



Review Article

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ROLE OF *KOSHTHA* AND *AGNI* IN *PANCHAKARMA*: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life originated in India more than 5,000 years ago and is often called the “Mother of All Healing”. *Panchakarma* is considered to be the most eminent branch of *Ayurveda*, as the name suggests it is a ‘five-step’ process for a complete detoxifying and rejuvenating therapy. Every individual is unique in *Prakruti*, *Dosha*, *Agni*, *Koshtha* and such other factors. So before administrating any *Panchakarma* procedure it is must to assess the *Agni* and *Koshtha* of the person. *Agni* and *Koshtha* role can be explained in 3 aspects- i.e., *Poorva Karma* (*Deepana* - *Pachana*, *Snehana* and *Swedana*), *Pradhana Karma* (*Vamana karma*, *Virechana Karma*, *Basti Karma* and *Nasya*) and *Paschat Karma* (*Samsarjana krama*). An attempt is made in the article to highlight the importance of *Agni* and *Koshtha* in all the aspects with respect to *Panchakarma*.

Keyword: *Panchakarma*, *Agni*, *Koshtha*, *Poorvakarma*, *Pradhana Karma*, *Paschat Karma*.

INTRODUCTION

Panchakarma presents a unique approach of *Ayurveda* with specially designed five procedures of internal purification of the body through the nearest possible route.

In *Rasa Shastra*, *Shodhana* is a process that is employed during the pharmaceutical processing either to detoxify, purify or to potentiate the efficacy of the raw materials. In the same way in *Panchakarma*, the *Shodhana* process is employed to purify the body and removal of the toxic elements from the body allowing the permanent healing of tissues and channels. *Koshtha*, *Agni* and *Bala* are the important assessment factor in *Panchakarma*.

Agni

Agni is termed as *Vaishwanara* as it takes the person from *mrityuloka* to *swargaloka*. It is an important factor and is equivalent to *prana*, is one among *dashapranaayatana*. The concept of *tejas* (*Agni*) is implicit in the *rajasa* of *Sankhya* system, *Rajas*, stands for kinetic energy of the universe. Thus, for every motion *Agni* is essential and this motion, in turn produces *Agni*.

*Agniushmaniyatva jagat*¹

Ayurveda considers that *Dehagni* is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, *oja*, *tejas* and *prana*.² When *Agni* stops functioning, the individual dies and if *Agni* functions normally the individual can lead healthy life.³

Agni in *Ayurveda* is reflected in the concept of *Pitta*. The term *Pitta* is derived from the root ‘*tap*’- to heat or to burn. This term has three meanings viz.

- *Tapa aishwarya*- factor which responsible to make one achieve the eight kind of benefits

- *Tapa daha* – act of burning of the nutrition consumed
- *Tapa santape* - the generation of heat

Pitta is same as *Agni*, since it performs fire like actions i.e., *Paka* which refers to *Pachana*, *dahana*, *parinama*, *pravrtti*, *prakasana*, *ranjana*, or *varnakara* and *prabhakara*. Not in very aspects these 2 are same - *Agni* has opposite *gunas* when comparing to *Pitta*.⁴

The seat of *Agni* is *Grahani*⁵, so the strength of the *Grahani* is from *Agni* itself, and the strength of *Agni* is from *Grahani*. When the *Agni* undergoes vitiation, *Grahani* also gets vitiated and produces diseases.

Koshtha

Koshtha is the nature of bowel habit, which originates as an entity of *Prakruti* at the time of conception and the anatomical entity, the space or the hollowness of the body includes all the organs of abdominal and thoracic cavities⁶ which represents motility of the intestines and movement of food and faecal matter in the alimentary canal and elimination of stool. *Acharya Charaka* also spoken of *Koshtha* as *Mahasrotas*.⁷ *Koshtha* assessment plays a Pivotal role in the attainment of *Samyak Shodhana*.

According to *Charaka* – ‘*matra kalashraya yuktihi*’, the *matra* and *kala* are to be taken as the main keys for implication of *Agni* and *Koshtha* as parameters respectively.

