

CONCEPT OF AGNI- AN AYURVEDIC REVIEW**Dr. Priyanka Dilip Dhane* and Dr. Smita S. Kadu**

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1. ABSTRACT

The ancient system of Indian science Ayurveda describes various concepts related to the physiological functioning & biological response; Agni is one of such concept. Agni considered responsible for digestive & metabolic functioning of body. The digestion & assimilation of ingested food performed by the agni which is very essential process for the growth & development of human body. Agni is responsible for strength, health & it determines the quantity of food to be consumed. Ingested food is to be digested, Absorbed & assimilated, which is necessary for the maintenance of life, & is performed by the agni. Agni has been divided into 13 types, i.e. 1 Jatharagni, 5 Bhutagni & 7 Dhatvagni. Jatharagni is the chief among all types of agni because function of bhutagni & dhavagni depend on

this. Jatharagni is the most important one, which digests all types of food & transforms it into Rasa & Mala. There are different agnis of different mahabhutas i.e. Parthiv Agni, Apya Agni, Taijas Agni, Vaayaviya Agni & Akasheeya Agni. Agni provides Bala, Arogya, Ayu, Prana, Swasthyam, Varnam, Utsaha, Prabha, Ojha & Teja to the body. For understanding of disease process & prescribe of treatment is one of the important concepts of agni.

KEYWORDS: Jatharagni, Dhatavagni, Bhutagni, Metabolic process.

2. INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda, the term “Agni” is used in the sense of digestion of food & metabolism products. Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital

functions of our body. Therefore, Ayurveda considers that Dehagni is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment lusture, oja, teja (energy) & prana (life energy).

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

In healthy state the food consumed is properly digested & assimilated by the body with the help of agni. Agni provides Bala, Arogya, Ayu, Prana, Swastham, Varnam, Utsaha, Prabha, Ojha & Teja to the body. All the transformation in the body is catalyzed by Agni, if Agni is impaired the proper transformation of food, Dhatus & Malas are impaired & this will lead to accumulation of waste products in the body. Agni Dusthi is the causative factor for most of the diseases. The normal activity of the Agni helps the maintenance of physiological activities while its abnormal state produces pathology & its absence causes of death of the human being that is why Agni is known as vital force. Agni is closely related to Pitta. The main function of Pitta is described as Pachana, separation of Sara & Kitta, Dahana, Prinama, Ranjana, Varnakarama & Prabhakarana. Agni not only Jatharagni but also Bhutagnis & Dhatwagnis. These is responsible for digestion & metabolism at different levels.

Agni Samya & Vaisamya (normalcy & abnormalcy)

Existence of all different kinds of agnis in their required Pramana (quantity), Gunas (qualities) & Karmas (functions) is known Agni Samya (normalcy). While Vrddhi (increase) & Kshaya (decrease) in these aspects is known as Agni Vaisamya (abnormalcy), Vrddhi (increase) & Kshaya (decrease) are known as tikshna (strong, powerful) & manda (weak) respectively. Both these are abnormal & give rise to many diseases in the body.

Effect of Agni Vaismaya

When the three kinds of abnormal Agnis (digestive activity) stated above are present, digestion of food will not be proper. In Mandagni, the food will be Apaka (inadequately digested or not digested at all), in case of Tikshnagni it will be Dagdhapaka (overburnt) and in case of Visamagni it will be Pakwa- Apakwa (mixture of digested and undigested) and also different from one period of digestion to the other. In all these conditions there will be accumulation of Ama (undigested materials remaining over) in the Rasa Dhatu. The quantity of such Ama materials will be copies (large) in Mandagni and less in the other two.

Relation between Agni & Pitta in various Ayurvedic Classics

According to Acharyas Sushruta the origin of Pitta is from “Tapa”, The main function of Pitta in Ayurveda digestion of ingested food, to maintain heat of the body, it maintains the color, lusture, and formation of blood from rasa etc of body.

Different Acharyas has given different views to understand the relation between Agni and Pitta.

Acharya sushruta, given firmly own view, in the body there is no existence of any other Agni without Pitta, because when there is increased digestion and combustion in the body due to Ushna Guna of Pitta, for that the treatment is like Agni. Acharya Marichi has also given own view that the Agni present in the pittaa gives good or bad results when it is normal or vitiated stages.

Acharya Chakrapani has also commented on “Pittantargatta,” that the function of Pitta inside the body is not combustion but its work is to provide heat of Agni. Besides this, Acharya Shusrut has described five types of Agnis indirectly as the variety of Pitta. Acharya Bhoj also considered Pitta as Agni, digestive fire is included within Agni, which is specially meant for different enzymatic activities of the body, i.e. Pachana, Deepan, Bhedana, etc.

According to Acharya Vagbhatt, Pitta is of five types, in which type the Pitta are located in between the Pakvashaya and Amashaya, (in Grahani) although it is composed of Panchabhutas. But due to increase of (predominance qualities of) Tejas Bhuta, it is devoid of liquidity (although it is a liquid). Also, it does not possess Snigdha, Sita and such other properties of ApaBhuta, because of its function of Paka, it is called by the term “Anal” (Agni), it cooks the food, and dividing it into essence and waste material separately. Being localized there, it help to the other Pitta present there and also the other Dhatwagni present in the Dhatus by giving them strength (power of functioning), which is known as “Pachaka Pitta”.

