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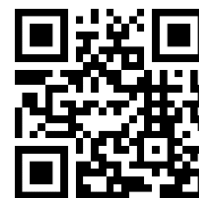


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## Understanding The Gut–Skin Axis Through Ayurveda: An Agad Tantra Perspective

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### ABSTRACT:

**Introduction:** The gut–skin axis is an emerging concept in modern medicine that highlights the bidirectional relationship between gastrointestinal health, immune regulation, and dermatological conditions. *Ayurveda*, though not using this terminology, describes a similar interconnection through the principles of *Agni*, *Ama*, *Rasa–Rakta*, and *Dooshivisha*.

**Methods:** This study is a conceptual review based on classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary scientific literature. Google scholar, researchgate, pubmed, etc databases were used to gather information. The modern understanding of the gut–skin axis was analyzed and correlated with Ayurvedic principles, with special reference to the toxicological concept of *Dooshivisha*. **Results:** Impairment of digestive fire leads to the formation of *Ama*, a toxic metabolic by-product that obstructs bodily channels and vitiates Doshas. This results in *Rasa* and *Rakta Dushti*, ultimately manifesting as skin disorders. Chronic accumulation of toxins resembles *Dooshivisha*, explaining the persistence and recurrence of dermatological conditions. Modern concepts such as gut dysbiosis, increased intestinal permeability, systemic inflammation, and immune dysregulation show strong parallels with Ayurvedic pathophysiology. **Conclusion:** This integrative perspective provides a holistic framework for understanding the etiopathogenesis of chronic dermatological disorders and emphasizes the importance of digestive health, toxin elimination, and systemic balance in their management.

**KEYWORDS:** Gut-skin axis, *Dooshivisha*, *Agad Tantra*

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The skin, being the largest organ of the body, reflects both internal physiological balance and external environmental influences. In recent years, the concept of the gut–skin axis has gained significant attention in modern medicine, emphasizing the bidirectional relationship between gastrointestinal health, immune regulation and skin homeostasis.<sup>[1]</sup> Alterations in gut microbiota, increased intestinal permeability and systemic inflammation have been implicated in the pathogenesis of various dermatological disorders such as acne, psoriasis, eczema, and chronic fungal infections.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Ayurveda*, though not using the exact terminology of the gut–skin axis, has long recognized the intimate connection between digestion, metabolism and skin health. The fundamental concept of *Agni* (digestive fire) plays a pivotal role in maintaining overall health. Impairment of *Agni* (*Mandagni*) leads to the formation of *Ama*, a toxic, improperly digested metabolic by-product. This *Ama* due to its heavy, sticky and channel-blocking properties, circulates throughout the body and initiates pathological processes.<sup>[3]</sup>

From a *Dhatu*-level perspective, the nourishment of *Twak* (skin) is dependent on the proper formation and functioning of *Rasa* and *Rakta Dhatu*. Any disturbance in digestion directly affects *Rasa*, which in turn vitiates *Rakta*,<sup>[4]</sup> ultimately manifesting as various skin disorders (*Twak Vikara*). Among the *Doshas*, *Vata* plays a crucial role in the systemic circulation of both nutrients and toxins; its vitiation facilitates the dissemination of *Ama* to peripheral tissues, including the skin.

In the domain of *Agad Tantra*, the concept of *Dooshivisha* provides further depth to this understanding. *Dooshivisha* refers to latent or

low-grade toxins that persist in the body for prolonged periods due to incomplete elimination or repeated exposure to harmful substances such as environmental pollutants, pesticides, incompatible diet (*Viruddha Ahara*) and chemical agents. These toxins remain dormant but can become active under favorable conditions such as stress, dietary indiscretion, or weakened immunity, leading to chronic, recurrent, and treatment-resistant diseases, particularly affecting *Rakta* and *Twak*.

In the present era, rapid urbanization, increased consumption of processed and incompatible foods, exposure to environmental toxins, and heightened psychological stress have significantly contributed to digestive disturbances and toxin accumulation. This has resulted in a noticeable rise in chronic and recurrent dermatological conditions. The modern understanding of the gut–skin axis closely parallels the Ayurvedic principles of *Agni–Ama–Rakta–Twak* interrelationship, further enriched by the concept of *Dooshivisha* in explaining chronicity and recurrence.

Therefore, it becomes essential to revisit and highlight this integrative perspective in today's scenario. Understanding the gut–skin connection through *Ayurveda*, particularly from the standpoint of *Agad Tantra*, not only provides a holistic explanation for the etiopathogenesis of skin disorders but also opens new avenues for preventive and therapeutic strategies focusing on digestion, detoxification, and systemic balance.

