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ROLE OF AGNI AND DHATU POSHANA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF KARSHYA IN CHILDREN: AN AYURVEDIC CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Dr. Huma Khan¹, Dr. Amit Patil²

¹PG Scholar, Department of Kaumarbhritya, Shri Dhanwantari Ayurvedic Medical College and Research centre, Mathura, 281401

²Guide and Professor & HOD, Department of Kaumarbhritya, Shri Dhanwantari Ayurvedic Medical College and Research centre, Mathura, 281401

Corresponding Author- Dr. Huma Khan, PG Scholar, Department of Kaumarbhritya, Shri Dhanwantari Ayurvedic Medical College and Research centre, Mathura, 281401

Email id -khanhuma395@gmail.com

Abstract

Background *Karshya* is a nutritional disorder described in *Ayurveda* that is characterized by excessive emaciation, poor growth, reduced body strength, and depletion of body tissues. In children, appropriate growth and development depend upon the proper functioning of *Agni*, which governs digestion, absorption, metabolism, and tissue transformation. Sequential nourishment of the seven *Dhatus* (*Dhatu Poshana*) begins with the formation of healthy *Ahara Rasa* and continues through the action of *Jatharagni* and *Dhatvagni*. Impairment of these physiological processes results in inadequate tissue nutrition, poor physical development, diminished immunity, and ultimately the manifestation of *Karshya*. **Aim** To review the role of *Agni* and *Dhatu Poshana* in the development of *Karshya* in children according to classical *Ayurvedic* literature. **Objectives** To review the concept of *Agni* in childhood. To understand the physiology of *Dhatu Poshana*. To explain the role of impaired *Agni* and defective *Dhatu Poshana* in the development of *Karshya* in children. **Materials and Methods** This conceptual review was carried out by reviewing classical *Ayurvedic* texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Kashyapa Samhita*, and *Madhava Nidana*. Relevant published research articles and modern pediatric nutrition literature were also reviewed. The collected information was critically analyzed to understand the relationship between *Agni*, *Dhatu Poshana*, and *Karshya* in children. **Observation and Results** Classical *Ayurvedic* literature indicates that balanced *Agni* is essential for normal digestion, tissue nourishment, growth, and immunity during childhood. Impaired *Agni* produces defective *Ahara Rasa*, leading to inadequate nourishment of successive *Dhatus*. Progressive tissue depletion eventually manifests as *Karshya*, poor growth, reduced strength, and increased susceptibility to recurrent illnesses. **Discussion** The concepts of *Agni* and *Dhatu Poshana* provide a logical explanation for childhood undernutrition described as

Karshya. The classical mechanisms show close similarity with modern concepts of impaired digestion, malabsorption, nutrient deficiency, and growth failure. **Conclusion** Maintenance of healthy *Agni* ensures proper *Dhatu Poshana* and supports normal growth and development in children. Early correction of *Agnimandya* may help prevent *Karshya* and improve overall nutritional status.

Keywords: *Karshya, Agni, Dhatu Poshana, Jatharagni, Kaumarbhritya, Child Nutrition*

Introduction

Childhood is a period of rapid physical growth, tissue development, and functional maturation, during which adequate nutrition is essential for maintaining normal health and achieving optimal developmental milestones. *Ayurveda* recognizes childhood as a stage dominated by *Kapha Dosha*, where continuous tissue formation and nourishment occur at a faster rate than in adulthood. Proper digestion and metabolism are therefore fundamental for sustaining growth, immunity, and vitality. *Acharya Charaka* has described *Agni* as the root of life because every physiological process, including digestion, assimilation, tissue nourishment, strength, complexion, and longevity, depends upon its normal functioning.¹

According to *Ayurveda*, nourishment of the body occurs through the sequential transformation of nutrients into the seven *Dhatus* by the coordinated action of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*. Healthy *Agni* converts ingested food into well-formed *Ahara Rasa*, which nourishes each *Dhatu* successively through the physiological process of *Dhatu Poshana*. When *Agni* becomes impaired due to improper dietary habits, recurrent infections, congenital factors, or chronic illnesses, digestion becomes incomplete and tissue nourishment is adversely affected. Inadequate formation and distribution of nutrients eventually lead to depletion of body tissues and the clinical manifestation of *Karshya*.²

