Tracing the pathways: Identifying Nadi linking foot to eye and their role in Padabhyanga

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ABSTRACT

Throughout Ayurveda texts, the practices of Padabhyanga, Padatrdharana, Prakshalana, and Padapooja have been emphasized as beneficial for ocular health, referred to as Dhrishti Prasadaka or Chakshusya. Acharya Vagbhatta’s elaboration on two Nadi originating from the midpoint of the feet, ascending to the Shirah Pradesh and extending to the Netra, underscores a profound correlation between the Chakshu Indriya and the Pada. This research article delves into the intrinsic relationship between the foot and the eye as elucidated in ancient Ayurveda texts. After meticulous examination of various sources, it becomes evident that a network of interconnected Nadi links the foot to the eye. Texts such as Vaishshtha Samhita, Varah Samhita, Shandilya Samhita, and Darshan Samhita mention Yashshvini-Pusa Nadi connected by Varana Nadi to the right eye, and Hasthjihva-Gandhari Nadi connected via Vishwodhara Nadi to the left. Similarly, insights from Yoga Upanishads and Varmam Shastra further corroborate the association of specific Nadi with ocular function. Central to this understanding is the role of Vayu, described as the “Yantra Tantra Dhra,” responsible for physiological functioning via the Nadi. The unimpeded flow of Vayu through the Nadi is crucial for overall health. Acharya Charaka’s mention of Vayu residing abundantly in Twacha (skin) highlights the tactile sensation’s dependency on Vayu, suggesting the efficacy of Tailabhyanga (foot massage) in maintaining Vayu equilibrium, particularly Vyana and Kurma Vyau, thus benefiting ocular health. Hence, Padabhyanga emerges as a pivotal practice for promoting eye wellness, aligning with the concept of Chakshushya.

Key words: Ayurveda, Padabhyana, Chakshusya, Nadi, Netra Sharir

INTRODUCTION

Reiterated across various ancient texts including those by Acharya Charaka¹, Acharya Vagbhatta² and Acharya Sushruta the practices of Padabhyana, Padatrdharana Prakshalana, and Padapooja are underscored as beneficial for eye health, termed as Dhrishti Prasadaka or Chakshusya. Acharya Vagbhatta, in Uttar Tantra chapter 16, elaborates on the connection between the foot and the eyes, stating that two Nadi originating from the foot’s midpoint ascend to the Shirah Pradesh and extend to the Netra, influencing ocular activities.² These Nadi are susceptible to contamination, affecting eye function, emphasizing the importance of foot care. Similar descriptions are found in Acharya Bhavprakash’s³ and Acharya Charaka’s works.

To grasp the impact of foot-originating Nadi on eye function, understanding Sharir Nadi, including their location, connections, and functions, is essential. While detailed descriptions are limited in major Ayurveda texts, ancient Veda and Upanishada teachings, especially those related to Yoga, offer profound insights into this domain. Let’s explore further:

The concept of Nadi

Ayurveda wisdom transcends mere physicality, delving into subtler dimensions of the Sharir (body). It categorizes the Sharir into three realms:

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1. **Sthool Sharir**: the tangible, visible parts discernible to the naked eye.

2. **Sukshma Sharir**: the subtle aspects that elude direct perception.

3. **Karana Sharir**: the spiritual essence.

Highlighting the significance of the *Apratyaksha* (unseen), *Ayurveda* emphasizes that what is imperceptible to the human eye (*Apratyaksha*) surpasses the visible. The *Nadi*, associated with *Chakra* and *Prana*, belong to the *Sukshma Sharir* and *Karana Sharir*, serving as pivotal points for physiological and pathological functions.

