



## Review Article

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### AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVES ON GARBHA FORMATION: A COMPREHENSIVE EXPLORATION OF PHYSIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES ON FOETAL DEVELOPMENT

Pallavi Purohit <sup>1\*</sup>, Vaishali Pande <sup>2</sup>, Purnandu Charan Bahuguna <sup>2</sup>, Sharad Karande <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PG Scholar, PG Department of Dravyaguna Vigyana, Patanjali Bhartiya Ayurvedigyan Evam Anusandhan Sansthan, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India

<sup>2</sup> PG Scholar, PG Department of Kriya Sharir, Patanjali Bhartiya Ayurvedigyan Evam Anusandhan Sansthan, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India

<sup>3</sup> Professor, PG Department of Kriya Sharir, Patanjali Bhartiya Ayurvedigyan Evam Anusandhan Sansthan, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India

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**\*Corresponding author**

E-mail: pallavipurohit2508@gmail.com

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#### ABSTRACT

The Ayurvedic perspective on Garbha (embryo) formation encompasses a holistic understanding that integrates the physiological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of conception, highlighting the intricate interplay of various factors. The process begins with the union of Shukra (sperm) and Shonita (ovum), along with the entry of the Aatma (soul) into the uterus, thereby initiating the development of the embryo. Classical Ayurvedic texts, including those by Maharishi Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata elaborate on this multifaceted process, emphasizing the involvement of various elements and factors. Maharishi Sushruta and Vagbhata assert that the embryo is formed through the combination of parental contributions (sperm and ovum), the soul, and other natural elements within the uterus. Additional insights from Acharya Bhavamishra and Maharishi Harita highlight the contributions of five elements (Panchamahabhuta), sensory organs, tissues, and vital airs. Modern embryology parallels this by describing the biochemical and cellular mechanisms of fertilization, such as the fusion of sperm and ovum in the uterine tube, resulting in a zygote. Ayurvedic literature extends this understanding by identifying six primary factors responsible for foetal formation: maternal (Matruja), paternal (Pitruja), nutritional (Rasaja), dietary and lifestyle (Satmyaja), soul (Atmaja), and mental (Sattvaja) contributions. The foetus is viewed as a composite of these influences, shaped by divine and elemental forces.

**Keywords:** Garbha, Shadgarbhkar bhava, Shukra, Shonita, Matruja, Pitruja, Atmaja

#### INTRODUCTION

**Definition of Garbha:** The entity that enters the uterus and combines with Shukra (veerya or sperm) and Shonita (ovum) achieves conception, initiating the development of an embryo, which houses the Aatma (soul). Prior to the fusion of sperm, ovum, and the soul, it cannot be classified as an embryo. Only after this combination is it recognized as such <sup>1</sup>.

The fusion of sperm, ovum, and the soul within the uterus is referred to as conception. According to Maharishi Sushruta, the union of the soul, natural elements, and the sperm and ovum within the uterus constitutes the embryo. As it develops and forms hands, feet, tongue, nose, ears, and other body parts, it is then recognized as a body <sup>2</sup>.

Maharishi Vagbhata also asserts that the formation of the embryo results from the combination of sperm and ovum with the soul, natural elements, and other factors within the uterus <sup>3</sup>.

Acharya Bhavamishra has supported the views of Maharishi Sushruta <sup>4</sup>.

Maharishi Harita has described the body as being composed of five elements, the five sensory organs, seven tissues, and ten vital airs. He stated that the body formed from sperm and ovum, integrated with the soul, mind, and ether, possesses a triadic nature and is susceptible to impurities. "O esteemed physician,

understand that this body is composed of the five great elements" <sup>5</sup>. Maharishi Sharangadhara has also explained that the embryo arises from the pure union of sperm and ovum, which, upon birth, is referred to as a "child" <sup>6</sup>.

When a man with disease-free and healthy sperm engages in intercourse at the appropriate time with a woman who has a healthy vagina, uterus, and ovum, and this union occurs within the uterus, the soul enters the womb, facilitated by an active life force <sup>7</sup>. This embryo, nurtured by suitable nutrients and the prescribed treatments for pregnancy care, grows healthily and free of disease. At the time of delivery, it emerges with all sensory faculties intact, having fully developed body parts. It is endowed with bala (strength), varna (complexion), satva (intelligence), and sanhanana (robustness), and is influenced by matruj (maternal), pitruj (paternal), and aatmaja (self-derived) traits, along with those rasajadi (qualities derived from nutrients) bhaava. It is born with a constant connection to the Mana (mind); as stated by Lord Atreya <sup>8</sup>.

