



DHAMANI SHARIRA: FUNCTIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS IN AYURVEDA PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Acharya Chakrapani emphasised the importance of understanding the concept of *Sharira* for effective clinical practice. *Sharira* is the site where *chetana* (consciousness) manifests and is a union of factors derived from the five great elements (Pancha-mahabhuta) in a specific proportion, which helps maintain the body's equilibrium. *Dhamani* is a unique concept in *Sharira*, and various Acharya have elaborated on it from different perspectives. In particular, Acharya Sushruta dedicated an entire chapter in *Sharirasthana* to discuss *Dhamani* and describe its courses, types, and functions. *Sushruta* mentions that *Dhamani* originates from the *Nabhi* and plays a significant role in understanding the clinical aspects of disease and its structural significance. The role of *Dhamani* is critical in understanding the pathogenesis (*Samprapti*) of diseases and its application in treatment approaches, as discussed in the *Brihatrayi*. This article explores how *Dhamani* resides in the body to maintain *Ayu* as a purely functional entity, connects the senses (*Indriya*) with their respective objects (*Indriyarth*), and how it plays a vital role in clinical practice and treatment strategies. Additionally, we aim to provide a diagrammatic representation of the concept of *Dhamani* for better comprehension and teaching.

Keywords: Dhamani, Nadi, Sira, Hridaya

INTRODUCTION

Acharya Chakrapani mentioned the importance of properly understanding the concept of Sharira for clinical practice in Charaka Sharirasthana. Without proper knowledge of Sharira, no physician can succeed in their clinical practice.¹

Ayu implies the conjunction of physical body, senses, mind and Atma and is known by the synonyms Dhari (preserves vitality), Jivita (live), Nityaga (continuum), and Anubandha (interdependent, or a link between past life and future life)²

Ayurveda considers sharira a living body constituted by the association of the panchamahabhutas and the Atma. The physical body is formed by the amalgamation of Panchamahabhutas in variable quantities. The physical body is active but unconscious. The Atma is inactive and conscious in the living being. They both coexist together inside the sharira. The physical body works in the direction of the atma. The association between the body and the Atma can be related to a

lame person sitting on the shoulders of a blind person and moving in the directions of the blind person. Sharira is one of the tripods of life, along with mind and Atma.³

Different Acharya elaborate Dhamani in various perspectives. Charaka elaborates Dhamani as synonym of Srotas. Stressing the importance of Dhamani sharira, Acharya Sushruta dedicated an entire chapter to it in Sharirasthana of Sushruta Samhita. Acharya Sushruta describes its courses, types, and functions in detail.

The term Dhamani means throbs or pulsates. Dalhana mentioned that Dhamani means pulsating and filled with Anila. Sushruta mentioned that Dhamani originates from Nabhi. Among the Dhamani arising from the Nabhi, ten spread upward, ten downward, and four sideward (transverse).

Urdhvavaha Dhamani

Those extending upward support and maintain the body by regulating of processes like receiving Shabda(sound), Rupa (sight), Rasa (taste), and Gandha (smell) sensations; Uchchvasa (inspiration), Nishwasa (expiration), Jrimbha (yawning), Kshavathu (sneezing), Bhasha (talking), and other similar processes.

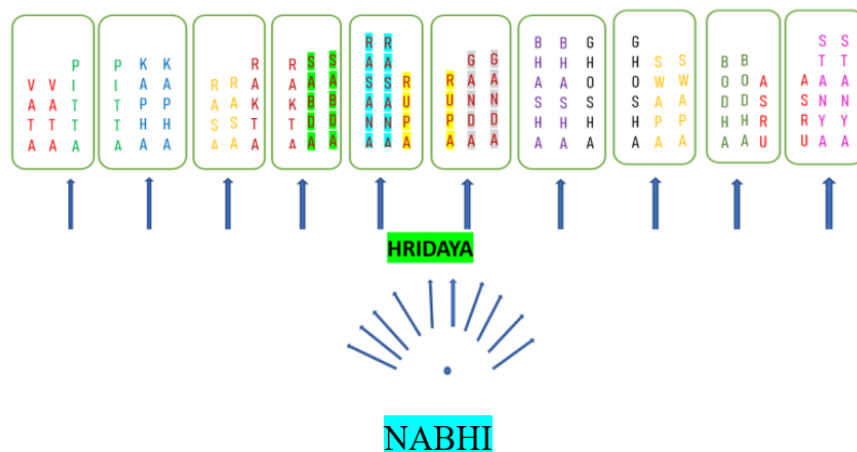


Fig 1: The Urdhvavaha Dhamani begins at the Nabhi, reaching Hridaya and extending into the Urdhva vaha region.

forming Vata-related functions in the upper and lower regions of the body, respectively.