Karshya is described in classical *Ayurvedic* literature as a condition characterized by excessive leanness, reduced muscle mass, poor physical strength, diminished endurance, and delayed growth resulting from inadequate nourishment of the body tissues. In modern pediatrics, similar manifestations are observed in protein-energy malnutrition, chronic undernutrition, malabsorption syndromes, and growth failure. Although the terminology differs, both systems recognize impaired digestion, defective nutrient utilization, and insufficient tissue synthesis as major contributing factors. Therefore, understanding the role of *Agni* and *Dhatu Poshana* in the development of *Karshya* provides an important theoretical basis for preventive and therapeutic strategies in childhood nutritional disorders.³

Aim & Objectives

Aim

To review the role of *Agni* and *Dhatu Poshana* in the development of *Karshya* in children according to classical *Ayurvedic* literature.

Objectives

1. To review the concept of *Agni* in children.
2. To study the physiology of *Dhatu Poshana* according to *Ayurveda*.

3. To explain the role of impaired *Agni* in the development of *Karshya* in children.
4. To correlate classical concepts with modern pediatric nutritional science.

Materials and Methods

The present conceptual review was conducted through an extensive review of classical *Ayurvedic* texts, including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Kashyapa Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and *Madhava Nidana*. Standard textbooks of *Kaumarbhritya*, pediatric nutrition, physiology, and metabolism, along with published review articles and original research papers indexed in scientific databases, were also consulted. Relevant information was systematically compiled, critically analyzed, and interpreted to understand the relationship between *Agni*, *Dhatu Poshana*, and the development of *Karshya* in children from both classical and contemporary perspectives.⁴

Ayurvedic Review

Concept of *Agni*

Agni is regarded as the fundamental principle responsible for digestion, absorption, metabolism, transformation, and utilization of food within the body. According to *Acharya Charaka*, preservation of normal *Agni* is essential for maintaining health, whereas impairment of *Agni* becomes the primary cause of disease. The quality of nourishment received by every tissue depends upon efficient digestive and metabolic activity governed by *Agni*. In children, whose body tissues are continuously growing and developing, the role of *Agni* becomes even more significant because adequate digestion directly influences growth, immunity, and overall development.⁵

Importance of *Agni* During Childhood

Childhood is characterized by continuous anabolic activity and rapid tissue formation. During this period, adequate nourishment is required not only for maintenance but also for growth of muscles, bones, organs, and the nervous system. Healthy *Agni* ensures proper digestion of food and conversion into nutritious *Ahara Rasa*, which supplies nutrients necessary for tissue formation. When *Agni* remains balanced, children exhibit normal appetite, healthy body weight, appropriate physical growth, strong immunity, and satisfactory cognitive development. Conversely, impairment of *Agni* produces poor digestion, reduced appetite, inadequate nutrient absorption, and ultimately defective tissue nourishment resulting in *Karshya*.⁶

Classification of *Agni*

According to *Ayurveda*, *Agni* is broadly classified into three functional levels.

Jatharagni

Jatharagni is the principal digestive fire situated in the gastrointestinal tract. It performs digestion of ingested food and converts it into *Ahara Rasa*. Since all subsequent metabolic activities depend upon properly formed *Ahara Rasa*, *Jatharagni* is regarded as the chief *Agni* of the body. Disturbance of *Jatharagni* produces incomplete digestion, formation of *Ama*, nutritional deficiency, and defective tissue formation.

Bhutagni

Five *Bhutagnis* act upon their respective elemental components within digested food and prepare nutrients suitable for tissue metabolism. Their coordinated activity enables proper assimilation of nutrients according to the elemental composition of body tissues.

