



Review Article

ROLE OF AGNI IN PANCHAKARMA PRACTICE: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Panchakarma is a complex system of the expulsion of vitiated *Doshas* i.e., toxins, or waste and thus inducing purification of the body. They are therapeutic emesis (*Vamana*), therapeutic purgation (*Virechana*), decoction enema (*Niruha Vasti*), oil enema (*Anuvasana Vasti*), and instillation of medicine through the nose, (*Nasya*). All *Panchakarma* procedures are carried out in three stages known as *Poorvakarma* (pre-operative procedures), *Pradhanakarma* (operative procedures), and *Paschat karma* (post-operative procedures). *Agni* has a very important role in all these *Poorva-Pradhana* and *Paschat karma*. The order of *Panchakarma* starts with *Deepana-Pachana*. Then *Sneha-Sweda* and *Pradhana karma*. The role of *Deepana-Pachana* is the correction of deranged *Agni*. Because a *Dravya* has to get digested properly by the *Jatharagni* after which it starts its action, Exception for this in *Vamana dravya*. Furthermore, following *Pradhana karma*, the body experiences *Suddhi* as a result of the removal of *Doshas*, which results in *Agnimandya*. *Agnimandya* is corrected by *Samsarjana krama*. Thus, the successful administration of *Panchakarma* is solely dependent on the person's *Agni* status. So, in this paper, a humble attempt is made to understand the role of *Agni* in *Panchakarma* practice.

INTRODUCTION

In light of this scenario, there is an enormous window of opportunity opening up for Ayurveda, particularly with *Panchakarma*^[1-3]. With five uniquely designed procedures for internal body cleaning via the nearest path, *Panchakarma* offers a distinctive approach to Ayurveda. The need to undertake the purification of biological systems from gross channels up to molecular levels is described classically in terms of *Samsodhana* and *Panchakarma*. *Panchakarma* is a complex system of the expulsion of vitiated *Doshas*, carried out in three domains i.e., *Poorvakarma*, *Pradhanakarma*, and *Paschat karma*.

Role of Agni in Poorvakarma: *Panchakarma* therapy is preceded by *Poorva Karmas* viz., *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Snehana*, *Swedana*. *Deepana* and *Pachana* advocated for improving the states of *Kosthagni*.

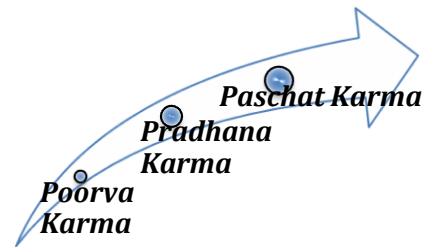


Illustration 1: Trividha karma

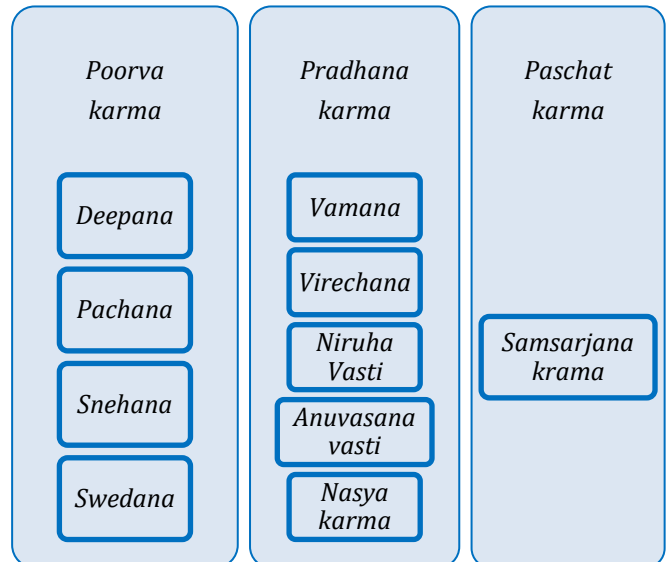


Illustration 2: Panchakarma

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1. Deepana-pachana (Use of Digestive and Carminative Drugs)