In *Vaishishth Samhita*, the human body is described as measuring 96 fingers (*Swa-Angula Pramana*). The *Dehmadhya*, positioned two *Angula* above the *Guda* and two *Angula* below the *Medhara*, houses the triangular-shaped *Shikhi Sthana*, symbolizing a fiery locus akin to heated gold (*Mooladhara Chakra*). The *Kanda* is situated nine *Angula* above the *Dehmadhya* and enveloped by various bodily substances. From the *Kanda* emerges the *Sushumana*, the principal *Nadi* traversing the *Merudanda* (spinal cord). Encircling the *Sushumana* is the *Nadi-Chakra*, the origin of the body’s 72,000 *Nadi*, spreading like branches of a tree in all directions.

Please note: According to the *Dhyan Bindu Upanishad*, the position of the *Kanda* is situated between the *Nabhi* and *Mredhara*. While the traditional count of *Nadi* in *Yoga Shastra* and *Ayurveda* stands at 72,000, alternative references such as the *Shiv Samhita* propose a broader range extending to 3 crore 50 lakhs. These *Nadi* encompass both the *Sthoola* (visible to the naked eye) and *Sukshma* (invisible) realms. However, for practical purposes, the functionality of the body is often attributed to 14 main *Nadi*.

**The Nadi related to eye & lower limb (As per Yoga Upanishad)**

Among these 14 *Nadi*, the most spiritually significant one is the *Sushumna* or *Bhrama Nadi*, which is associated with the awakening of Kundalini, the practice of Yoga, and the attainment of *Moksha*. The remaining 13 *Nadi*, namely *Ida*, *Pingala*, *Gandhari*, *Hastijihva*, *Kuhu*, *Sarasvati*, *Pusha*, *Sankini*, *Payasvani*, *Varuna*, *Alambusha*, *Vishvodari* and *Yashasvini*, are primarily linked with bodily functions. Although there are differing opinions regarding the pathways and functions of these *Nadi*, prevalent theories in *Yoga Upanishad* and *Veda* can be categorized into two perspectives.

The first viewpoint posits the existence of 14 significant *Nadi* in the body. This perspective finds convergence in texts such as *Vaishshtha Samhita*, *Jabal Darshana Upanishad*, *Varah Samhita*, *Shandilya Samhita*, and *Darshan Samhita*.

In all the aforementioned *Yoga Upanishads*, it is evident that the *Gandhari Nadi* is commonly associated with the left eye, while the *Pusa Nadi* is related to the right eye. It’s important to note that these *Nadi* are not directly connected to the foot. Instead, the *Nadi* extending from the *Nadi-Chakra* to the foot are *Yashasvini* and *Hastijihva* on the right and left side respectively. Additionally, two *Nadi* spread over the right and left side of the body are *Varana* and *Vishwodhara*.

Thus, it appears that not a single *Nadi*, but an interconnected network of these *Nadi*, forms a pathway connecting the foot to the eye.

Summarizing, on the right side of the body, the pathway from the foot to the eye consists of the *Yashhvini-Pusa Nadi* connected by the *Varana Nadi*. Meanwhile, on the left side, the connection from the foot to the eye involves the *Hasthijhva-Gandhari Nadi*, connected via the *Vishwodhara Nadi*.

An interesting observation from the *Jabala Darshana* is that *Varana Nadi* is believed to pacify all *Papa Karma* performed by *Gyana* and *Karma Indriya* (*Asatamya Indriya Sanyoga*). Analyzing its position and function, *Varana* alone could be the *Nadi* associated from the foot to the eye.

The second prevalent view names only 10 significant *Nadi* in Upanishads, namely: *Shiv Sarwodaya*, *Dhyan Bindu Upanishad*, *Yoga Chudamani Undishyad*, *Siddha Siddhant Padathi*, and *Tri Shikha Bhrama Upanishad*. 

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*Journal of Ayurveda and Integrated Medical Sciences | April 2024 | Vol. 9 | Issue 4*
Notably, Sarasvati, Varuni, Visvodara, and Payasvini are omitted from this list of 14 main Nadi.

According to this second perspective, Gandhari and Hasthijhva are considered the Nadi of the left and right eye, respectively. However, it’s important to note that they originate from the Nadi Kanda and are not directly connected to the feet. Nonetheless, given that each of these main Nadi gives off hundreds of sub-branches spread throughout the body, it is possible that branches of Gandhari and Hasthijhva are related to the feet and/or lower limb, possibly through the Kaushki Nadi, which spreads over the lower limb.

