



A Systematic and Integrative review of Pāshoya (Foot Bath Therapy): A Classical healing modality

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ABSTRACT

Background- *‘Ilāj bi’l Tadbīr* (regimenal therapy), *‘Ilāj bi’l Taghdhiya* (dietotherapy), *Ilaj-bil-dawa* (pharmacotherapy) and *Ilaj-bil-yad* (surgery) are the four therapeutic modalities under the Unani medical system. *‘Ilāj bi’l Tadbīr* includes several regimenal interventions most of which are based on the healing miracles of water. Hydrotherapy is a very versatile treatment modality, ensuring a wide variety of therapeutic effects. The healing properties of water also provide benefits depending on its temperature and the method of application. Pāshoya (Foot bath therapy), a holistic treatment involving the immersion of feet in warm water, has been utilized for centuries across various cultures. Pāshoya is a non-invasive regimen that involves soaking the feet in warm water, often infused with herbs, salts, or essential oils.

Objective- This therapy aims to promote relaxation, improve circulation, and alleviate certain ailments. This paper explores the historical context, physiological benefits, methods, and potential applications of foot bath therapy, supported by recent scientific studies.

Discussion- Various clinical trials have been conducted for its effect used for enhancing sleep quality. It also involves immersing the foot in a medicated decoction to cure a variety of physical problems hence, recommended for analgesic effect in several musculoskeletal complaints specially associated with feet.

Conclusion- Pāshoya (Foot bath therapy), a time-honored and holistic practice continues to be valued for its numerous health benefits. While empirical evidence supports its efficacy in improving circulation, reducing stress, and managing pain, further research is needed to substantiate claims of detoxification and other health benefits.

Key Words- Hydrotherapy, Pāshoya, Foot bath therapy, regimenal therapies, *Unani* medicine, Greek medicine, *Ilāj bit tadbīr*

INTRODUCTION

Greek medical practitioners used hydrotherapy, also known as the "Water Cure," by applying it topically for its therapeutic benefits through complete submersion. In Greek medicine, water is considered a useful agent of therapeutic merit due to its surface tension, which enables it to adhere and draw out pollutants; it has the expulsive virtue, which aids the body in eliminating wastes and contaminants. The most reactive element and energy receiver, water affects circulation and the vital faculty due to its thermodynamic properties. Water, with its distinctive thermodynamic properties, has markedly different therapeutic effects at different temperatures. Although there are almost an endless variety of ways to apply hydrotherapy, the major ones are Ḥammām (Turkish Bath), Pāshoya (Foot Bath), Ābzān (Sitz Bath), Sponge Bath, Inkibāb (Vapour Bath), Taqmeed (Fomentation), Naṭūl (Irrigation) etc. ¹⁻⁴ Pashoya (foot bath) is a Persian word consisting of two words, Pa means foot and Shoya means "to wash". In Unani medicine, Pāshoya is a most frequently used therapy immersing the feet, up to the ankles, in a shallow

tub of water filled with simple water or herbal decoction along with light massaging of the calf muscles.^{5, 6} According to Unani philosophy, the heart is associated with arms and the brain is associated with feet; therefore, Dāstshoya and Pāshoya felicitate to drain morbid materials from the heart and brain, respectively.^{4,7,8,11}

MATERIALS AND METHOD

RESEARCH GATE, PUBMED, MEDLINE, and GOOGLE SCHOLAR databases were searched for the published articles with Hydrotherapy, Pāshoya, Foot bath therapy, regimenal therapies, *Unani* medicine, *Ilāj bit tadbīr*, etc. This review article only included relevant clinical trials published in peer-reviewed journals in English. Classical Unani books were the source of Unani literature.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND-

Its origins can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as China, Egypt, and Greece, where it was used for its therapeutic and restorative properties. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) employed foot baths to balance qi (energy) and treat various ailments. Ancient Egypt has used foot baths as part of beauty and health rituals, often combined with aromatic oils. Ancient Greece and Rome used public baths including foot soaking as a preliminary step to full-body baths, emphasizing hygiene and relaxation.^{13, 14, 16}



Bronze footbath in Greek (Late 5th–early 4th century BCE)

CLASSIFICATION^{4-9, 11}

According to water temperature and therapeutics it has two types i.e. Pāshoya-i-hārr and Pāshoya-i-Barid.

Pāshoya-i-hārr-Warm water initially stimulates and raises the body temperature, but then relaxes and breaks down, especially in the muscles, joints and blood vessels. It also opens the pores, causes sweating and can penetrate the skin and muscles quite thoroughly. Hot water can also remove hidden abscesses, boils or rashes, causing them to surface for removal. Prolonged immersion in too hot water is not recommended. Warm water improves blood circulation in the body, opens pores and capillaries. Hot water stores a huge amount of caloric energy, which it strongly transfers to the bodies with which it comes into contact. A hot water foot bath is recommended for

insomnia, colds and flu. Hot foot baths boost blood flow to the feet and the entire skin surface, alleviating congestion in the internal organs and brain. This form of bath also raises body warmth, relaxes tight muscles, and stimulates white blood cell activity. A hot foot bath's temperature usually ranges between 43°C and 46°C.