Dhatvagni

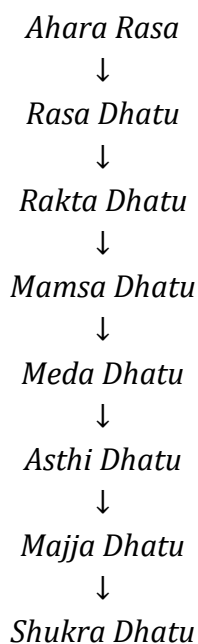
Each of the seven *Dhatus* possesses its own metabolic fire called *Dhatvagni*. These tissue-specific metabolic activities convert nutrients into stable body tissues while simultaneously producing nourishment for the succeeding *Dhatu*. Proper functioning of *Dhatvagni* is therefore essential for continuous tissue growth and maintenance.

Concept of *Dhatu Poshana*

Dhatu Poshana refers to the physiological process through which nutrients derived from digested food nourish all seven *Dhatus* sequentially. After digestion by *Jatharagni*, *Ahara Rasa* circulates throughout the body and reaches every tissue through the channels of circulation. Under the influence of respective *Dhatvagnis*, each *Dhatu* utilizes the nutrients required for its own nourishment while passing the remaining nutritional essence to the next *Dhatu*. This sequential process maintains tissue integrity, growth, strength, and vitality.⁷

Sequence of *Dhatu Poshana*

The nourishment of body tissues occurs in the following order:

**Theories of *Dhatu Poshana***

Classical *Ayurvedic* scholars have proposed several theories explaining tissue nourishment.

Ksheera-Dadhi Nyaya

According to this theory, nourishment occurs through gradual transformation similar to the sequential conversion of milk into curd, butter, and ghee. Each *Dhatu* transforms into the next after undergoing complete metabolic processing.

Kedari-Kulya Nyaya

This theory compares nutrient distribution with irrigation of agricultural fields through canals. Nutrients are supplied to tissues according to their physiological requirements and accessibility.

Khale-Kapota Nyaya

Here, nutrients are compared to grains scattered in a field where pigeons consume food according to their individual needs. Likewise, each tissue selectively absorbs nutrients necessary for its own metabolism.

Ekakala Dhatu Poshana Nyaya

This concept explains that all tissues receive nourishment simultaneously through systemic circulation, although utilization depends upon their individual metabolic capacity.

Role of Agni in Dhatu Poshana

The process of *Dhatu Poshana* depends entirely upon the functional integrity of *Agni*. Proper *Jatharagni* produces healthy *Ahara Rasa*, while efficient *Dhatvagni* converts nutrients into mature tissues. If *Agni* becomes impaired, digestion remains incomplete and the quality of *Ahara Rasa* deteriorates. Consequently, nutrient delivery to tissues becomes inadequate, resulting in deficient tissue metabolism and progressive depletion of all *Dhatu*s. Thus, *Agni* serves as the central regulator of growth, tissue maintenance, and nutritional status.⁸

Concept of Karshya

Karshya is described as a condition of excessive emaciation caused by depletion of body tissues due to inadequate nourishment. Classical texts describe affected individuals as having thin muscles, prominent bony structures, reduced body weight, diminished strength, intolerance to physical exertion, decreased immunity, and poor endurance. In children, these manifestations become more significant because they interfere with normal growth, cognitive development, and disease resistance.⁹

Causes (Nidana) of Karshya in Children***Dietary Causes***

- Inadequate food intake
- Irregular feeding schedule
- Nutritionally deficient diet
- Excessively dry food
- Excessively light diet
- Improper complementary feeding
- Frequent fasting

Lifestyle Causes

- Excessive physical activity
- Inadequate sleep

- Psychological stress
- Excessive crying
- Neglect of proper childcare

Disease-related Causes

- Recurrent gastrointestinal infections
- Chronic diarrhea
- Worm infestation
- Chronic respiratory infections
- Congenital disorders
- Malabsorption syndromes
- Persistent *Agnimandya*¹⁰

