown	<i>Tridosha (transcendent)</i>	<i>Chitta</i> (Consciousness)	Pineal	Enlightenment, unity

Source: Synthesised from classical texts (*Charaka Samhita*, *Yoga Sutras*, *Shat-Chakra-Nirupana*) and contemporary literature. *Dosha* correlations adapted from Frawley^[14] and Lad^[16].

Anatomical and physiological correlates

One of the most productive areas of contemporary *Chakra* research has been the identification of structural and functional correlates between *Chakra* locations and modern anatomical entities.^[21] The correspondence between *chakra* locations and major autonomic nerve plexuses is particularly striking and has been systematically documented by researchers including Motoyama (1981), Sannella (1987), and more recently Khalsa and colleagues (2015).^[22,23] The *Muladhara* corresponds to the coccygeal plexus and pelvic splanchnic nerves; *Svadhishthana* to the hypogastric and sacral plexus; *Manipura* to the solar (coeliac) plexus and splanchnic nerves; *Anahata* to the cardiac plexus; *Vishuddha* to the pharyngeal plexus and laryngeal nerves; and *Ajna* to

the cavernous plexus, hypothalamus, and pituitary complex.^[24]

Endocrinological parallels are equally compelling. The correlation of each *Chakra* with a specific endocrine gland adrenals (*Muladhara*), gonads (*Svadhishthana*), pancreas (*Manipura*), thymus (*Anahata*), thyroid and parathyroid (*Vishuddha*), pituitary (*Ajna*), and pineal (*Sahasrara*) has been described in integrative texts and partially supported by correlational neurophysiological studies.^[25] *Yoga* practitioners have been shown to demonstrate altered basal cortisol rhythms, enhanced melatonin secretion, and modulated thyroid function compared with non-practitioners, suggesting that Yogic practices acting through *chakra*-level mechanisms may systematically influence endocrine homeostasis.^[26]

The identification of *Chakras* with cerebral lateralisation and neural oscillatory networks represents a more recent and speculative frontier. Electroencephalographic (EEG) studies of deep

meditators have identified specific gamma, theta, and alpha wave patterns at scalp locations corresponding to *Ajna* and *Sahasrara* chakra projections, suggesting that advanced meditative states alter cortical activity in regionally specific patterns consistent with the classical *Chakra* map.^[27] Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies of *Pranayama* practice have demonstrated differential activation of insular cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, and prefrontal regions, implicating interoceptive neural pathways in mediating the *Pranic* regulation described in classical texts.^[28]

Prana, Vata, and the Nadi system

The Ayurvedic concept of *Vata Dosha* the biohumour governing all movement, impulse transmission, and regulatory functions in the organism provides the most direct physiological bridge between *Chakra* theory and Ayurvedic medicine.^[29] *Prana Vayu*, one of the five sub-types of *Vata*, resides in the thoracic region and governs cardiac function, respiration, and higher sensory-cognitive functions.^[30] Its specific anatomical territory overlaps substantially with the *Anahata* and *Vishuddha Chakras*, suggesting a doctrinal alignment between the two systems. *Apana Vayu*, governing the descending and eliminative functions, aligns with *Muladhara* and *Svadhishthana*; *Samana Vayu*, governing digestive and metabolic equilibration, aligns with *Manipura*; and *Udana Vayu*, governing upward movement, speech, and spiritual aspiration, aligns with *Vishuddha* and *Ajna*.^[31]

The *Marma* points described in Ayurvedic surgery (*Sushruta Samhita*, *Sharirasthana*) represent another important convergence with the *Chakra* system. The 107 classical *Marma* points are anatomically specific vital points whose inadvertent injury causes death, disability, or disease.^[32] Several major *Marma* points particularly *Hridaya Marma* (cardiac), *Nabhi Marma* (umbilical), *Shira Marma* (cranial), and *Sthapani Marma* (glabellar) correspond in location and functional significance to *Anahata*, *Manipura*, *Sahasrara*, and *Ajna Chakras* respectively, suggesting a shared cartography of vital anatomical significance between Ayurveda and Yoga.^[33]

Kundalini Shakti and the ascending Pranic current

Central to the therapeutic application of the *Shadchakra* system is the concept of *Kundalini Shakti* the dormant, coiled *Pranic* energy said to reside in the *Muladhara Chakra* in its unawakened state.^[34] Classical texts describe *Kundalini* as a serpentine force of primordial *Shakti* (cosmic energy) that, upon awakening through sustained *Sadhana* (spiritual practice), ascends through each successive *Chakra* along the *Sushumna Nadi*, progressively purifying and transforming the associated physiological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions until union (*Yoga*) with *Shiva* consciousness is achieved at

