

## Nadis in Tantric Literature

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### Abstract

The term *Nadi* is the most controversial term in the field of *Ayurveda & Yoga*. It is not an easy subject & cannot be understood by studying *Ayurveda* texts. To get into the depth it is necessary to consult texts on Nervous system, Psychology, *Ayurveda*, *Tantra*, Acupuncture in addition to *Yoga* texts. *Nadi* means stream in *Rig-veda*. It is very important to understand this term "Stream" on which the whole concept of *Nadi* stands. In other words we can say that, any channel through which energy flows is *Nadi*. Yogis did least anatomical correlations on this subject as this was known to all at that time as these are the principle path or tract through which consciousness travels or it was not much necessary for them. The conducting pathways are quoted by Tantric as well as Yogic Gurus, but they give this in a different way. Since they are made up of subtle matter they cannot be seen by naked eyes & we cannot make any test at this level to show scientifically these are those nerves which we met when we do the dissection of Human body. So the quest of "Nerves" in the physical body can be clearly identified, but those *Nadis* or Nerves in the astral body is yet to be identified.

**Keywords:** *Nadis, Tantra, Sushumna, Chakra, Yoga Nadis.*

### Introduction

The ancient Indian *Ayurveda & Indian Philosophy* regards that the four basic elements in the Universe namely *Pritvi, Ap, Thejus & Vayu* are derived from the First Universal Basic Element Cosmos (*Akasa*). Sound is considered as the special quality of Universal basic element Cosmos-Hence sound power is considered as the strong & effective power amongst all the Physical powers in the World. Hence, the Basic syllable in each *Chakra* charges due to the sound produced in that *Chakra*. The Indian Philosophy regards that, *AUM* is the most powerful Ancient Basic sound in the Universe. *AUM* is created by the combination of three syllabi-namely-A+U+M. When one of the syllabi *AUM* is mixed with any basic syllable, it produces effective sound vibrations. Yogic science regards that due to these sounds the basic syllabi in *Chakras* are transformed into much energy field.

The term *Nadi* is the most controversial term in the field of *Ayurveda & Yoga*. It is not an easy subject & cannot be understood by studying *Ayurveda* texts only. To get into the depth it is necessary to consult

texts on Nervous system, Psychology, *Ayurveda*, *Tantra*, Acupuncture in addition to *Yoga* texts. *Nadi* means stream in *Rig-veda* (Mac Donnel and Keith).<sup>1</sup> It is very important to understand this term stream on which the whole concept of *Nadi* stands. In other words we can said that, any channel through which anything substance or energy flows is called *Nadi* and the flow through it is known as *Srotas*.<sup>2</sup>

*Hariharananda Aranya* (1938) mentioned that *Nadi* means "*Nala*"-The (channel) through which anything (energy, substance) flows. This is the reason why nerves, veins, arteries are called *Nadi*. Yogis did least anatomical correlations on this subject as this was known to all at that time as these are the principle path or tract through which consciousness travels or it was not much necessity to them. The conducting pathways are quoted by Tantric as well as Yogic Gurus, but they give this in a different way. According to Professor Guar, the term *Nadi* has been used, commonly as a vessel, cord, meatus, canal or tube & *Vata Nadi* was considered as Nerve.

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## Synonyms of Nadis

According to *Kanada*, synonyms of *Nadi* are given below:

*Hinsra, hansa, snayu, dhamani, dhar, tantuki, jivitajnya, jivanjnyana, vasa & sira.*<sup>3</sup>

## Meanings of Synonyms<sup>4</sup>

**Hinsra & Hansa:** These words are derived from the verb 'Han' which means to destroy. It also means movement or speed. If the vessels are diseased or do not pulsate normally, life is in danger.

**Snayu:** This word is derived from the word 'Shna' which means to bath or to clean. Thus *Snayu* means that which bathes & cleanses various tissues.

**Dharani and Dhara:** Both of these words are derived from verb 'Dhuy' which means to support or sustain. This *dhamani* or *dhara* means one which supports & sustains life.

**Tantuki:** This word is derived from 'Tanu' which means to spread. Thus *Tantuki* indicates the wires spreads all over the body.

**Jivitajnya:** The word joint means life & "Jnyana" means knowledge. Thus it is through the *Nadis* the physician gets the knowledge of life.

**Vasa:** *Vasa* is the word derived from the verb 'Vas' meaning to stay or to cover. It covers or encloses the nutrient fluids & helps in their distribution to various organs.