Role of *Jatharagni* in the Development of *Karshya*

Healthy *Jatharagni* initiates digestion and forms nutrient-rich *Ahara Rasa*. When *Jatharagni* becomes weak (*Agnimandya*), digestion remains incomplete, appetite decreases, and the formation of high-quality nutrients is reduced. The resulting nutritional deficiency affects all subsequent metabolic processes. Children with persistent *Agnimandya* therefore become susceptible to poor weight gain, muscle wasting, reduced immunity, and delayed physical development, which collectively represent the clinical features of *Karshya*.¹¹

Role of *Dhatvagni* in the Development of *Karshya*

After digestion, each *Dhatu* depends upon its respective *Dhatvagni* for proper metabolism and maturation. Impairment of *Dhatvagni* prevents efficient utilization of nutrients despite adequate food intake. Consequently, tissues fail to develop normally and sequential nourishment of subsequent *Dhatu*s is interrupted. This progressive metabolic failure leads to generalized tissue depletion, decreased body strength, and chronic emaciation observed in *Karshya*.¹²

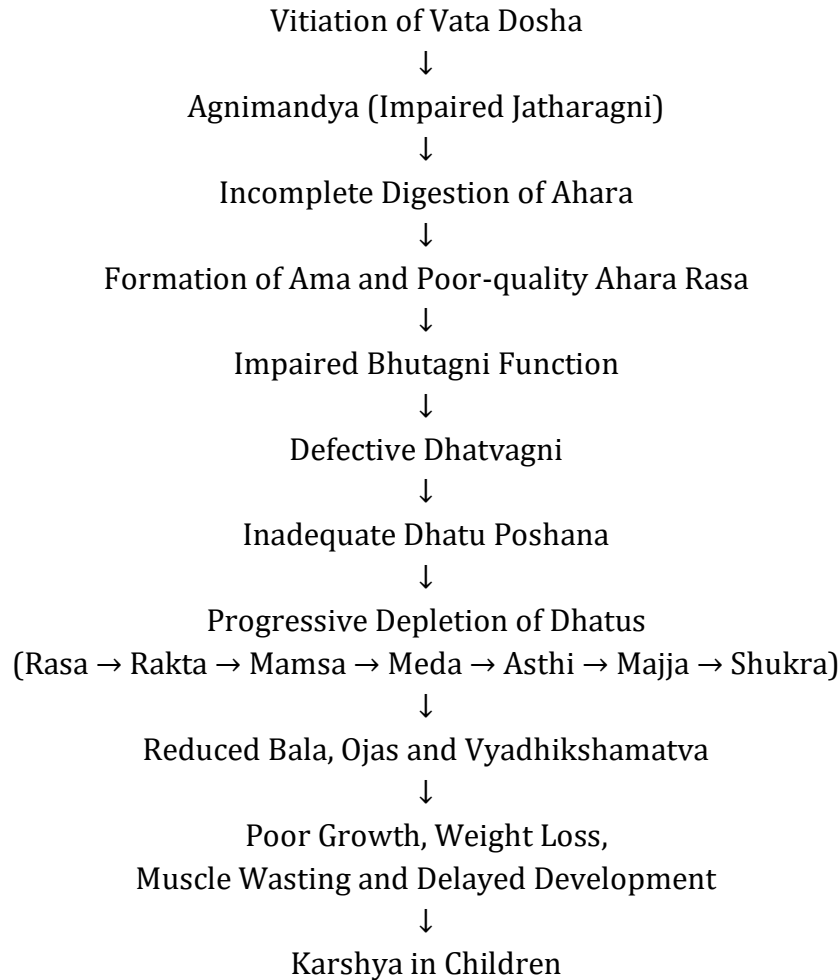
Importance of *Rasa Dhatu* in Childhood Nutrition

Rasa Dhatu is the first tissue formed after digestion and serves as the primary nutritional medium for all subsequent *Dhatu*s. In children, healthy *Rasa Dhatu* supports growth, hydration, tissue nourishment, immune competence, and proper physiological functioning. Deficiency of *Rasa Dhatu* due to impaired *Agni* results in poor appetite, inadequate weight gain, lethargy, recurrent infections, and progressive undernutrition. Since every succeeding *Dhatu* depends upon adequate nourishment from *Rasa*, early correction of *Agnimandya* is essential to prevent the development of *Karshya*.¹³