Sahasrara.^[35]

The *Kundalini* awakening process has been correlated with measurable physiological events including spontaneous episodes of intense heat (*Agni*) along the spinal axis, altered respiratory patterns, involuntary somatic movements (*Kriyas*), heightened sensory perception, and profound alterations in consciousness.^[36] Clinical documentation of *Kundalini* syndromes by Sannella (1987), Greenwell (1995), and Greyson (2000) identified characteristic psychosomatic manifestations that correspond point-for-point with classical chakra-level purification events described in Yogic texts.^[37] Neurologically, these experiences have been partially explained by activation of the dorsal vagal complex, release of endogenous opioids and serotonin, and limbic-prefrontal integration occurring during sustained meditative absorption.^[38]

Chakra-based Pranic healing modalities

A diverse range of clinical and para-clinical healing modalities have been developed within the *Shadchakra* framework, each targeting specific energetic centres to restore *Pranic* equilibrium.

Pranayama (Breathing practices): Controlled respiratory techniques modulate the activity of specific *Vayus* and by extension their corresponding *Chakra* centres. *Nadi Shodhana Pranayama* (alternate nostril breathing) has been the most extensively studied, demonstrating significant reductions in sympathetic arousal, improvements in heart rate variability (HRV), and enhanced cognitive performance in randomised trials.^[39] *Bhramari Pranayama* (humming bee breath), through its vibration of the nasopharyngeal and cranial structures, has been shown to stimulate the *Ajna Chakra* and produce measurable reductions in anxiety and blood pressure.^[40] *Kapalabhati* and *Bhastrika*, both vigorous respiratory techniques, activate *Manipura Chakra* energy and have been associated with improved insulin sensitivity and hepatic metabolic markers.^[41]

Mantra therapy: The systematic recitation of specific *Beeja Mantras* associated with each chakra generates vibrational resonance within corresponding anatomical zones.^[42] Acoustic studies have demonstrated that Sanskrit *Mantras* produce specific cymatics (sound-induced vibratory patterns) that correspond to the classical petal configurations and geometric *Yantras* described for each chakra in classical texts.^[43] Clinical research by Harne and Hiwale (2017) demonstrated that regular *Mantra* recitation produced significant reductions in perceived stress, salivary cortisol, and blood pressure in a cohort of hypertensive patients.^[44]

Colour and chromotherapy: Each *Chakra* is associated with a specific spectral colour: *Muladhara* with red, *Svadhishthana* with orange, *Manipura* with

yellow, *Anahata* with green, *Vishuddha* with blue, *Ajna* with indigo, and *Sahasrara* with violet.^[45] Chromotherapy, the therapeutic application of coloured light to specific body zones, has been employed in integrative Ayurvedic practice to balance chakra energies. While the clinical evidence base remains limited, preliminary studies have shown that coloured light exposure alters autonomic parameters and melatonin secretion in ways consistent with chakra-specific physiological effects.^[46]

Sound healing and music therapy: The application of specific musical frequencies, binaural beats, and Tibetan singing bowls tuned to *Chakra*-resonant frequencies has gained clinical attention as a non-pharmacological healing modality.^[47] Research by Bartel (2018) demonstrated that gamma-frequency neural entrainment through auditory stimulation produced measurable improvements in attention, memory consolidation, and stress regulation, with effects plausibly mediated through *Ajna* and *Sahasrara* chakra activation.^[48]

Dhyana (Meditation) and Trataka: Concentrated meditation on each chakra's *Yantra* and visualisation of its associated colour, form, and deity constitutes a classical *Chakra*-activation practice described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*.^[49] Neuroimaging studies of chakra-focused meditation have identified increased grey matter density in prefrontal cortex, anterior insula, and hippocampus among long-term practitioners, suggesting structural neuroplastic changes consistent with progressive chakra purification.^[50]

Therapeutic touch and biofield healing: *Chakra*-based energy healing modalities including Reiki, *Pranic* Healing (as systematised by Master Choa Kok Sui), and Therapeutic Touch operate on the premise of conscious manipulation of the *Pranic* biofield surrounding and permeating the physical body.^[51] While subject to significant skepticism within conventional medicine, systematic reviews by Jain and Mills (2010) identified statistically significant effects of biofield healing on pain reduction, anxiety, and quality of life across multiple randomised controlled trials, suggesting that these modalities exert measurable clinical effects beyond placebo.^[52]