Drugs that quantitatively and qualitatively increase *Agni* are termed as *Deepana-pachana dravyas*. Both medicines aid to bring the same state of *Nirama* which are highly essential for the proper conduction of *Sodhana* therapy. If *Sodhana* therapy is administered in an *Ama* condition, it will destroy the body in the same way that extracting juice from unripe fruit^[4], and there is a chance of working the therapy in the opposite direction.^[5]

2. Snehana (Oleation Therapy): It refers to the administration of oily substances or lipids of either plant or animal origin either internally or externally in the body. The definition of *Snehana* (oleation therapy) given by *Acharya Charaka*^[6] implies that the procedure which brings about *Snehana* (oiliness), *Vishyandana* (liquefaction), *Mardava*

(softness), and *Kledana* (moistness) is called *Snehana*. These actions are produced both internally and externally. When *Sodhananga snehapana* (Internal administration of *Sneha*) is considered, we have to assume that these actions are taking place in the minute channels inside the body. The *Sneha* which is administered before *Sodhana* (purification therapy) helps in the *Koshtagati* (movement of *Doshas* towards *Koshta*) of *Sakha-gata dosha* by bringing about their *Vridhhi* (Increase), *Vishyandana* (*Vilayana*-dissolve), and *Vayu nigraha* (controlling *Vata*). Then only it can be expelled out through the nearest route. The judicious application of theories regarding *Agni* is evident during the whole course of this therapy. The dose of *Sneha* itself is determined by the assessment of the digestive power of the individual^[7].

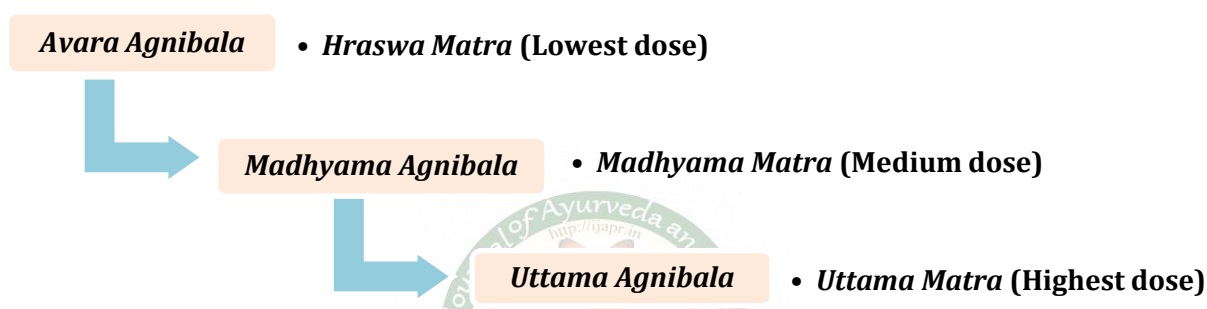


Illustration 3: Agnibala and Dose of Sneha

Arunadatta states it is unwise to administer *Sneha* without taking the power of *Agni* into account.^[8] Initially, *Sneha* should only be given in *Hrasva matra* (the lowest dose). If *Sneha* is administered in *Prabhuta matra* (the highest dose), it may result in loss of life of the patient. Even though *Diptagni* is mentioned as a *Samyak snigdha lakshana* by all the Acharyas, to continue the procedure of *Snehapana*, *Agni Deepthi*

should be there from the beginning onwards. Thus, we can say that the commencement, sustainability, and stoppage of *Snehapana* exclusively depend on the status of *Agni*. The dose fixation of *Snehapana* also solely depends upon the status of *Agni*. While selecting the *Sneha dravyas* for *Snehapana*, the physician should analyze the *Agni*, as the *Chathu Snehas* are indicated in different *Agni* statuses.