Role of *Koshtha* and *Agni* in *Poorvakarma*

Poorvakarma is the first set of action which is a combination of external and internal procedures and before the actual procedure of purification begins, there is a need to prepare the body with prescribed methods to encourage it to let go of the toxins. The main cause of maximum of diseases is *ama* or undigested toxins that get formed in the system due to external factors and spread

to different parts of the body. Through *Poorvakarma* these toxins are channelized and collected for easy removal at *Pradhana karma* stage.

In Deepana and Pachana

Deepana means kindling or igniting of *Agni* but it does not digest the *ama*⁸. *Deepana* drugs are *Agni* and *Vayu bhuta* dominance – it increases the stimulation of *jatharagni* and so increases the appetite and improves *abhyavaharana shakti*. It makes the body ready to accept the drugs.

Pachana causes the digestion of *ama* and used as a *poorvakarma* before *shodhana*. It increases the *jarana shakti*. If *Snehana* is done in *amayukta* condition, it leads to the destruction of *sanja* and even death and if *samshodhana* medicine is taken in the condition of *ajeerna*, it will lead to *vibandha* and *glani*. On the contrary, it will produce *samyak shodhana* in the absence of *ama*.⁹

In Snehapana

Sneha Prayoga without the consideration of *Agni* is irrational.¹⁰ When the administration *kala* of *shodhananga snehapana* is considered it is been mentioned that it should be given in early morning hours when the earlier food is digested and *Agni* should be in optimum level not very strong. There are different concepts explained by *Acharyas* in the context of *Snehapana* and relation with *Koshtha* and *Agni*. *Ghruta* administered along with *kshara* and *Lavana* and then *Swedana* followed *Virechana* is employed in *Manda Agni* and *Krura Koshtha* persons.¹¹ *Sneha* taken by a person having dominance of *pitta* in *Grahani* and having strong digestive power gets digested quickly by the virtue of power of *Agni*.¹²

Acharya Vagbhata has mentioned about *Hrasiyasi Matra* (test dose). *Hrasiyasi Matra* is the quantity of *Sneha* which digests within one *Yama* and this can be used as trial dose when the *Agni* is unknown.

During *Snehapana*, *Agni Vriddhi* (increase in digestive function) is expected. All though *Sneha* has opposite character than *Agni*, when it gets digested, it serves as a fuel and kindles the *Agni*. This *Agni* has more power to digest even more quantity of *Sneha*. Therefore, while calibrating *Agnibala*, quantity of *Sneha* and duration for digestion plays important role. *Agnibala* and digestive period are inversely proportional i.e., as *Agnibala* increases, the digestion period is bound to decrease, even when the same dose is administered or when the dose is increased.

For the administration and fixation of *sneha*, *Koshtha* should be assessed.

1. *Mridu koshtha* - 3 days should be given → *uttama matra sneha* should not be given in this type because it will cause *Agnimandhya*
2. *Krura koshtha*- 7 days should be given → if *madhyama* or *hrshva matra* is given in *krura koshtha*; *sneha* is not rational because this dose does not cause *doshoklesha*.¹³
3. In *Sadhyo sneha*- *Koshtha* should be considered *Mridu* and as their will be *Swayam utklishta dosha*, *Agni* doesn't have upper hand; however, administration of *shodhana aushadha* after *Sadhyo sneha* is after assessing *Agni* and *Koshtha*.

In Swedana

Swedana helps in *dosha Dravatva* and *Agni Deepana*.¹⁴ *Ushna* and *tikshna* properties of *Swedana karma* help in digestion of *ama*

dosha, which results in stimulation of all the 13 types of *Agni*. In case of *Agni Mandhya*, *Swedana* should not be performed.