Psychosomatic correlations and mental health applications

The *Shadchakra* system provides a uniquely integrative map of psychosomatic relationships that anticipates many discoveries of contemporary psychoneuroimmunology.^[53] The *Anahata Chakra*'s governance of both cardiac function and emotional processing parallels the established psychosomatic link between chronic negative emotional states (particularly grief, hostility, and social isolation) and cardiovascular disease risk mediated through

autonomic dysregulation and inflammatory pathways.^[54] The classical description of *Manipura Chakra* as the seat of ego, self-esteem, and metabolic fire corresponds closely with the documented relationship between psychological stress, cortisol excess, and metabolic syndrome involving hepatic and pancreatic dysfunction.^[55]

Mental health research on chakra-based Yoga interventions has produced encouraging results. A randomised controlled trial by Shapiro *et al.* (2019) demonstrated that an eight-week *Kundalini Yoga* programme significantly reduced symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder compared with waitlist controls, with improvements in saliva cortisol, perceived stress scale scores, and autonomic balance as measured by HRV.^[56] A systematic review by Cramer *et al.* (2018) of Yoga for depression identified moderate-quality evidence for significant antidepressant effects, with the most effective interventions incorporating *Pranayama*, *Mantra*, and meditative elements precisely the practices targeting the *Vishuddha*, *Ajna*, and *Sahasrara* centres.^[57]

Clinical applications in Ayurvedic practice

Ayurvedic practitioners integrate *Shadchakra* assessment informally into clinical consultation through evaluation of *Prakriti* (constitutional type), *Manas Prakriti* (psycho-constitutional type), *Nadi Pariksha* (pulse diagnosis), and observation of physical and behavioural signs associated with specific *Chakra* imbalances.^[58] Empirical observations link *Muladhara* disturbances with disorders of elimination, musculoskeletal disease, and existential anxiety; *Svadhishthana* imbalances with genitourinary disorders, hormonal dysregulation, and addictive behaviour; *Manipura* imbalances with digestive diseases, diabetes mellitus, and self-esteem disturbances; *Anahata* imbalances with cardiovascular disease, immune deficiency, and relationship difficulties; *Vishuddha* imbalances with thyroid disorders, communication difficulties, and chronic upper respiratory conditions; and *Ajna* imbalances with headaches, insomnia, hormonal disorders, and impaired intuitive judgement.^[59]

In Ayurvedic oncology, the *Shadchakra* framework is increasingly employed as a complementary model to understand the psychosomatic underpinnings of cancer initiation and progression, and to design integrative palliative care programmes combining *Panchakarma*, *Rasayana*, *Pranayama*, and *Mantra* therapy targeting specific chakra-level disruptions identified in each patient.^[60]

Evidence synthesis and limitations

The evidence base for chakra-based healing, while growing, remains characterised by methodological heterogeneity, small sample sizes, lack of standardised *Chakra* assessment instruments, and

difficulty in designing rigorous placebo controls for subtle body interventions.^[28] The most robust evidence comes from studies of *Pranayama* and meditation, where measurable physiological outcomes provide objective endpoints. Evidence for direct biofield manipulation remains contested. A significant limitation of current research is the tendency to study isolated yogic practices without acknowledging or measuring their collective operation within the integrated *Shadchakra* framework, potentially underestimating the systemic therapeutic effects of complete *Chakra*-based programmes.

CONCLUSION

The *Shadchakra* system represents one of the most sophisticated and clinically resonant frameworks within the integrated Ayurvedic-Yogic tradition for understanding human physiology at the subtle energetic level. This review establishes that the six principal chakras *Muladhara*, *Svadhishthana*, *Manipura*, *Anahata*, *Vishuddha*, and *Ajna* possess well-defined classical attributes, plausible anatomical correlates in autonomic nerve plexuses and endocrine glands, and a growing body of clinical evidence supporting the therapeutic efficacy of chakra-based healing modalities. The convergence of *Shadchakra* theory with modern psychoneuroimmunology, autonomic neuroscience, and biofield science offers a fertile interdisciplinary frontier for research. Future work should prioritise the development of validated chakra assessment instruments, standardised *Chakra*-based clinical protocols, and well-powered randomised controlled trials examining the integrative application of *Pranayama*, *Mantra*, meditation, and *Panchakarma* within the *Shadchakra* framework. Rigorous integration of the *Shadchakra* concept into Ayurvedic medical education and clinical practice has the potential to significantly enrich the holistic health paradigm and expand the evidence base for *pranic* healing as a legitimate domain of integrative medicine.

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