**Sira:** The word *Sira* is derived the verb "Sra", which indicates movements.

The main function of *Nadi* is to receive and convey the *Prana* in the body from one place to another. In other terms we can say *Nadis* are transport system which travels through their own routes/paths which are present in the body, transmit the *Prana*.<sup>4</sup>

## Nadis in Tantra Grantas

In *Kundalini Yoga* by Swami Sivananda gives the idea of some important *Nadis* as *Gandhari, Hastijihwa, Kuhu, Saraswati, Pusha, Sankhini*, etc. These have their origin in *Kanda*. All these *Nadis* placed on the sides of *Sushmna, Ida & Pingala*, & proceed to different parts of the body to perform some special functions. These are all subtle *Nadis*: All the *Nadis* from the *Kanda* which are located in the space

between the origin of the reproductive organ and the anus. Innumerable minor *Nadis* spring from these as the leaf of an *Aswatha* tree & is covered with minute fibers. So also this body is permeated with thousands of *Nadi*.

*Chakras* or *Padmas* are present in the *Linga Sharira* or Astral body-which is made of 17 *Tatwas*-5 *Jnanendriyas*, 5 *karmendriyas*, 5 *Pranas*, *Manas & Buddhi*. These have their corresponding sites in the centers in the spinal cord & the nerve plexus are in gross body. These centers or *Chakras* cannot be seen by the naked eye, but the nerve plexuses at the corresponding sites can be viewed with our naked eye. *Sukshma Prana* moves in the *Nadis* of the *linga sharira*. *Sthoola Prana* moves in the nervous system of the gross physical body. These two courses are intimately connected. We can see so many plexuses in the *Sthoola* or physical body or physical gross plexuses as interlacing of several nerves, arteries, veins etc. Well known plexuses are, Cervical, Brachial, Lumbar, Hepatic, Cardiac, Epigastric, Pharyngeal, Sacral, Coccygeal etc. These are considered as centers of *Sukshma Prana* in the *Sushmna Nadi* & these are subtle centers of vital energy.<sup>5</sup>

*Nadis* are those cord like structures through which, the traditional Indian Medicine & spiritual science, the energies of the subtle body flows. According to the *Tantras* there are 72,000 more such cords or channels or their networks are present through which the stimuli flow like an electric current from one point to another. *Nadis* are thought to carry a life force energy, known as *Prana* in Sanskrit. The word *Nadi* comes from the Sanskrit root "Nad" meaning flow, channel, stream. The rhythmical breathing and special breathing techniques are supposed to influence the flow of these *Nadis* or energetic currents.

Among these ducts or *Nadis*, three are of utmost importance the medullar *Sushmna*, which lies in the cerebrospinal axis is the most important, because this is the basic structure to which all the *Chakras* are attached, all the other *Nadis* are related. This is very important in *Yoga & Tantra*. The *Nadi Sushmna* whose substance is the threefold *gunas* is in the middle of the body, extends from the middle of the *kanda* to the head & the *Vajra Nadi* inside the *Sushmna* extends from *Medra* to the head. The flow of *Prana* is through the central canal of spinal cord is considered.

Tantric *Acharyas* have searched the tract/ path of *Mana* by which *Mana* controls the parts/ organs of the body & for this purpose they again coined a new term "Nadi" & they have also searched the meeting

points or areas (plexuses) of these *Nadis* in the body & termed as *Chakras*. This whole Anatomy & Physiology is now-a-days termed as nervous system of the body that govern, control, & regulate whole body & *Mana*. The yogic *Acharyas* had explored the method/ path of purification of body & mind to achieve *Moksha* & termed it as *Ashtanga Yoga*. With this purified & trained *Mana*, one can achieve all goals, one wishes in his life.

Shri. Raman das Mahatyagi in his *Yogka Vijnanic Rahasya*, explained *Nadis* are the fibers of a lotus & being supported by the vertebral column, spread downwards. Sir John Woodruff says in *Bhutasuddhi Tantra* 72,000 *Nadis*, in *Prapanchasara Tantra* 3,00,000, in *Siva Samhita* 3,50,000. So we can consider that the whole body is supplied with thread like wires with which the conduction of currents taking place. But the Tantric texts could not describe each & every names of *Nadis* which they perceive during Yogic *Kriyas*. They explain these as *Yoga Nadis* even though they are in the subtle form. Those main *Nadis* are *Sushmna*, *Ida* & *Pingala*, known as "*Trinadis*". The *Nadis* are stated the conduits of *Prana*. Through them, the solar & lunar currents flow. They are therefore vital forces of life. *Sushmna Nadi* is situated within the spinal column, in the spinal canal. Within the *Sushmna Nadi*, there is the *Nadi* by name *Vajra*. *Chitra Nadi*, a minute channel which is also called *Brahma Nadi* is within this *Vajra Nadi*. *Kundalini* awakens & passes through this *Chitra Nadi*. These are all *Sukshma* centers and we cannot have any laboratory tests & test-tube experiments to identify these. Without these subtle centers, the gross physical body cannot exist & function.<sup>6</sup>

### Yoga Nadis

According to *Yogis*, *Nadis* are the astral tubes made up of astral matter that carry psychic currents. The Sanskrit term "*Nadi*" comes from the root "*Nad*", which means motion or sound. It is through these *Nadis* that the vital force or *Pranic* current moves or flows. Since they are made up of subtle matter they cannot be seen by naked eyes & we cannot make any test at this level to show scientifically these are those nerves which we met when we do the dissection of Human body. So the quest of "*Nerves*" in the physical body can be clearly identified, but those *Nadis* or Nerves in the astral body is yet to be identified.