In Bahirparimarjana chikitsa

Bhrajaka pitta plays a vital role in absorption of drug through skin i.e., in *Bahirparimarjana chikitsa*¹⁵. When we see the mode of action of *Utsadana* and *Udgharshana*, it causes dilatation of *Siramukha* and stimulating the *Agni* situated in the skin.¹⁶

Role of Koshtha and Agni in Vamana

The *gunas* of *Vamana Aushadhi*'s includes *agni* and *vayu mahabhuta* predominant and possess the *Vyavayi*, *ushna* and *tikshna guna* which suggests that the drug shows *Prabhava* before digested to *jatharagni*. Improper or perversion of procedures like *Vamana*, which leads to vitiation of *Agni*. *Acharya Sushruta* quotes that by looking at the *vyadhi bala*, *purusha bala* and *agni bala* dosage should be fixed, if person given more than *agni bala* it leads to *ajeerna* and *vishtambha* and does *Pachana*. There are 3 types of *Koshtha* in relation to *Vamana* explained by *Arundatta*. If *shleshma adikatwam* is there it is *mridutwam* so less dose of *Vamana aushadhi* is enough, if *shleshma madhyatwam* it is *madhyatwam* and if *shleshma hinatwam* is there it is *kruratwam*. So, the treatment should be planned by considering all this.

Role of Koshtha and Agni in Virechana

Proper assessment of *Agni* and *Koshtha* leads to *Samyak Yogas* of *Virechana*. *Virechana* drugs are administered after *shleshma kala* has passed and determining the *Koshtha* of the person. It is necessary to determine the nature of *Koshtha* viz *Mridu*, *madhyama* and *krura koshtha* for planning of *Virechana karma* as *ausadha* gets *Pachyamana avastha* in *Virechana* procedure.¹⁷ In *krura koshtha*, there will be *Grahani ulbana anila* and in *Mridu koshtha*, *Udirna pitta- alpa kapha- grahani manda maruta* will be there. If *Virechana aushadhi* is given in person of *krura koshtha*, the drugs get digested instead of purgation. So, for this condition *Basti* should be given before giving *Virechana*.¹⁸

In *Mridu koshtha* person, if *ati tikshna aushadhi* is given it will pass quickly without *dosha* properly eliminated.¹⁹ According to *Sharangadhara Samhita*, *tikshna virechana* should be given in *krura Koshtha* persons, *Mridu virechana* in *Mridu Koshtha* persons and *madhyama virechana* in *madhyama Koshtha*. *Asamyak Virechana* leads to *Agni mandya* and *Samyak Virechana* leads to *Agni vriddhi*.

Intervention of *Agni* in other types of *Virechana*-

- *Anulomana* – *kritwa paka*
- *Sramsana* – *paktavyam yadi paktaiva*
- *Rechana* – *vipakwam yadapakwam*

Role of Koshtha and Agni in Basti

When we see the *guna* of *Niruha*, it is said to be *Agni vardhaka*. Moreover, *basti dravya* doesn't come into the direct contact of the *jatharagni* but there is significant role of *Agni* and *Koshtha* in *Basti karma* as well as in *samikshya bhava* mentioning of *Agni* is there.²⁰

Acharya Chakrapani mentioned the concept like '*pakwashayooplepaka bahirnisratineya ushna pachti*'²¹ in *Anuvasana basti* context. *Acharya Chakrapani* had quoted about *Soshyamana Agni* which is present in the *Pakwashaya*.

Some concepts for supporting that *agni* and *koshtha* have a role in *Basti Karma* have been mentioned. The contraindication of *Niruha basti* includes *ajeerna* and *manda agni* condition and *Anuvasna basti* in *manda agni* and *guru koshtha* persons and if *Anuvasna basti* is administered in these persons it further reduces the power of digestion. Indication of *Anuvasna basti* includes those having *tikshna agni*, *ruksha* and *kevala vata rogas*²² because these persons absorb *sneha* quickly just as sand filter the water. If we see the indication of *Matra Basti*, it is been told in *alpa agni* person and *Madhutailika Basti* in *Mridu koshtha* person. If the *Anuvasna Basti* is given continuously it will destroy the *Agni* and aggravate the *dosha*. If excessively sharp and hot recipe of *Basti* given in *Mridu koshtha* it will cause symptoms of *atiyoga* of *Vamana* and *Virechana*.²³ If in *krura koshtha* and *Maha dosha* person, *alpa virya aushadhi* is given causes *margavarodha* thus obstructs *vata*.²⁴ If in *krura koshtha* and *durbala* person, recipe which is cold and less in quantity is given it will cause *avarana* and related symptoms.²⁵ If in *Mridu koshtha* person, *ruksha*, *tikshna*, *bahu matra aushadhi* is given causes *parikartika* etc.²⁶

Role of *Koshtha* and *Agni* in *Nasya*

There is no direct relation of *koshtha* and *agni* in *Nasya* but because of the *agni* only the absorption of *Nasya aushadhi* takes place. In *Ajeerna* condition, if *Nasya* is given it will cause occlusion of circulation of *dosha* moving upward and causes *Shwasa*, *Kasa*, *Chardi*. So *Deepana* and *Pachana* before administration of *Nasya* should be done. There is limited role of *Koshtha* in *Nasya* but in *Pratishyaya* considering the *Koshtha*, *Nasya* is given.