Table 1: Selection of Sneha dravyas according to the status of Agni

S.No.	Sneha Dravyas	Indication
1	<i>Sarpi + Saindhva</i> (rock salt) and <i>Pippali</i> ^[9]	<i>Manadagni</i> (less digestive fire)
2	<i>Taila</i>	<i>Kleshshaha</i> (those can tolerate difficult situations), <i>Atyagni</i> ^[10,11]
3	<i>Vasa</i>	<i>Atayagni</i> (increased digestive fire)
4	<i>Majja</i>	<i>Ghasmara</i> ^[12] (<i>Uttama Abhyavaharana Shakti</i>) <i>Kleshshaha</i> (those can tolerate difficult situations)

3. Swedana (Sudation Therapy): It is one of the important *Poorvakarma* for all *Panchakarma*. *Swedana* aids in *Doshagati* from *Sakha* to *Koshta*. It produces *Paka* of *Dosha* because of its *Ushna Guna*. It does *Srotomukha vishodhana* (to clean the orifices of *Srotas*), *Swedana* supposedly instills *Nirmalatva* (cleanliness) in the *Srotas*, according to *Acharya Sushruta*^[13]. *Dosha dravatva* is produced by *Swedana*, and it helps in the easy elimination of vitiated *Doshas*. The *Ushna* and *Teekshna* properties

of *Swedana dravya* help in the digestion of *Ama dosha*, and stimulates *Agni*. If there is proper *Jeerna ahara lakshana*, then only *Swedana* can be done. For that, proper *Agni* should be there.

Role of Agni in Pradhanakarma: *Pradhana karma* includes *Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Niruha Vasti Anuvasana Vasti*, and *Nasya karma*. There is a definite role for *Agni* in all these procedures.

1. Vamana (Therapeutic Emesis): The first and most important *Pradhana karma* (primary procedure) of *Panchakarma* therapy is considered to be *Vamana karma*, which is recommended for the purification of the *Urdhwabhaga* of the body. It means to cause therapeutic vomiting or to expel the vitiated *Doshas* through the oral route. It is the process through which the stomach's contents, including *Kapha* and *Pitta*, are expelled from the body through the oral route. The basic rule is to expel vitiated *Doshas* through the route that is nearest to them, and the oral route is the nearest route for the expulsion of *Kapha dosha*, which manifests as *Vamana karma*. Even though *Vamana* is indicated in *Mandangi*, the Acharya Charaka^[14], and Susrutha^[15], they opine that it can be administered only to a person having

Samyak agni dipti^[16]. After *Poorvakarmas*, agni will be in *Samavastha* and in that *Avastha vamana dravyas* should be administered.

2. Virechana (Therapeutic purgation): *Virechana* is the method of eradicating morbid *Doshas* through *Adhobhaga*, i.e., *Guda* (anus). Since *Doshas* can be eliminated by any pathway, the term "*Virechana*" is broad and is used to describe *Vamana karma* as well^[17]. Despite the *Agneya* nature of the *Virechana* medications, *Virechana karma* is contraindicated in *Mandagni*. Unlike *Vamana Dravya*, *Virechana Dravyas* perform during their *Pachyamana Avastha*, which is referred to when they are digesting. One of the *Samyak lakshana* of *Virechana* is the regular operation of *Agni*.