Acharyas have different opinions regarding the concept of Dhamani, each offering their perspective. Acharya Charaka regarded *Dhamani*, Sira, and Srotas as synonymous, viewing them as equivalent structures. In contrast, Acharya Sushruta's concept of *Dhamani* is distinct and unique. He described Srotas as an extension of *Dhamani*, likening them to the pores of a lotus stalk. According to Sushruta, the Srotas are connected to the *Dhamani*, and he elaborated on their characteristics, mainly focusing on their pathological conditions, referred to as "Viddha lakshana." On the other hand, Charaka focused on the concept of "Srotodushti lakshana," which pertains to the signs of dysfunction or obstruction in the Srotas.⁶ In this context, *Dalhana* provides the following justifications -⁷

1. Unlike *Dhamani*, which are described as colorless, *Dhamani* are said to have the same color as the *Dhatu* in which they are located.⁸ Sira, which carry Vata, Pitta, Kapha, and Rakta, are described as having light red, blue, white, and deep red colors, respectively.⁹
2. Number at origin: The texts state that there are forty Sira at their point of origin, whereas there are twenty-four *Dhamani*.
3. Special functions: Sira are responsible for all bodily, mental, and intellectual tasks without hindrance. On the other hand, *Dhamani* are involved in perceiving sensory objects (such as sound, light, taste, smell, and touch) and transporting substances like air, water, food, and rasa.

4. Textual description: Sira, *Srotas* and *Dhamani* are frequently mentioned separately in various treatises, indicating that *they* are distinct from Sira.

Connection between *Dhamani* and nadi

Dhamani is described as a life-sustaining unit of the body, with Nadi resulting from its functions. Although these terms were used interchangeably in several Ayurvedic texts, such as *Yogaratanakara* and *Kanadanadivigyan*, it is important to note that *Yogaratanakara* specifically detailed Nadi Pareeksha as one of the *Ashtavidha Pariksha*. This examination allows the practitioner to assess the Prakruti-Vikruti and the condition of the Doshas in each organ, as well as their effect on the Dhatus, Manas, and Sukshma Sharira. The Vata, Pitta, and Kapha principles, central to Ayurvedic diagnosis and treatment, can be understood through the Nadi Pareeksha by analysing their influence and current state in the body.¹⁰

Acharya Sharangadhara contributed an entire chapter on Nadi Pareeksha in the *Purva Khanda* of *Sharangadhara samhita*. In this work, he mentions that *Dhamani* can be accessed as Nadi at the root of the thumb, which functions as a sign of life. In the *Dipika* commentary on *Sharangadhara samhita*, Acharya Adamalla refers to the Shabdavaha *Dhamani*, thus acknowledging the concept of the Shabdavaha Nadi (*Dhamani*) — a type of *Urdhva vaha Dhamani* that represents the sign of life found at the base of the thumb.¹¹

Table 1 references different aspects of Dhamani, with its subdivisions involved in various *samprapti* of Vyadhi.

Vyadhi	Dosha resides in a Particular division of <i>Dhamani</i> involved	Type of <i>Dhamani</i> involved
Madatyaya ¹²	Pratibudhi, svapa <i>Dhamani</i>	Urdhvavaha <i>Dhamani</i>
Apasmara ¹³	Pratibudhi, Sangya vaha <i>Dhamani</i>	
stana roga ¹⁴	Stanya vaha <i>Dhamani</i>	
Apachi ¹⁵	Manya uparisthitha <i>Dhamani</i>	
Unmada ¹⁶	Vak <i>Dhamani</i>	
Mukha-Minmina-Gadgada, ¹⁷ Swarabheda ¹⁸	Shabda vaha <i>Dhamani</i>	
Sangya nashana ¹⁹	Chetovahini <i>Dhamani</i>	
Arshas ²⁰	Purishavahini <i>Dhamani</i>	Adhovaha <i>Dhamani</i>
Ashmari ²¹	Mutra vaha <i>Dhamani</i>	
Vridhhi ²²	Phala kosha vahini <i>Dhamani</i>	

Prameha pidaka ²³	Rasavaha, pittavaha and kapha vaha <i>Dhamani</i> (not in <i>Urdhva vaha</i> because of Rasayani)	
Visarpa, Kushta, ²⁴	Tiryag-gata <i>Dhamani</i>	Tiryag-gata <i>Dhamani</i>

Urdhvavaha Dhamani – The functions of the *Urdhvavaha Dhamani* are primarily related to higher mental processes. For example, *Vakvaha Dhamani* is responsible for speech, *Ghoshita* is responsible for loud sounds or shouting without words, *Swapiti* governs sleep, *Pratibudhi* relates to consciousness or awakening, *Ashru* controls tear production, and *Stanya* facilitates the secretion of breast milk in women. In the context of alcohol absorption, Sushruta mentions that *Madhya* (intoxicating substances)²⁵ affects the *Indriya* (senses) and *Chetas* or *Buddhi* (mind or intellect) as it travels through the *Urdhvavaha Dhamani* due to the specific influence (Prabhava) of *Madhya*. Similarly, in the pathogenesis of *Apasmara* (epilepsy),²⁶ the doshas, particularly in the *Pratibudhi Dhamani*, are implicated and responsible for this condition.