Primary Ayurvedic texts, including the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga sangraha, were analyzed to extract detailed descriptions of embryo formation. The text explores the structural and functional attributes derived from above factors, such as physical characteristics inherited from parents, and the influence of the soul and mind on the developing foetus. This comprehensive view underscores the significance of a balanced diet, healthy lifestyle, and mental well-being for

optimal foetal development. Thus, the Ayurvedic approach provides a profound, integrative framework for understanding embryogenesis, emphasizing the interplay between physical, psychological, and spiritual elements in the creation of life.

The analysis focused on:

The union of Shukra (sperm) and Shonita (ovum), including biochemical and spiritual mechanisms underlying conception. The role of the Panchamahabhuta (five elements) and their elemental contributions to foetal development. The influence of psychological and spiritual aspects, particularly the roles of sattva, rajas, and tamas in shaping mental constitution.

### Components responsible for formation of embryo

Fertilization is the fusion of a sperm with a mature ovum, initiating embryonic development and restoring the species' chromosome number. It typically occurs in the ampullary part of the uterine tube. Post-ovulation, the ovum is picked up by the tubal fimbriae and transported to the ampullary part, where it remains viable for 12 to 24 hours. Out of millions of sperms ejaculated, only thousands reach the uterine tube, with 300-500 reaching the ovum, aided by muscular contractions and the uterine tube's aspiration action. Sperm penetrate the corona radiata and zona pellucida, facilitated by hyaluronidase from the acrosomal cap. Following zona reaction and oolemma block, one sperm fuse with the oocyte, prompting the oocyte to complete its second meiotic division, forming a female pronucleus and a second polar body. The sperm's head and neck become the male pronucleus, and the pronuclei unite, restoring the diploid chromosome number<sup>9</sup>. The resulting zygote contains paternal and maternal genetic material, and the child's sex is determined by the sperm's sex chromosome<sup>10</sup>.

According to modern science, the process of conception primarily involves the sperm and ovum. However, in Ayurveda, besides sperm and ovum, there are several other factors responsible for conception. Ayurveda considers all substances to be composed of five basic elements (Panchamahabhuta), making it evident that these elements undoubtedly play a role in the creation of the foetus. In addition to sperm and ovum, the foetus is formed with the involvement of factors such as Matrija (maternal), Pitrija (paternal), Atmaja (soul-related), and Rasaja (nutritional)

elements, along with the continuous connection of the mind. Each of these shad Garbhakara Bhavas is assigned with a certain organogenesis, functional/ Psychological phenomenon, to develop in the forthcoming baby, during its intrauterine life. The cumulation of these procreative factors is a must for healthy progeny<sup>11</sup>.

Maharshi Sushruta described the conception process with intricate details. According to his explanation, during the union of a man and a woman, the body heat (Tejas) stimulates the air element (Vayu). This stimulation causes the semen (Shukra) to be excreted, which then enters the uterus and combines with the menstrual blood/ ovum (Artava). The fusion of these elements, Agni (Artava) and Soma (Shukra), results in the formation of the embryo, which then settles in the uterus<sup>12</sup>.

Following this, the embryo, which is referred to by various terms such as Kshetraja (the knower of the field), Vedayita (the perceiver), Sprashta (the toucher), Ghrata (the smeller), Drashta (the seer), Shrota (the hearer), Rasayita (the taster), Purusha (the person), Srasta (the creator), Ganta (the mover), Sakshi (the witness), Dhata (the supporter), and Vakta (the speaker), although it is eternal, imperishable, and beyond comprehension, enters the womb. This process is driven by the air element (Vayu) and influenced by divine factors, including the elements (Bhuta), the qualities of Sattva (goodness), Rajas (passion), and Tamas (ignorance), as well as the influence of divine and demonic entities. Thus, the embryo takes residence in the uterus, initiated and sustained by these multifaceted influences<sup>13</sup>.

The foetus is described as composed of six elements. Among the five elements, there are the five great elements (Pancha Mahabhuta), and the sixth element is the soul (Atma). Thus, by this reasoning, the collective manifestation of the disorders of the five great elements forms the basis of the consciousness of the foetus<sup>14</sup>.

In the foetus, which is endowed with this consciousness, air (Vayu) facilitates the division, fire (Tejas) aids in digestion and metabolism, water (Jala) provides moisture, earth (Prithvi) contributes to solidity, and space (Akasha) enables expansion<sup>15</sup>.