**Aim**

To explore and conceptualize the gut–skin axis through Ayurvedic principles, with special reference to *Agni*, *Ama*, *Rasa–Rakta*, *Vata*, and *Dooshivisha*, in the

etiopathogenesis of dermatological disorders.

### Objectives

1. To review the modern concept of the gut-skin axis and its role in dermatological conditions.
2. To analyze the Ayurvedic concepts of *Agni* and *Ama* in relation to gut dysfunction and toxin formation and role of *Vata Dosha*, *Rasa* and *Rakta Dhatu* in the manifestation of skin diseases (*Twak Vikara*).
3. To conceptualize *Dooshivisha (Agad Tantra)* as a contributing factor in chronic and recurrent dermatological disorders.
4. To establish a correlation between the gut-skin axis and Ayurvedic pathophysiology.

### Material and Method

Electronic searches of the relevant full articles and abstracts from various databases such as PubMed, Ayush Research Portal, Google Scholar, DHARA, and CTRI were sought. Search strategy like AND, OR, NOT was also used for data collection.

### Search strategy

Gut-skin axis AND *Agni*, Gut-skin axis AND *Ama*, Gut-skin axis OR *Dooshivisha*, Gut-skin axis OR skin diseases, gut skin axis and *Ayurveda*, etc keywords used for data collection from various database.

### 1. Modern Concept of the Gut-Skin Axis

The gut-skin axis is a contemporary concept that describes the bidirectional relationship between gastrointestinal health, immune function, and skin physiology. It emphasizes that alterations in the gut environment can directly influence skin homeostasis and contribute to the development of various dermatological disorders.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### 1.1 Components of the Gut-Skin Axis

The gut-skin axis is regulated by multiple interconnected systems:

A] Gut Microbiota: The human gastrointestinal tract harbours a complex community of microorganisms, collectively known as the gut microbiota. These microbes play a crucial role in: digestion and metabolism, synthesis of vitamins and bioactive compounds, modulation of immune responses. A balanced microbiota maintains homeostasis, whereas imbalance (dysbiosis) can initiate systemic inflammation.<sup>[6]</sup>

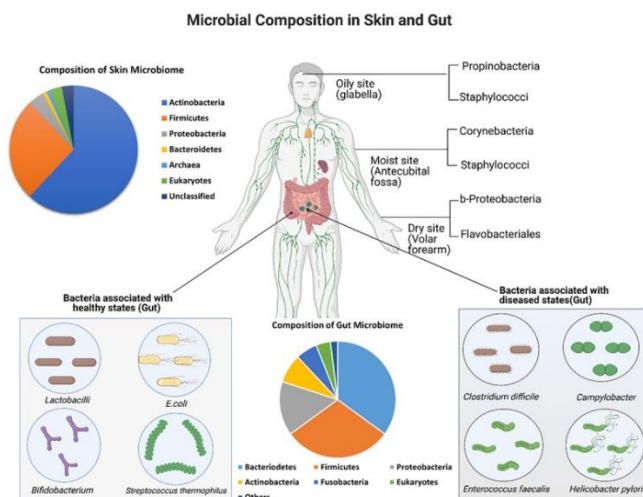
B] Intestinal Barrier Function: The intestinal epithelium acts as a selective barrier that regulates the passage of nutrients and prevents entry of harmful substances.

Disruption of this barrier leads to: increased intestinal permeability ("leaky gut"), translocation of toxins, microbes, and antigens into circulation. This contributes to systemic immune activation.

C] Immune System Interaction: Approximately 70% of the immune system is associated with the gut (GALT - Gut Associated Lymphoid Tissue).

Gut imbalance results in: release of pro-inflammatory cytokines, immune dysregulation, chronic low-grade inflammation. These immune mediators affect distant organs, including the skin.

D] Microbial Metabolites: Gut microbes produce metabolites such as: short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), lipopolysaccharides (LPS) While beneficial metabolites maintain health, harmful metabolites can: trigger inflammation, impair skin barrier function, exacerbate dermatological conditions.



**Figure 1:** Composition of gut and skin microbiota<sup>[7]</sup>

## 1.2 Pathophysiology of Gut-Skin Axis Dysfunction

Disturbance in gut health initiates a cascade of pathological events:

- Dysbiosis (imbalance of gut microbiota)
- Increased intestinal permeability
- Entry of toxins and microbial products into bloodstream
- Activation of systemic immune responses
- Release of inflammatory mediators
- Alteration of skin barrier and immune function
- Manifestation of skin disorders

This mechanism explains the chronic and recurrent nature of many dermatological diseases.