The Nadi related to eye & lower limb (As per Varmam Shastra)\[^9,10\]

The reference to the Nadi associated with the eyes is also found in the classical text of Varmam Shastra, where it is described to run from the foot to the eye. Specifically, three Nadi are directly related to both the feet and eyes: Pinglai Nadi, Alamburudhan Nadi, and Gandhari Nadi. Upon thorough examination of the Varmam Nadi pathways, it becomes evident that these three conduits serve as the channels linking the lower limbs to the eyes.

Additionally, the Sanguni Nadi seems to have a connection to the eyes. Originating from the base of the penis, it travels through the Vishudhi Chakra, reaching the Pidari Varmam (External occipital protuberance), and then branches out to supply the entire face.

It’s worth noting that these Nadi are also associated with the Varmam Points, which are vital points of Prana located on the body surface. Specifically concerning the eyes, they are linked to the Nakshatralaalam Varmam, located at the outer canthus of the eye.

Nadi related to eye & lower limb as per Sen Sib

(Thai indigenous medicine/ Tibetan Buddhism)\[^11\]

Interestingly, even in the Sib Sen system, 10 Nadi are mentioned, which bear striking resemblance to those mentioned in ancient Vedic literature. Among these, three are related to the eyes and lower limbs, as outlined below:

- **Sen Sahatsarangsi**, also known as Sahadsarangsri or Hadsarangsri, influences organs such as the eyes, lower abdomen, and chest. It follows a distinct pathway from the left foot to the left eye and is utilized in treating conditions such as facial paralysis, toothache, and eye ailments. This Nadi appears to be similar to the Gandhari Nadi.

- **Sen Thawari**, the counterpart of Sen Sahatsarangsi on the right side of the body, bears resemblance to the Hasthijhva Nadi/Pusa Nadi and Alamburudhan Nadi.

- **Sen Kalathari**, also known as Kaaniateree, Kanlataree Galadhari, or Gandhari, though seemingly synonymous with Gandhari, functionally resembles the Varuna Nadi, which is distributed throughout the body.

The vital role of Nadi and Prana in bodily functions

After comprehensively examining the Nadi associated with the Pada and Netra, including their origins, pathways, and connections to various body parts, let’s delve into their functional significance.

There is unanimous agreement that Vayu, or vital air, flows through all 72,000 Nadi, with 10 types of Vayu governing essential bodily functions.\[^12\] Among these, Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana, and Vyana are deemed most crucial, as described in Ayurvedic texts.\[^13\] While some scholars differentiate between the Vata described in Ayurveda and the Vayu in Yoga Upanishads, they are considered synonymous in the context of Marma points and Nadi.

Acharya Charaka refers to Vayu as “Yantra Tantra Dhra,”\[^14\] emphasizing its pivotal role in physiological functions. Prana, situated below the Kanda, regulates the other Vayu and is likened to an emperor appointing officials in different regions, ensuring the smooth functioning of the body.

Vayu omnipresent in the body through the Nadi network, maintains equilibrium and is vital for overall health. However, when disturbed, it can lead to...
diseases. Therefore, the unobstructed flow of Vayu through the Nadi is crucial for optimal health.

**DISCUSSION**

1. **Unraveling the Pathways: Exploring the Networks Connecting Feet to Eyes**

Upon thorough scrutiny of diverse sources, it becomes apparent that the intricate web of Nadi linking the feet to the eye’s manifests in various interpretations:

A. In texts acknowledging 14 main Nadi (Vaishshtha Samhita, Varah Samhita, Shandilya Samhita, and Darshan Samhita):

   - Yashshvini-Pusa Nadi, joined by Varana Nadi, traverses from the foot to the right eye.
   - On the left side, Hasthjihva-Gandhari Nadi, through Vishwodhara Nadi, connects the foot to the eye.
   - Varana Nadi functions independently based on its location and purpose.