Adhovaha Dhamani – The functions of the *Adhovaha Dhamani* are primarily associated with gastrointestinal and endocrine functions. For instance, two *Dhamani* are responsible for carrying *Anna* (food), two *Dhamani* carry *Toya* (water), two *Dhamani* in the *Basti* are responsible for carrying *Mutra* (urine), two *Dhamani* are involved in the production of *Shukra* (semen), and two *Dhamani* are accountable for the elimination of *Shukra*. These also play a role in regulating menstrual blood, known as *Artava*. In terms of pathology, during the progression of *Arshas* (hemorrhoids), dosha and *Rakta* (blood) accumulate in the *Purishavaha Dhamani*, a subdivision of the *Adhovaha Dhamani* found in the *Guda Vali* (rectal region), leading to the formation of *Arshas*.²⁷

Tiryag-gata Dhamani – The *Tiryag-gata Dhamani* is primarily associated with the integumentary system and thermoregulation. Dalhana mentioned that the *Tiryag-gata Dhamani* plays a role in *Kushta vyadhi* (skin diseases)²⁸. In certain conditions, such as *Pakshagata* (hemiplegia) and *Vatavyadhi* (disorders related to Vata dosha), all three types of *Dhamani*—*Urdhvavaha*, *Adhovaha*, and *Tiryag-gata*—can be affected, leading to symptoms throughout the body.²⁹

Dhamani – Treatment Aspect

- In the context of *Maha Vatavyadhi Chikitsa*, *Siravyadha* (venesection) is recommended for all *Dhamani* and *Sira vikara* (disorders of the veins).³⁰
- *Chedana* (surgical incision) is a procedure indicated for treating all *Sira* and *Dhamani Roga* (disorders of the *Dhamani*).³¹
- In *Avagahana Sweda* (medicated steam bath), the *Romakupa* (hair follicles), which are the terminal parts of the *Tiryag-gata Dhamani*, help in the absorption of medicines during the *Swedana Karma* (sweating therapy) and provide nourishment to the body (*Tarpanam*).³²
- In *Kushta* (skin diseases), *Virechana* (purgation therapy) is indicated, as the doshas from the *Tiryag-gata Dhamani* may be eliminated via the *Adhovaha Dhamani* due to the connection between the *Adhovaha* and *Tiryag-gata Dhamani*. Specifically, eight separate *Dhamani* from the *Adhovaha Dhamani* carry sweat (*Sveda*) to the *Tiryag-gata Dhamani*.³³

Dhamani – Topographic Relation

Sushruta emphasised that *Dhamani* should be avoided during surgical procedures to prevent complications. In this context, he referred to *Dhamani* as a structural unit within the body.

Dhamani – A Living Entity

Dalhana stated that *Dhamani* evolves from the *Panchabhutas* and connects the five senses (*Pancha indriyas*) and their respective objects (*Arthas*). *Dhamani* forms five distinct connections (*Avarana*) with each sense organ and its corresponding sense object to facilitate their functions. At the time of death, *Dhamani* ceases to maintain these connections, causing the senses to lose their connection with their objects and transition into the state of *Panchatva* (returning to the five elements). Thus, only the *Panchabhutas* remain, but the functions of the senses cease. *Dhamani* connects the senses in their subtle (*Sukshma*) form. It is also destroyed at the end of life, reinforcing that *Dhamani* is a living entity.³⁴

Additionally, it is noteworthy that *Ashtanga Hridaya* describes nine *Dhamani* as *Marma* points, a concept not mentioned by other Acharyas in the context of *Marma*. As discussed earlier, these nine *Dhamani* are crucial for maintaining life (Ayu).³⁵

CONCLUSION

The concept of *Dhamani* in Ayurveda is of immense clinical significance, extending well beyond its theoretical foundations. It is crucial in diagnosing and managing various health conditions, particularly circulatory and systemic imbalances. Clinically, *Dhamani* serves as a diagnostic tool, with its examination at the root of the thumb offering insights into a person's life force and health status. This allows practitioners to assess the body's vital energies and predict potential health outcomes.

Therapeutically, *Dhamani* is essential in circulating *Rasa* (nutrient-rich fluids), contributing to overall health maintenance. Its role is fundamental in restoring balance and promote healing within the body. The concept of *Dhamani* is also central to understanding the pathogenesis of diseases (*Samprapti*), as imbalances in the doshas carried by these vessels can result in systemic disorders. Additionally, *Dhamani Marma* points hold vital significance, and injury to these points can lead to serious consequences, highlighting their importance in both therapeutic and surgical practices.

While Ayurveda views *Dhamani* as a critical element of a holistic system, modern medicine finds correlations with the cardiovascular system, suggesting a promising area for further exploration. This connection allows for integrating ancient Ayurvedic knowledge with contemporary medical practices, enriching our understanding of circulatory health and disease management.

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