## 1.3 Skin Disorders Associated with Gut-Skin Axis

Several dermatological conditions have been linked with gut dysfunction<sup>[8]</sup>

## 1.4 Role of Psychological Factors

The gut-skin axis is also influenced by the gut-brain-skin axis.

Psychological stress can: alter gut microbiota composition, impair intestinal barrier, increase inflammatory responses

This explains why stress aggravates conditions like: acne, psoriasis, eczema, etc<sup>[9]</sup>

## 2. Ayurvedic Understanding of Gut-Skin Relationship

Ayurveda emphasizes a fundamental and inseparable relationship between digestion, metabolism, and skin health, even though the term “gut-skin axis” is not explicitly mentioned in classical texts. The integrity of *Twak* (skin) is considered a reflection of internal physiological balance, particularly the proper functioning of digestion and tissue nourishment. According to Ayurvedic principles, ingested food undergoes transformation into *Rasa Dhatu*, which subsequently nourishes *Rakta Dhatu*, the primary tissue responsible for maintaining skin health and complexion. Any disturbance at the level of digestion or metabolism leads to vitiation of *Rasa* and *Rakta*, ultimately manifesting as various dermatological conditions (*Twak Vikara*). Thus, Ayurveda inherently recognizes that impaired gastrointestinal function can directly influence skin pathology, establishing a conceptual parallel to the modern gut-skin axis.

## 3. Role of Agni

*Agni* (digestive and metabolic fire) is regarded as the cornerstone of health in *Ayurveda*, governing the processes of digestion, absorption, assimilation, and transformation of nutrients. A balanced state of *Agni* ensures proper formation of dhatus and maintenance of physiological harmony. However, when *Agni* becomes impaired, particularly in the

form of *Mandagni* (diminished digestive capacity), it leads to incomplete digestion of food. This results in the production of improperly processed metabolites, which adversely affect tissue nutrition and function.<sup>[10]</sup> In the context of skin health, defective *Agni* disrupts the formation of *Rasa* and *Rakta Dhatu*, leading to their vitiation and subsequent manifestation of skin disorders. Therefore, *Agni* plays a central role in maintaining the gut-skin relationship, and its dysfunction serves as the primary initiating factor in the pathogenesis of many dermatological diseases.<sup>[11]</sup>

#### 4. Concept of *Ama*

*Ama* is a key pathological entity in *Ayurveda*, described as a toxic, unprocessed metabolic by-product formed due to impaired digestion and metabolism. It possesses properties such as heaviness, stickiness, and the ability to obstruct bodily channels, thereby interfering with normal physiological functions. Once formed, *Ama* circulates throughout the body and accumulates in various tissues, including *Rasa* and *Rakta*, leading to their vitiation. In relation to skin disorders, *Ama* acts as a pathogenic factor by inducing inflammation, impairing microcirculation, and promoting chronicity. Clinically, this may manifest as symptoms like itching, redness, eruptions, and recurrent infections. From a modern perspective, *Ama* can be correlated with toxic metabolites and inflammatory mediators arising from gut dysfunction, thereby establishing a strong link with the gut-skin axis.

#### 5. Vata Dosha: Neural Regulation and Gastrointestinal Dynamics

*Vata Dosha* is primarily responsible for regulating movement, sensory functions,

communication, and neuronal activity within the body. In the context of the gut-brain axis, specific subtypes such as ***Prana Vata***, which governs cognitive functions and higher neural activity, and ***Apana Vata***, which controls elimination and lower gastrointestinal processes, play a crucial role. *Vata* also coordinates various physiological activities, including the proper functioning of *Agni*. An imbalance in *Vata* manifests as symptoms like anxiety, restlessness, irregular appetite, and constipation, reflecting disturbances in gut-brain communication. From a modern physiological perspective, these features can be correlated with alterations in autonomic nervous system activity, disrupted gastrointestinal motility, and impaired neurotransmission. Such changes are commonly observed in stress-related gastrointestinal disorders, including irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), thereby demonstrating a clear parallel between *Vata* imbalance and gut-brain axis dysregulation.<sup>[12]</sup>