Table 1: Different components derived from the great five elements<sup>16</sup>

Akasha	Vayu	Agni	Jala	Prithvi
Shabda (sound)	Sparsh (touch)	Rupa (form)	Rasa (taste)	Gandha (smell)
Shrotendriya (auditory system)	Sparshendriya (sense of touch)	Chakshu indriya (ophthalmic apparatus)	Rasnendriya (gustatory system)	Ghranendriya (olfactory organs)
Laaghava (lightness)	Raukshya (dryness)	Pakti (metabolism)	Shaitya (coldness)	Gaurava (heaviness)
Saukshmya (minuteness)	Prerna (impulsion)	Pitta (metabolic enzymes)	Mardava (softness)	Sthairya (stability)
Viveka (discernment)	Chesta (activity of body)	Prakash (light)	Sneha (unctuousness)	Murti (structure of body)
Srotasa (channels)	Dhatu vyuhana (formation and transportation of dhatus)	Ushma (heat or temperature of the body)	Kleda (moisture)	Kesha (hair)
	Ucchwasa (expiration)	Abha (lusture)	Asrika (blood)	Asthi (bones)
		Darshana (visual sense)	Urine etc. watery substances	
			Vasa or meda (fat)	

In discussing the various sources of these elements in the foetus, the ancient scholars mentioned the mother, father, nutritive fluids (Rasa), and soul (Atma). The mind (Sattva) is always associated with the soul. The qualities of the mother's and father's blood (Shonita) and semen (Shukra) are to some extent influenced by their diet and lifestyle. Inspired by this concept, the creation of the foetus is envisioned as involving six factors: maternal (Matruja), paternal (Pitruja), nutritive (Rasaja), dietary and

lifestyle (Satmyaja), soul (Atmaja), and mental (Sattvaja) contributions<sup>17</sup>. Neither the mother, father, soul, diet, nor mental state alone can account for the formation of the foetus. It is also not the case that the mind enters the foetus from another realm. Instead, the foetus is formed only when there is a collective contribution from all these factors combined: mother, father, diet, soul, nutritive fluids, and mental state<sup>18</sup>.

**Table 2: Structures derived from the maternal (Matruja) factors** <sup>16</sup>

Body parts	CS	SS	KS	AS	AH	BP
Skin	+			+		
Blood	+	+	+	+	+	+
Muscles	+	+	+	+	+	+
Fat	+	+		+		+
Umbilicus	+	+	+	+	+**	
Heart	+	+	+	+	+**	+
Pancreas (Kloma)	+		+	+		
Liver	+	+	+	+	+**	+
Spleen	+	+	+	+	+**	+
Kidney	+		+			
Urinary bladder	+		+			
Rectum	+		+			
Stomach	+		+		+**	
Upper part of rectum	+	+*	+	+*	+*	+*
Lower part of rectum	+	+*		+*	+*	+*
Small intestine	+	+*	+	+*		+*
Large intestine	+	+*	+	+*		+*
Bone marrow		+		+	+	+

\*The authors have described only guda (anus) and aantra (intestines).

\*\*Mentioned by Arunadatta.

**Table 3: Structures derived from the paternal (Pitruja) factors** <sup>16</sup>

Body parts	CS	SS	AS	AH	KS	BP
Hair (scalp)	+	+	+	+	+	+
Beard & moustache	+	+			+	+
Hair of body	+	+		+*	+	+
Teeth	+	+			+	+
Bones	+	+	+	+	+	
Veins	+	+	+	+*	+	+
Tendons	+	+	+	+*	+	+
Arteries	+	+		+	+	+
Semen	+	+	+	+	+	+
Nails	+	+	+		+	+

\*Mentioned by Arunadatta.

**Table 4: Features derived from Atmaa (soul)** <sup>16</sup>

Features	CS	SS	AS	AH	KS
Birth in specific species	+		+	+	+
Knowledge about oneself	+		+		+
Mana (Mind)	+		+		+
Respiration in flatus	+		+		+
Impulse	+				+
Sustenance	+		+		+
Appearance	+		+		+
Voice	+		+	+*	+
Specific complexion	+		+		+
Happiness and sorrow	+	+	+	+*	+
Longing and hatred	+		+	+*	+
Consciousness	+		+	+	
Retention power (Dhriti)	+		+		
Intellect (Buddhi)	+		+	+*	
Memory (Smriti)	+		+	+*	+
Pride or egotism (Ahankar)	+		+	+*	+
Endeavour	+		+	+*	+
Longevity		+		+*	+
Perception of Indriyas		+	+	+	+

\*Mentioned by Arundatta.