B. In texts recognizing 10 main Nadi (Shiv Sarwodaya, Dhyan Bindu Upnishyad, Yoga Chudamani Undishyad, Siddha Siddhant Padathi, and Tri Shikha Bhrama Upnishyad):

   - Hasthjihva extends from the navel to the right eye.
   - Gandhari Nadi courses from the navel to the left eye.

C. According to Varmam Shastra:

   - Gandhari Nadi travels from the left eye to the right lower limb.
   - Alamburudhan Nadi originates from the right eye, extending to both lower limbs.
   - Pinglai Nadi commences from the left big toe, traversing to both eyes and terminating at the right nostril.

D. In the Sib Sen system:

   - Sen Sahatsarangsi links the left eye to the left foot.
   - Sen Thawari connects the right eye to the right foot.

   - Sen Kalathari spreads across the body from foot to both eyes, resembling Varuna Nadi.

Notably, the 14 main Nadi perspective furnishes a detailed trajectory relative to Sushumana, whereas the 10 main Nadi perspective primarily provides nomenclature and targeted body parts. Furthermore, the absence of Nadi reaching the foot in the latter viewpoint, barring the mention in Tri-Shikha Bharam Upnishyad (Kaushki Nadi), lends credence to the former’s precision. Even in Varmam Shastra, Gandhari and Alamburudhan Nadi are intertwined with Ida Nadi, Asani Nadi, and Sanguni Nadi, sharing common Varmam points along their paths.

2. **Exploring the connection between foot massage and vision enhancement**

Upon grasping the relationship between Nadi and Prana, the influence of foot massage on vision becomes clearer.

In Charaka Samhita’s Sutra Sthan chapter five, it is stated that Vayu predominantly resides in the Twacha (the sensory organ of touch). This Vayu, flows throughout the body via the Nadi system, carrying tactile sensations. Additionally, oils possess Vata pacifying properties, thus daily foot massage helps maintain Vayu equilibrium and prevents Vata-related disorders.

Among the ten types of Vayu, Vyana and Kurma Vayu within the Nadi system are responsible for eye function. By directly connecting the feet to the eyes, foot massage impacts Vayu equilibrium, ensuring proper eye function.

The term "Pada" refers to the entire limb, not just the feet, according to linguistic sources and Charaka’s descriptions of Padabhyanga benefits. Hence, foot massage encompasses the entire lower limb, offering comprehensive benefits for vision enhancement.

In Varmam Shastra, the Nadi Gandhari and Alambudharan originate nine fingers above the heel, emphasizing the importance of massaging the entire lower limb, including the feet, for effective vision enhancement.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it’s apparent that not individual Nadi, but an interconnected network of these pathways, intricately link the foot to the eye. Additionally, Acharya Vagbhatta’s elucidation of two Nadi running from Padamadhya to Netra, reaching the Shirah Pradesh or head, and subsequently, via various routes, attaining the eye, underscores the complexity of this phenomenon. The term ‘Bahudha’ in the Shloka further elucidates this viewpoint. After thorough exploration of the intricacies of the Nadi connecting the feet and eyes, it’s evident that they play a crucial role in the body’s functionality. The consensus on Vayu’s presence in all 72,000 Nadi underscores its importance in regulating vital bodily functions. Understanding the intricate relationship between Nadi and Prana illuminates the profound impact of foot massage on vision. Charaka Samhita highlights the pervasive presence of Vayu in the Twacha and its role in maintaining bodily equilibrium via the Nadi system. The holistic approach to foot massage, encompassing the entire limb, resonates with Varmam Shastra’s emphasis on comprehensive care for optimal vision enhancement.

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How to cite this article: Lovepreet, Sunil Kumar Yadav. Tracing the pathways: Identifying Nadi linking foot to eye and their role in Padabhyanga. J Ayurveda Integr Med Sci 2024;4:248-253. http://dx.doi.org/10.21760/jaims.9.4.39

Source of Support: Nil, Conflict of Interest: None declared.

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