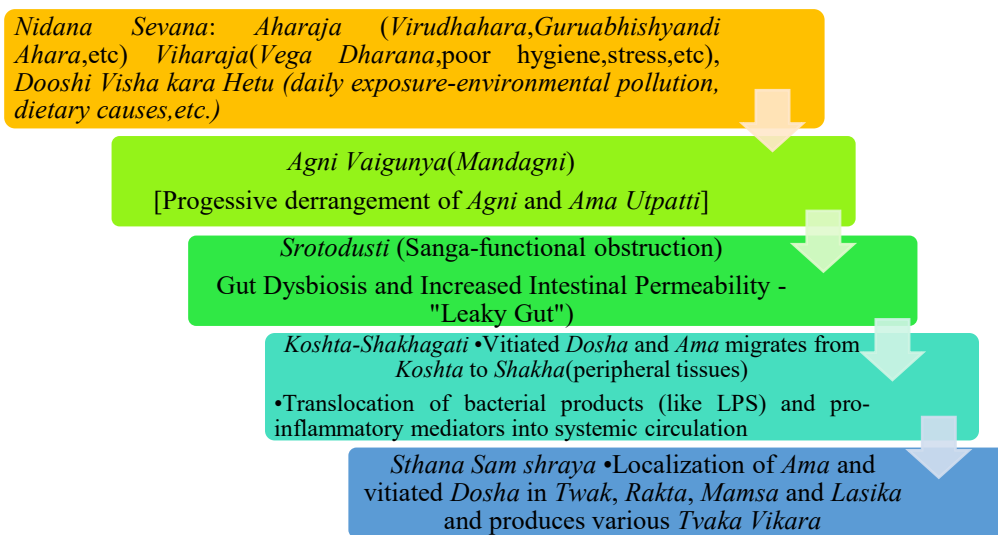
#### 6. Concept of *Dooshivisha* (Agad Tantra Perspective)

In *Agad Tantra*, the concept of *Dooshivisha* provides a deeper understanding of chronic and latent toxicity within the body.<sup>[13]</sup> *Dooshivisha* refers to low-grade, residual toxins that persist in the system due to incomplete elimination or repeated exposure to harmful substances such as environmental pollutants, pesticides, incompatible diet (*Viruddha Ahara*), and chemical agents. These toxins remain in a dormant state for prolonged periods without producing acute symptoms but can become active under favorable conditions such as stress, dietary indiscretions, or weakened immunity. Once activated, *Dooshivisha* vitiates primarily *Rakta* and *Twak*, leading to chronic, recurrent, and often treatment-resistant

dermatological disorders.<sup>[14]</sup> In the context of the gut-skin axis, long-standing accumulation of *Ama* and gut-derived toxins may behave similarly to *Dooshivisha*, thereby explaining the persistence and recurrence of

**Ayurvedic Pathogenesis of Gut – skin axis**

This flowchart illustrates how continuous exposure to etiological factors (*Nidana Sevana*) leads to *Agnimandya*, resulting in *Ama* formation, which obstructs body channels and vitiates *Dosha*. The interaction of *Ama* and *Dosha* leads to *Rasa* and *Rakta Dushti*, and through the action of *Vata*, these toxins circulate and localize in the skin. Over time, this persistent toxic state develops into *Dooshivisha*, ultimately manifesting as chronic and recurrent dermatological disorders.<sup>[16]</sup>



**Figure 2 :** Ayurvedic pathogenesis of gut skin axis

**DISCUSSION:**

**Result and Discussion**

| Modern Concept (Gut-Skin Axis)      | Ayurvedic Concept        | Explanation / Correlation  |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Gut microbiota                      | <i>Agni &amp; Koshta</i> | Balanced gut microbiota reflects proper digestive function ( <i>Samagni</i> ), while dysbiosis correlates with impaired digestion ( <i>Mandagni</i> ). |
| Dysbiosis                           | <i>Mandagni</i>          | Microbial imbalance leads to improper digestion and metabolic disturbance, similar to weakened <i>Agni</i> .   |
| Toxic metabolites (LPS, endotoxins) | <i>Ama</i>               | Undigested, toxic by-products in <i>Ayurveda</i> correspond to inflammatory  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   |   | metabolites produced in gut dysfunction.   |
| Increased intestinal permeability (“leaky gut”) | <i>Srotorodha</i> & <i>Srotodushti</i>                        | Damage to gut barrier parallels obstruction and dysfunction of body channels, allowing toxins to circulate.                        |
| Systemic inflammation                           | <i>Dosha Prakopa</i> (especially <i>Pitta</i> & <i>Vata</i> ) | Inflammatory responses resemble aggravated <i>Doshas</i> , particularly <i>Pitta</i> (inflammation) and <i>Vata</i> (circulation). |
| Immune dysregulation                            | <i>Rakta Dushti</i>   | Altered immune response correlates with vitiation of <i>Rakta Dhatu</i> , leading to skin manifestations.                          |
| Circulation of toxins in bloodstream            | <i>Vyana Vata</i> circulation of <i>Ama</i>                   | Toxins spreading through blood is similar to <i>Vata</i> -mediated transport of <i>Ama</i> throughout the body.                    |
| Chronic low-grade toxicity                      | <i>Dooshivisha</i>  | Persistent toxins in modern science are comparable to latent, long-standing toxins described in <i>Agad Tantra</i> .               |
| Skin inflammation & barrier dysfunction         | <i>Twak Vikara</i>  | Manifestation of disease at the skin level due to internal imbalance.  |
| Chronic & recurrent skin diseases               | <i>Dooshivisha</i> + <i>Ama</i> + <i>Rakta Dushti</i>         | Recurrent nature of diseases explained by persistent toxins and impaired metabolism.   |
| Gut-brain-skin axis (stress link)               | <i>Manasika Nidana</i> + <i>Vata</i> aggravation              | Psychological stress affecting gut and skin corresponds to mental factors aggravating <i>Doshas</i> .                              |
| Probiotics & dietary correction                 | <i>Deepana</i> , <i>Pachana</i> , <i>Pathya Ahara</i>         | Restoring gut balance aligns with improving <i>Agni</i> and following proper diet.   |
| Detox therapies                                 | <i>Shodhana Chikitsa</i>                                      | Elimination of toxins through <i>Panchakarma</i> correlates with modern detox approaches.  |