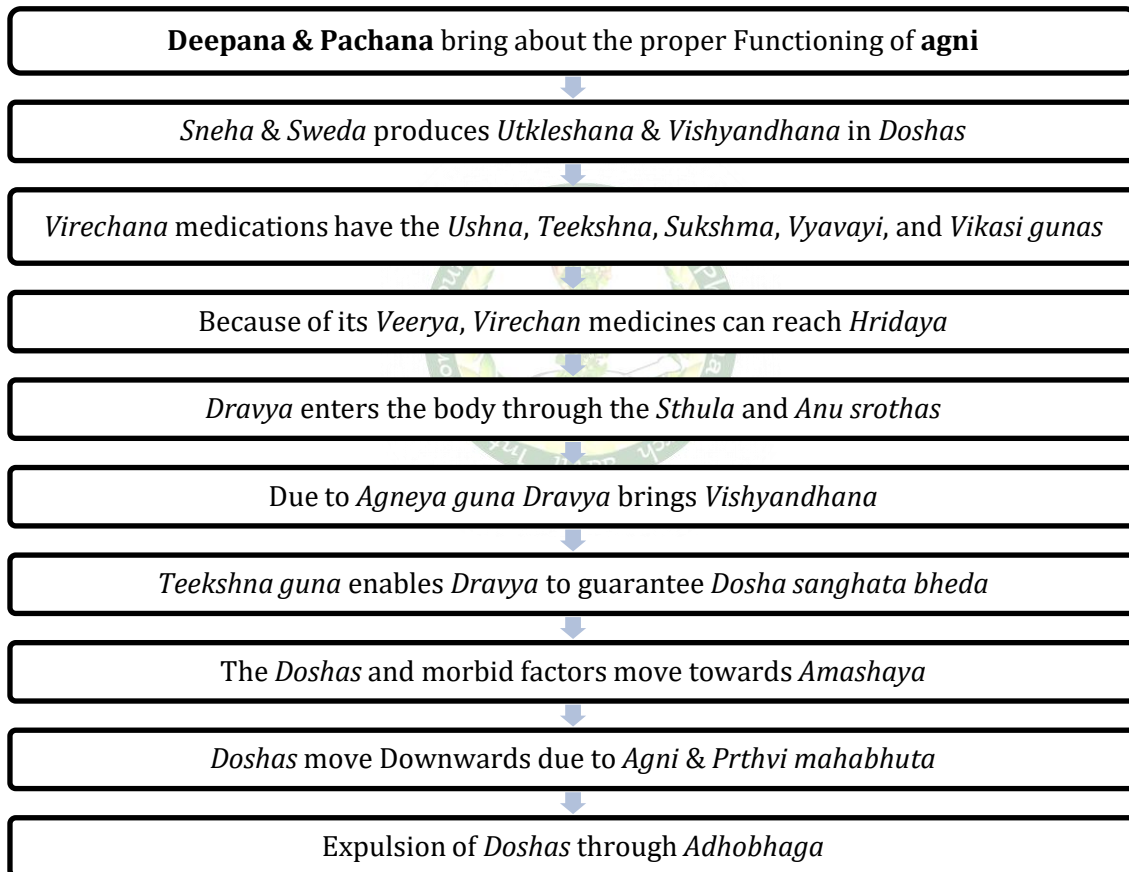


Illustration 4: Virechana Karmukata Vasti

Table 2: Contraindications of Panchakarma procedures according to the status of Agni

S.No.	Types of Karma	Contraindications
1	<i>Snehapana</i>	<i>Nitya Mandagni</i> ^[32] , <i>Aama Dosha</i>
2	<i>Virechana</i>	<i>Agnimandya</i>
3	<i>Niruha & Anuvasana Vasti</i>	<i>Manadagni</i>

3. Vasti (Therapeutic Enema): Both *Niruha vasti* (*Kashaya vasti*) and *Anuvasana vasti* (oil *Vasti*) are contra indicated in *Mandagni* (low digestive power)^[18]. In *Gridrasi Chikitsa* (treatment of

sciatica) Acharya, Chakradatta makes it clear that only *Vasti* can be performed after *Sodhana*, either *Vamana* or *Virechana*. That also indicates the state of *Niramavastha*, i.e., proper *Agni deepthi* should be