**Table 5: Features derived from satmyaj bhaav** <sup>16</sup>

Features	CS	SS	AS	AH	KS
Freedom from diseases	+	+	+	+	
Absence of idleness	+		+	+*	
Absence of greed	+		+	+*	+
Normal voice	+		+	+*	+
Normal complexion	+	+	+	+*	+
Normal seed	+		+	+*	+
Constant happiness	+		+		+

Brain		+	+	+	+
Perspicuity of indriyas	+		+	+	+
High quality oja			+	+	
Longevity			+	+	
Strength or energy		+	+	+	

\*Mentioned by Arunadatta.

Besides these, Sushruta has included vigour or valour, Vriddha Vagbhata radiance or splendour and Kashyapa elevation or progress and satisfaction in the list.

Table 6: Features derived from Rasaj Bhaav <sup>16</sup>

Features	CS	SS	AS	AH	KS
Origin of body or manifestation of different body parts	+		+	+	
Growth of body	+	+	+	+	+
Attachment of life or strength with body	+				+
Contentment	+		+	+	+
Nourishment	+		+	+	+
Enthusiasm	+		+	+	
Energy or strength		+			
Health		+			
Unhealthy state		+			
Complexion	+	+			
Maintenance of body			+	+	+
Non- greediness			+	+	

Mentioned by \*Arunadatta and \*\* Chakrapani.

Sattva (purity), Rajas (passion), and Tamas (ignorance) are the three psychic constitutions described in Ayurveda. According to ancient sages Charaka, Sushruta, and Kashyapa, Sattva represents a pure mind. When enumerating mental states, Charaka briefly mentions emotions arising from both pure Sattva and the vikara (disturbance) caused by Rajas and Tamas. Furthermore, in the fourth chapter of the Sharirasthana section, titled "Mahati Garbhavakranti," the three mental types, Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamasic, are discussed, followed by a description of the sixteen mental constitutions that arise from their combinations.

## DISCUSSION

The Ayurvedic perspective on foetal development, particularly through the concept of Shadgarbhakar Bhava, offers a holistic view that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Conception, according to Ayurveda, occurs through the union of Shukra, Shonita, and Aatma, facilitated by divine and elemental forces. The soul's entry into the uterus is described as initiating the life process.

This framework identifies six key factors, matruja (maternal), pitruja (paternal), rasaja (nutritional), satmyaja (dietary and lifestyle), atmaja (soul), and sattvaja (mental), that contribute to the formation of the foetus, collectively influence foetal development, incorporating physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

The Panchamahabhuta- earth (solidity), water (moisture), fire (metabolism), air (movement), and space (expansion)—are essential for the formation and functionality of the foetus. While explaining Garbhini Paricharya, the great authorities of Ayurveda have explained about the things to avoid in pregnancy called Garbhopaghatakara Bhavas. Garbhopaghatakara Bhavas are such factors which when accompany during pregnancy can harm or destroy the fetus or its development. A malformed alive foetus is one of the worst aspects of pregnancy <sup>19</sup>.

Ayurveda emphasizes that the foetus's development is not only influenced by the physical contributions of the mother and father but also by the nourishment, lifestyle, emotional well-being, and even the soul's entry into the body. The balance of the five

elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) plays a vital role in shaping the fetus's bodily structures and functions. This integrated approach highlights the importance of maintaining a healthy mental and emotional state during pregnancy, which can impact the fetus's temperament and cognitive abilities. The Ayurvedic view of Garbha formation provides a unique perspective that complements modern embryology by considering the spiritual and psychological factors influencing prenatal development. This holistic approach could enhance prenatal care by incorporating practices that support both the physical and emotional well-being of the mother, ultimately leading to healthier pregnancies and well-rounded individuals.

## CONCLUSION

Ayurveda's inclusion of spiritual and elemental aspects complements the molecular focus of modern embryology. The concept of Atmaja introduces a metaphysical dimension absent in contemporary scientific discourse, while the Panchamahabhuta framework parallels modern understanding of biochemical and physiological processes.

### Importance of balanced living

Ayurveda highlights the significance of balanced nutrition, a healthy lifestyle, and mental well-being for optimal foetal development. Modern research supports these principles, demonstrating the impact of maternal diet, stress, and environment on pregnancy outcomes.

### Holistic view of embryogenesis

The Ayurvedic approach integrates body, mind, and soul, offering a unique framework for understanding human development. Modern science could benefit from incorporating these holistic principles to enhance prenatal care and address comprehensive health concerns.

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