The above comparative analysis highlights a significant conceptual similarity between the modern understanding of the gut-skin axis and classical Ayurvedic principles. The role of gut microbiota in

maintaining systemic homeostasis can be closely correlated with the concept of *Agni* and *Kostha*, where proper digestive and metabolic function ensures overall health.<sup>[17]</sup> Disturbances in gut microbiota, referred to as



dysbiosis, parallel the condition of *Mandagni*, leading to improper digestion and the generation of toxic metabolites.

These toxic metabolites, including endotoxins such as lipopolysaccharides, show a strong resemblance to the Ayurvedic concept of *Ama*, which is formed due to incomplete digestion and possesses properties that disrupt normal physiological processes. The phenomenon of increased intestinal permeability, commonly known as “leaky gut,” can be interpreted in *Ayurveda* as *Srotodushti* and *Srotorodha*, wherein the integrity of bodily channels is compromised, allowing the systemic spread of toxins.

Furthermore, the systemic inflammatory response observed in gut–skin axis dysfunction corresponds to *Dosha Prakopa*, particularly involving *Pitta* and *Vata*. While *Pitta* is responsible for inflammatory processes, *Vata* facilitates the movement and dissemination of pathological factors throughout the body. This is further supported by the role of *Vyana Vata*, which aids in the circulation of *Ama*, ultimately leading to tissue-level pathology.<sup>[18]</sup>

The involvement of the immune system in modern medicine can be correlated with *Rakta Dushti* in *Ayurveda*, as *Rakta* dhatu plays a crucial role in maintaining skin health and immune function. When vitiated, it leads to various dermatological manifestations collectively described as *Twak Vikara*.

A particularly noteworthy correlation is observed between chronic low-grade toxicity in modern science and the concept of *Dooshivisha* described in *Agad Tantra*. *Dooshivisha* explains the persistence, latency, and recurrence of diseases due to the

presence of residual toxins in the body, which become active under conducive conditions. This provides a comprehensive explanation for the chronic and relapsing nature of many skin disorders associated with gut dysfunction.

Additionally, the influence of psychological stress on the gut–skin axis aligns with the Ayurvedic concept of *Manasika Nidana*, where mental factors such as stress and anxiety aggravate *Doshas*, particularly *Vata*, thereby affecting both digestive and skin health.

From a therapeutic perspective, modern interventions such as probiotics, dietary regulation, and detoxification strategies show a clear resemblance to Ayurvedic approaches including *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Pathya Ahara* and *Shodhana Chikitsa*. Both systems emphasize restoring internal balance, eliminating toxins, and improving systemic function rather than merely addressing local symptoms.

Thus, this comparative framework demonstrates that the modern gut–skin axis is not a novel concept but rather a scientific validation of principles long described in *Ayurveda*. Integrating these perspectives can provide a more holistic and effective approach in understanding and managing chronic dermatological disorders.

#### CONCLUSION:

The gut–skin axis highlights the strong connection between digestive health and skin disorders. This concept closely correlates with Ayurvedic principles of *Agni*, *Ama*, and *Rasa–Rakta–Twak* relationship, where impaired digestion leads to toxin formation and skin manifestations. The concept of *Dooshivisha* further explains the chronicity and recurrence of dermatological

conditions. Psychological stress and lifestyle factors play a significant role in aggravating this axis. Therefore, management should focus on improving digestion, eliminating toxins, and restoring systemic balance. This integrative approach offers a holistic understanding and effective management of skin diseases.

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#### Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

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