Pāshoya-i-hārr is usually prepared with medicines having hot temperament like Babuna (*Matricaria chamomilla*), Iklilul Mulk (*Trigonella ancata*), Chob Chini (*Smilexchina*), Ushba Maghrabi (*Smilex aspera*), Khirdal (*Brassica nigra*) and Subusgandum (*Triticum sativum*).^{8,11}

Pāshoya-i-Barid- Warm water has gentle soothing, harmonizing and balanced effect. Warm water, particularly lukewarm water, is frequently referred to as "tepid." Warm water is ideal for general bathing purposes. On hot summer days, cool water can help relieve heat and discomfort while also chilling the body. Pāshoya-i-Barid in chill water is effective for lowering fever. Cold water is an effective cooler, refrigerant, and absorber of excess heat, inflammation, and fever.³⁷⁻³⁸ Short-term immersion in cold water might serve as an invigorating, energizing tonic. After bathing in the hot water pools, Romans would take a quick plunge in the frigidarium, or cold-water bath, to strengthen their skin and close their pores. Cold water stimulates, consolidates, and shunts blood circulation inwards into the core and internal organs, whereas hot water relaxes, disperses, and shunts blood circulation out to the body's outside. Cold water constricts blood vessels, promotes circulation alleviate edema and inflammation resulting in a thrilling experience. Cold water immersion should only last about 3 to 4 minutes. If you get a chill, walk out immediately.^{8,11}

Contraindication-

1. Cold water immersion isn't recommended for cold and prone to chills.
2. *Balghamī Mizāj*
3. Age & Build- Those who are weak and feeble and too young and old.
4. Avoid cold foot baths if the kidneys are weak, or the bladder sensitive or irritable.

Pāshoya-i-Bārid is prepared with medicines having cold temperament like Gul-i-banafsha (*Trianthemaporulacastrum*), Gul-i-Khitmi (*Althaea officinalis*), Gul-i-neelofar (*Nymphae lotus*) and Inabussalab (*Solanum nigrum*).

Alternating water baths- It is usually in the form of partial baths and a powerful method of healing. Hot water removes old, stagnant blood from the body's interior, while the cold-water pumps fresh blood back to the body part to improve circulation in the feet and legs, alternate between hot and cold. The circulation is significantly boosted by alternating heat and cold applications, and the affected area begins to throb and pulse. This is a sign of recovery and renewal. Typically, a 3–4 minutes hot application is followed by 1-2 minutes of cool application. You can repeat this cycle twice to thrice or even more, but always finish with a hot or warm application to remove or neutralize any remaining chills.²⁷⁻²⁸

RULES AND PRINCIPLES OF PĀSHOYA^{2,8,11}

1. *Pāshoya* (Foot bath) is contraindicated in high-grade fever because the hot water temperature raises the severity of the fever. However, it is indicated with lukewarm water in some severe mental illnesses like *Sarsām* (Meningitis).
2. During the therapy, a blanket should be placed between the face and the tub of the liquid to avoid vapor absorption in the brain.
3. *Pāshoya-i-Hārr* brings warmth to the skin, helps to diverge morbid matter, softens the skin, and enhances its effect when drugs according to the need are added.
4. The foot should be covered by a blanket after the therapy so it cannot directly be exposed to the cold wind & can also be repeated many times.
5. When legs are tied to absorb the matter, they should be placed in warm water when removed so that the vapors do not turn towards the brain. It should be open from the foot area to the thighs. *Pāshoya* is indicated in fever because it opens the skin pores, perspiration and draws heat to the periphery of the body²⁰

6. If *Pāshoya* and *Hijamah* both are indicated firstly *Hijamah-bila-shurt* than *Pāshoya* is done so that deep seated vapors which has been absorbed due to *Hijamah* gets dissolved and do not move upward.

PHYSIOLOGICAL BENEFITS

- Improved Circulation: Warm water immersion dilates blood vessels, enhancing blood flow to the lower extremities.³⁰
- Relaxation and Stress Relief: Foot baths can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress and promoting a sense of calm.^{23,25, 42}
- Pain Relief: Soaking feet in warm water can alleviate discomfort caused by conditions like arthritis, plantar fasciitis, and muscle soreness.^{33,36}
- Detoxification: Some proponents claim that foot baths help in drawing out toxins through the skin, although scientific evidence is limited.