there before conducting *Vasti karma*^[19]. *Samyak Niruha Vasti* will also bring *Agni Deepthi*. So after every *Kashaya vasti*, *Sneha vasti* should be administered to protect against the increase in *Agni*^[20]. Application of *Nithya Sneha Vasti* (daily administering oil enema) also depends on *Agni* status. If a person is having *Rookshata* (dryness in the body), *Deepthagni* (proper *Agni*), doing physical exercises routinely, and having *Vatika* aliments, it is recommended to administer *Sneha Vasi* daily. For those people administering *Sneha vasti* once every two or three days, it will be like pouring water over sand^[21]. In other cases, a continuous administration of *Sneha vasti* will hamper the digestive fire^[22]. The simultaneous administration of *Sneha vasti* and *Snehapana* is also contraindicated as it leads to *Agnimandya*^[23]. In the case of *Niruhavasti*, all *Acharyas* recommended its administration before taking food: if *Kashyaya vasti* is administered after consuming food, *Agni* will be displaced from its position, i.e., there will be *Agnimandya*^[24]. In this way, *Vasti karma* is directly impacted by *Agni*. Therefore, performing *Vasti karma* without considering *Agni's* condition is illogical.

4. Nasya (Instillation of medicine through the Nose): *Acharya Charaka* made it very distinct in the *Nasya Karma* contraindication that it cannot be done in an *Ajeerna* situation^[25]. That itself indicates the need for proper *Agni* before the conduction of this procedure.

Role of Agni in Paschat karma: *Paschat Karma* is the regimen to be followed after *Pradhana Karma*. Immediately after the *Sodhana* procedure, *Agni* gets hampered^[26]. Hence it is mandatory to follow *Paschatkarma* to bring back the *Agni* to normal status. *Paschat Karma* is done in the form of *Samsarjana Krama*. This is done to gradually improve the *Agni* and to produce the desired *Shodhana* results (benefits of bio-purification). These include *Agni Vriddhi* (improved ability to digest food), *Vyadhi Upashanthi* (reduced severity of disease), *Prakruti Anuvartana* (normalization of body parts), an increase in *Bala* (strength) and *Vrushatha* (sexual potency), *Jaram krucchena Labhathe* (delayed aging process), and *Chiram Jeevati Anamaya* (living a long life without disease)^[27]. According to *Acharya Chakrapani*, *Samsarjana karma* is given after *Vamana* and *Virechana* because there is *Prabhuta* elimination of *Doshas* which causes *Kshobha* in the body, leading to *Agnimandya*. For *Agni sandhukshana* (to increase the digestive fire), *Samsarjana Karma* is followed. In the case of *Vasti*, there is less *Agnimandya*, so *Samsarjan Karma* is not followed^[28]. The two choices for raising the patient's *Agni* are *Oushadhi* (medication) and *Ahara* (diet). Yet, as a result of *Samshodhana Karma*, the patient develops *Shunyadeham Pratikarasahishnu*

(Intolerance to adverse conditions)^[29], which indicates that the patient would not be able to withstand the *Veerya* of medication. Since *Krutanna Kalpana* is manifested by *Rasa*, *Acharya* has suggested using *Peya* (thin gruel), *Vilepi* (thick gruel), *Yusha* (vegetable soup), and *Mamsa Rasa* (meat soup)^[30]. Never start *Guru Aharas* immediately after *Sodhana Karma*. *Peyadi Karma* will improve *Agni* by administering dry grass initially and then cow dung or pieces of wood in a *Homa*, where *Agni* is very less^[31].

CONCLUSION

Since the digestive fire (*Agni*) is one of the fundamental biologic components of the living organism, Ayurveda places a high value on it. One of the seats of *Prana*, or life, is said to be *Agni*. The therapeutic effect of *Sodhana* and *Shamana chikitsa* depends on *Prakriti*, *Dosha*, *Agni bala*, *Koshta*, and other factors. So, before administering any therapeutic procedure, it is mandatory to assess the *Agni* of the person. According to *Acharya Charaka*, when an individual's *Agni* is *Sama* (normal), they are in good health. However, when their *Agni* stops functioning, they die. However, if a person's *Agni* is vitiated, it will lead to poor health and disease. The body's entire range of digestive and metabolic activity is supported by biological fire or *Agni*.

All the *Panchakarma* procedures are described in a specific order from *Poorva Karma* to *Paschat Karma* is also based on *Agni* (digestive fire). Almost all procedures are contraindicated in a *Mandagni* state.

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