In *Nasya*, *Agni* and *Koshtha* have limited implication, however it is said that *Nasya* should be preceded by *Shodhana* and *Abhyanga* and *Sweda* done as *poorvakarma* in which all *Agni* and *Koshtha* plays a vital role.

Role of *Koshtha* and *Agni* in *Pashchat karma*

The *Pashchat karma* of *Shodhana* includes *Samsarjana krama* because after *Shodhana* due to the elimination of the *doshas* from the body, *Agni* becomes weak, so *Peyadi Samsarjana krama* should be followed. Just like too many fire woods when placed on the fire diminishes the fire, similarly *guru anna* further deranges the already weakened *Agni*. Whereas *laghu* meals in sufficient quantity and on appropriate time will accentuate the *Agni* just like the way small twigs and fire woods would aid proper burning of the fire. Similarly weakened digestive fire gets kindle by *Samsarjana krama* gradually and becomes capable of digesting even heaviest meal.

DISCUSSION

Koshtha and *Agni* are the important concepts which are useful in different aspects of treatment, so understanding the relation of *Prakruti - agni - koshtha* with reference to *Shodhana* procedure is very important.

The types of *koshtha* are related to the presence of *sara guna* like in *Pittaja prakriti* due to the presence of extra *sara guna* leads to *Mridu koshtha* i.e., *kseerena virechyati*. When we consider the 3 stages of *Shodhana*; in *Snehapana*, *Virechana* and *Samsarjana krama* only, there is direct contact of *aushadhi* to *koshtha* and *agni* and leads to the digestion of drugs but role of *koshtha* and *agni* doesn't limited in these only, it extends and indirectly related to all the other procedures of *Panchakarma*. As if we see *Vamana* drugs are not undergoing digestion but still there is hampering of *Agni* but less than that of *Virechana*. This can be understood

under different heading - first one is the magnitude of the drug contact. The *Vamana* drugs are just in the level of *Amashaya* but in *Virechana*, drugs have to travel whole through the GI tract. As the contact time of *Virechana aushadhi* is more than that in *Vamana* so the *Agni* hampering is more in the *Virechana*. Second one is the time taken for the completion of the entire procedure which is less in the *Vamana* when comparing to *Virechana* and so *Agni* is less hampered. *Koshtha* and *Agni* have equal importance in *Basti* and *Nasya* for the absorption of drug and then showing its effects.

Generally, in *Ayoga of Shodhana* the *Koshtha* and *Agni* should be seen and next dose of *aushadhi* should be administered. In *Rikta koshtha* and *Mridu koshtha*, *ati tikshna aushadhi* if given it will firstly cause the flow of *mala*, *pitta* and *kapha* and simultaneously *rasaraktadi dhatu srava* also is taken place leading to the *ati yoga*. If there is *aparigynat koshtha*, then *Mridu koshtha* and *alpa Mridu aushadhi* should be given. Impaired *Agni* is the root cause of all diseases, so proper care of *koshtha* and *Agni* should be taken.

CONCLUSION

Koshtha and *Agni* is the basic and important concept in *Ayurveda*. For the administration of drugs and also in every stage of *Panchakarma*, *Koshtha* and *Agni* play a key role. So, from the above, it can be concluded that there is significance role of *Koshtha* and *Agni* in *Panchakarma*, which has been misunderstood and misinterpreted and not used properly. It plays an important role in selection of the line of treatment of disease. If anyone administers without considering *Koshtha* and *Agni*, it leads to severe complications, even death may occur. So, it is obligatory to include *Agni* and *Koshtha* in the *Panchakarma*.

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