INDICATIONS

Pāshoya which is used for *Tahlil Mawad* and *Taskin Dard* is always hot in temperament while the *Pāshoya* which used for *Qabd al-'Urūq* (vascular astringent) is usually cold in temperament. Cold water is indicated for varicose veins, foot edema, headaches, low blood pressure, sweaty feet, and sprained ankle. Below is the list of most common diseases in which *Pāshoya* has been recommended-

System involved	Indications of Diseases
<i>Amrād-i-Ra's-o-Nizām-i-A'sāb-o-Dimāgh</i> (Diseases of head and nervous system)	Ṣuda'-i-hār (Acute Headache) ⁸ , Ṣuda-i-bārid (Headache) ⁸ , Ṣudā' Damawī (Sanguineous Headache), Ṣudā' Ṣafrāwī (Bilious headache) Ṣudā' Khumārī (Liquor-induced Headache), Sahar (Insomnia), ^{8,14-21} Phrenitis, Sarsām (Meningitis), Coma, Peripheral Neuropathy ^{27-28, 37, 41,47} , Stress ²⁵
Amrād-i-'Ayn (Diseases of eye)	Ramad / Ramad- ī- Ḥaḥiqī (Conjunctivitis) Ḥumra al- 'Ayn / Surkhi -i-Chashm (redness of eye), Dam 'a (Epiphora)
Amrād-i-Udhun, Anf-oḤalq (Diseases of ear, nose and throat)	Khunāq (Diphtheria), Waram-i-Lahāt (Uvulitis), Waram Ghudad-i-Ḥalq (Adenitis)
Amrād-i-Qalb (Diseases of heart)	Khafaqān (palpitation), Ghashī (Syncope)
Ḥummāyāt (Fever)	Ḥummā Silliya (Tubercular fever), Ḥummā Dā'ima / Ḥummā Lāzima (Continuous fever), Ḥummā Dā'ira (Intermittent fever), Ḥummā al-Ghibb Dā'ira (Tertian fever/ bilious intermittent fever), Ḥummā Muḥarriqa (High-grade fever) ⁸
Amrād-i-Niswān-o-Qabālāt (Gynaecology and obstetrics)	Iḥtibās al-Ṭamth (Amenorrhoea) Ikhtināqal Raḥim (Hysteria)
<i>Amrād-i-'Izām-o Mafāṣil</i> (Bones and joints disorders)	<i>Waja' al-Mafāṣil</i> Härr (Acute Arthritis), <i>Niqris</i> (Gout) ^{8,11}
<i>Amrād-i-Jild-o-Taz'iniyāt</i> (Diseases of skin and Cosmetology)	<i>Taqashshuf al-Jild</i> (Exfoliation of skin), <i>Khaṣar</i> / <i>Taşqī'</i> (Frostbite) ⁴³ , <i>Dawālī</i> (Varicose veins), <i>Khushk al-Jild</i> (Dryness of skin), <i>Ghāngharānā Dhayābiṭusiyya</i> (Diabetic gangrene), Pedicure, Sore feet, Crack heels

DISCUSSION

Pāshoya (Foot bath therapy), a time-honored practice, continues to be valued for its numerous health benefits. The study shows that cold foot bath had a significant impact, whereas the hot foot bath had the minimal effect. However, hot-water foot bath had better body-warming effects and health advantages for older persons and those who felt cold due to poor circulation.³¹⁻³² Although cold-water foot bath has been reported to have a stress-inducing effect on the cardiovascular system, the study's findings revealed that the influence on blood pressure was insufficient to support such an effect.²⁴⁻²⁵ Research also reveals that footbath therapy is excellent in controlling workplace stress, with cold-water foot bath being especially beneficial for health and stress reduction. Research in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine demonstrated that foot baths can reduce cortisol levels, a marker of stress⁴¹⁻⁴², in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome³¹. For instance, Park et al. reported that foot bathing significantly increased quality of life by regulating skin temperature and attenuation of neurotoxicity. While empirical evidence supports its efficacy in improving circulation, reducing stress, and managing pain, further research is needed to substantiate claims of detoxification and other health benefits.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION-

As a non-invasive, harmless treatment technique, foot bath therapy can be reliably used not only to reduce psychological stress, but also to improve cognition. Integrating foot bath therapy into modern healthcare and wellness practices offers a holistic approach to enhancing physical and mental well-being. This technique is very safe, cost-effective, easy to administer, and may be employed in low-resource settings also, without possible side-effects. The use of foot baths can be a simple, effective, and safe nursing intervention. As a result, this intervention has practical applicability in nursing homes and hospitals. Furthermore, as a non-pharmacological and cost-effective nursing intervention, patients can simply adopt it after obtaining instruction from community health nurses.

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