Samprapti of *Karshya* in Children

Nidana Sevana
(Inadequate nutrition, irregular feeding, recurrent infections,
worm infestation, chronic illness, psychological stress,
improper dietary habits)





Results and Findings

- Proper functioning of *Agni* is the cornerstone of digestion, absorption, metabolism, and tissue nourishment in children.
- Healthy *Jatharagni* produces well-formed *Ahara Rasa*, which acts as the primary nutritional substrate for all *Dhatus*.
- Sequential *Dhatu Poshana* depends upon the coordinated action of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*.
- Persistent *Agnimandya* results in incomplete digestion, poor nutrient assimilation, and defective tissue metabolism.
- Impaired *Dhatvagni* leads to inadequate nourishment of successive *Dhatus*, causing progressive tissue depletion.
- *Rasa Dhatu* plays a pivotal role in supplying nutrition to all body tissues; therefore, its depletion adversely affects overall growth and development.
- Childhood *Karshya* develops due to impaired digestion, defective tissue nourishment, recurrent infections, nutritional deficiencies, and increased metabolic demands.
- The *Ayurvedic* concepts of *Agni* and *Dhatu Poshana* closely correlate with modern principles of digestion, nutrient absorption, cellular metabolism, and tissue growth.

- Early correction of *Agnimandya*, improvement of nutritional intake, and restoration of normal tissue metabolism may help prevent *Karshya* and promote healthy growth in children.

Discussion

The present review demonstrates that *Agni* occupies a central position in maintaining normal growth and development during childhood. Classical *Ayurvedic* literature emphasizes that efficient digestion is essential for the formation of healthy *Ahara Rasa*, which subsequently nourishes all seven *Dhatus* through the physiological process of *Dhatu Poshana*. When *Jatharagni* becomes impaired because of improper dietary habits, recurrent illnesses, congenital factors, or chronic nutritional deficiencies, digestion becomes incomplete and nutrient availability decreases. Consequently, tissue nourishment becomes inadequate, leading to depletion of *Dhatus* and the development of *Karshya*.¹⁶

The concept of *Dhatu Poshana* provides a comprehensive explanation for tissue nutrition and growth in children. According to classical *Ayurvedic* principles, each *Dhatu* derives nourishment from the preceding tissue through the action of its respective *Dhatvagni*. Therefore, impairment occurring at any stage affects all subsequent tissues, resulting in progressive emaciation, reduced body strength, delayed physical growth, diminished immunity, and poor overall development. This sequential mechanism resembles the modern understanding of impaired digestion, malabsorption, defective cellular metabolism, and protein-energy malnutrition, thereby establishing a strong conceptual correlation between *Ayurveda* and contemporary nutritional science.

The review further indicates that childhood *Karshya* is not merely the consequence of inadequate dietary intake but also reflects defective digestion, impaired tissue metabolism, recurrent infections, and failure of normal physiological nourishment. Restoration of healthy *Agni* through appropriate dietary practices, lifestyle modification, and *Ayurvedic* interventions may improve tissue nutrition, promote normal growth, strengthen immunity, and prevent progression of nutritional disorders in children. Thus, preservation of balanced *Agni* and efficient *Dhatu Poshana* remains the fundamental principle for maintaining optimum pediatric health.

Conclusion

Agni and *Dhatu Poshana* constitute the physiological foundation of growth, nutrition, and tissue development in children according to *Ayurveda*. Proper functioning of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni* ensures complete digestion, efficient metabolism, and sequential nourishment of all *Dhatus*. Impairment of these mechanisms results in defective tissue nutrition, progressive depletion of body tissues, and ultimately the development of *Karshya*. The classical concepts described in *Ayurveda* closely correspond with modern principles of digestion, nutrient absorption, metabolism, and childhood malnutrition. Therefore, early recognition and correction of *Agnimandya*, along with appropriate nutritional support and maintenance of healthy *Agni*, may contribute significantly to the prevention and management of *Karshya* in children.

Conflict of Interest -Nil.

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