The body is filled with innumerable *Nadis* that cannot be counted. But in Tantric literatures, like *Siva Samhita*, *Kheranda Samhita*, *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika* they enumerated the number of *Nadis* from 72,000 to

3,50,000. The subtle lines or tracts or paths have influence on physical body. The gross **Nerves & Plexuses & Tracts** have close relationship with the subtle body. So we can understand that the physical centers have close relationship with astral centers, the vibrations that are produced in the physical centers by Yogic methods have desired effect in the astral centers.

The interlacing of several arteries, veins are called plexuses. For example pampiniform plexuses of veins, plexuses of arteries are also seen in the body. Likewise there are plexuses or centers of vital forces in the *SusuhmnaNadi*. They are known as *Padmas*, (lotuses) or *Chakras*. Detailed information on all these *Chakras* gives us an idea of those *Nadis* present in them as the 50 Sanskrit Syllable and they are the *Yoga Nadis*.

### Khanda

All the *Nadis* spring from the *Kanda*. It is in the junction where the *Sushmna Nadi* is connected with the *Muladhara Chakra*. This is 12 inches above the anus. It is like the shape of an egg & is covered with membranes. This is just above the *Muladhara Chakra*. The four petals of the *Muladhara Chakra* are on the sides of this *Kanda* and the junction is called *Granthi-Sthana*, where the influence of *Maya* is very strong. In some *Upanishads* you will find that *Kanda* is of 9 digits above the genitals.

*Kanda* is the center of the astral body from where the subtle channels arise and carry the *Sukshma Prana* (vital energy) to the different parts of the body. Corresponding to this part is the *Cauda equina* in the gross physical body. The astral center of *cauda equine* is the *Kanda*. The spinal cord extending from brain to the end of the vertebral column tapers into a bunch of nerves. This bunch of nerves is *Cauda equina* in the gross body.<sup>7</sup>

### Some Important Nadis

Ten principal *Nadis* are enumerated in *Trisikhi-Brahman upanishad*, *Yoga chudamani upanishad* and in several treatises on sphygmology. Only nine *Nadis* were enumerated in the first chapter of *Vaidya Sastra*. Only eight *Nadis* were enumerated in two treatises, *Kalajanana Nadi-Pariksha* and *Nadi-Pariksha*. *Nadi Sastra Samgraha* enumerated twenty *Nadis*, *Gadasanjeevani Nadivijnana* enumerated sixteen *Nadis*, *Brahma vaivarta purana (BrahmaKanda)* enumerated sixteen *Nadis*, *Siva Samhita* enumerated fourteen *Nadis*, *Nadi Sastra*

*Samgraha*, *Nadichakra Vidhi*, *Nadi-Nidana* also enumerated fourteen *Nadis*, *Yogasikhopaniashad* enumerated twelve *Nadis*, *Vaidya Sastra* enumerated eleven *Nadis* in total.<sup>8</sup>

These are the different observations of *Nadis*. There are number of *Nadis* but one cannot identify all above mentioned *Nadis*, one can only presume. Hence three and a half lakhs of *Nadis* and seventy two thousand *Nadis* both the concepts are acceptable as described earlier.

### Available Description on Some of the *Nadis*

**Alambusha:** Connects the mouth and anus.

**Candra:** Starting from Left nostril moving to the crown of the head and descending to the base of the spine.

**Citra:** One of the *Nadi* emanating from the heart through which the creative energy (*Sakti*) of *Kundalini* passes to reach the *Sahasrara* (crown). {Of the 101 *Nadis* only the *CitraNadi* splits into two parts at the root of *Sushmna*}. One part of the *Citra* moves within it, extending upwards to the *Randra* (aperture) of *Brahma* at the crown of the head above *Sahasrara Chakra*. This is the gateway to the *Parabrahma* (supreme spirit). The other part of *Citra* moves down to the genital organs for discharge of semen. It is said that at the time of death, *Yogis* and *Saints* consciously leaves through the *Brahmarandhra*. Since the aperture is in the *Karana Sarira* (spiritual or causal body), it cannot be seen or measured, when the *Prana* rises upwards, via the *Citra*, through the *Chakras* it takes with it *Ojas* (radiance), a creative energy latent in semen. The *Citra* is transformed into the *Brahma Nadi* or *Para Nadi*.

**Gandhari:** One of the *Nadi* is said to be behind the *Ida Nadi*, terminating near the left eye, regulating the function of sight.

**Hastijihva:** Located in front of the *Ida Nadi*, terminating near the right eye, regulating the function of sight, seeing.

**Ida:** Starting from left nostril, moving to the crown the head and descending to the base of the spine. In its course it conveys lunar energy and is therefore called *Chandra Nadi*. Its function is cooling, *Tamas* (inertia).

**Kausiki:** One of the *Nadi* terminating in the big toes.

**Kuhu:** One of the *Nadi* located in front of *Sushmna*, its function is to evacuate feces.

**Kurma:** Subsidiary *Nadi* whose function is to stabilize the body and mind.

**Payasvini:** One of the *Nadi* terminating in the right big toe, said to be located between the *Pusha* which is behind the *Pingala Nadi* and the *Sarasvati* (behind *Sushmna*).

**Pingala:** (tawny or reddish) starting at the right nostril moving to the crown and down the spine to the base. As the solar energy flows through it, it is also called *Surya Nadi*. Its function is burning, (*Rajas*), action.

**Pusa:** *Nadi* situated behind *Pingala*, terminating at the right ear. Function is hearing.

**Rakta:** *Nadi* creates hunger and thirst and collects mucus at the sinuses.

**Sankhini:** Terminates at the genital organs, situated between *Gandhari* and *Sarasvati*. It carries the essence of food.

**Sarasvati:** *Nadi* which is behind the *Sushmna Nadi*, terminating at the tongue, controlling speech and keeping the abdominal organs free from diseases.

**Som:** The *Nadi* which is very much related to *Ida Nadi*.

**Sura:** *Nadi* which lies between the eye brows.

**Surya:** The *Nadi* of the sun as functions as *Pingala Nadi*.

**Sushmna:** Starting from the base of the spine to the crown of the head, up the center of the spine. Its function is *Agni*, fire (*Satva*), illumination.

**Varuni:** The *Nadi* which flows throughout the body. Its function is to evacuate urine. Its position is between *Yasavini* and *Kuhu*.

**Vijnana:** The *Nadi* is the vessel of consciousness.

**Visvodari:** *Nadi* having the function of absorption of food. Its position is between *Hastijihva* and *Kuhu*.

**Yasavini:** *Nadi* situated between the left ear and the left big toe (before *Pingala* and between *Gandhari* and *Sarasvati*).

In addition to the various primary and minor *Nadis*, the *Sakta Tantra* and *Kundalini/ Laya Yoga* traditions emphasis was placed on central *Nadi* which represented concentric (hence increasingly subtle) channels along or in front of the spine and along which are sprung the 7 *Chakras*. The four central

*Nadis* are *SushmnaNadi*, *VajraNadi*, *CitraNadi* and *BrahmaNadi*.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

The structure we met with dissection along with the vessels (arteries, veins) are termed as Nerves according to Modern Science. What is the name given to those structures in Ayurveda? The answer to this question is being answered with different names. *Tantrika*, *Nadi*, *Dhamani*, *Sira*, *Vasa*, *Tantuki*, *Jivitajnya*etc.

To clear the concept of *Nadi*, we want to search The *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, *Yoga Granthas*, *Tantra Granthas* etc. To understand these *Granthas*, first of all we want to understand Saktism and Saivism, in which Lord Siva clears the doubts of Parvati Devi about the diseases that prevailed at that time. As this was a secret medicine, the knowledge did not flourish among common people. The knowledge spreads among Yogis and by doing the Yoga in proper way they attain a higher energy level which gives them all types of Satisfaction.

So the Yogis found energy flowing inner path as *Nadis*. They explained the *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Pranidhana*, *Dhyana* and *Samathi*, the *Ashtangas* of *Yoga* by *Patanjali* for the fruitful growth of body and mind in *Yoga Granthas*. So the Tantric literature deals with the *Yoga* and the way of living happily with a great energy level which they feel through the structure called *Yoga Nadis*. The important *Nadis* are *Sushmna*, *Ida* and *Pingala*. The total number of *Nadis* given in *Siva Samhita* was 3,50,000.<sup>10</sup>

A short history of Aryan Medical science describes the wind diseases of the Hindus which are mostly treated by the western writers as diseases of the Respiratory system. The bile diseases are generally corresponding with diseases of the circulatory system and the disorders of phlegm with the diseases of alimentary system.

The demonical diseases of the Hindus are but other words for hysteria,<sup>1</sup> epilepsy, dancing mania and other disorders of Nervous system.<sup>11</sup>

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