Many examples are available in our classics which indicate that Pitta is the same as Agni. But, some doubts also present behind the concept of whether Pitta is Agni, e.g. Why Katu, vidahi, etc. reduces the strength of Agni instead of enhancing it. Why ghee alleviates the effect of Pitta but enhances Agni.

Acharya Sushruta, in chapter^[12] has clearly indicated that Pitta and Agni are not the same. Samadoshahsamagnishcha.....swasthyaetibhidhiyate.

Types of Agni

1. Acharya Charaka- 13 types of Agni
Jatharagni-1, Bhutagni-5, Dhatvagni-7.
2. Acharya Sushruta- 5 types of Agni
i.e. Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Alochakagni Sadhakagni & Bhrajakagni.
3. Acharya Vagbhata- Bhutagnis 5, Dhatagni 7, Doshagni 3, Malagni 3
4. Acharya Sharangadhara- Recognized five pittas only.
i.e. Pachak, Bhrajaka, Alochaka, Sadhaka & Ranjaka.
5. Acharya Bhavamishra- As like Acharya Charaka & Vagbhata.

According to function & site of action, Agni has been divided in 13 types

1. Jatharagni-1: Agni present in Jathara (stomach & duodenum).
2. Bhutagni-5: Agni present in five basic elements (panchamahabhutas).
3. Dhatvagni-7: Agni present in seven Dhatus (seven element tissues of the body).

Jatharagni (functions of digestive fire)

Jatharagni is the Agni which is present in the Jathara (stomach and duodenum). According to Ashtanga Hridaya, Jatharagni, the seat is Grahani (duodenum), so called because it withholds the food for a certain time inside the Amasaya (stomach) to facilitate digestion. In the opinion of Dhanvantari, it is the Kala known as "Pittadhara," situated at the entrance of the Pakvashaya (intestine) and acting as a bolt to the door of the pathway/channel of food. It is responsible for the duration of life, health, valour, ojas (essence of the Dhatus), strength of all the Bhutagni and dhatwagni. 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. Jatharagni is considered to be the most important because each and every nutrient that one ingests first comes to the Jathara and is subjected to the action of Jatharagni. Jatharagni digests the food materials that consist of the five basic elements and transforms it for utilization by the respective Dhatusparamanus (tissues).

Jatharagni is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (Prasad) and the waste products (kitta) in our body.

Jatharagni is directly related to Dhatwagni or bioenergy in the cells and their metabolic processes, with ultimate tissue metabolism or Dhatu-Paka process. All the Dhatvagni depend on the normal, healthy state of Jatharagni. If the Jatharagni is hyperactive (Tikshna) or hypoactive (Manda), it will cause an excessive or retarded action of the Dhatwagni. This disturbed action ultimately leads to various disorders. Jatharagni is the main important Agni that controls the function of all other 12 Agnis. All the Agnis are totally dependent on the status of Jatharagni.

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being. Namely Vishamagni, Tikshanagni, Mandagni and Samagni.

1. Samagni

(The normal one), is that which digests the food in the scheduled time without giving any trouble to the body. It is conducive to health and so ideal. It is normally found in persons of Samsarga and Sammishra Prakriti (constitution originating from the combination of two and all the three Dosh as respectively.)

2. Visamagni

(The irregular) is that which changes from one time of food to the other in its functioning, producing flatulence, pain in the abdomen, obstruction to the free elimination of feces and flatus and such other troubles to the body. It is normally found in persons of Vata Prakriti (nervous constitution), develops in others also by over indulgence in Vatahara Ahara Vihara (foods and activities which increase Vata) and give rise to diseases of Vata origin.

3. Tikshnagni

(The powerful or strong) is that which digests even large quantities of food earlier to the scheduled time, producing burning sensation inside the abdomen, sour belching, thirst, feeling of hot fumes coming out and such other troubles to the body. It is normally found in persons of Pitta Prakriti (bilious-constitution), develops in others by the use of Pittahara Ahara Vihara (food and activities causing increase of Pitta) and gives rise to diseases of Pitta origin.

4. Mandagni

(The weak) is that which cannot digest even little quantity of food in the scheduled time, produces heaviness of the abdomen, stasis of food for long period inside, difficulty in

breathing and such other troubles to the body. It is normally found in persons of Kapha Prakriti (phlegmatic constitution), develops in others by the use of Kaphakara Ahara Vihara (foods and activities which increase Kapha) and gives rise to disease of Kapha origin. Except Samagni, the first type, which is Prakrtai (normal), the remaining three are Vaikrta (abnormal), and lead to the production of various diseases. The number of diseases produced by Mandagni (weak digestive activity) is more than those produced by the other two. Hence a categorical statement that “all diseases are due to Mandagni”.

5. Bhutagni

Bhutagni is the one that is present in a basic element (Bhutas). There are five Agnis in each of the five basic elements, namely – Parthiva (earth), Apya (water), Tejas (Agni), Vayavya (vayu) and Nabhasa (akash). Each and every cell in our body is composed of the five Mahabhutas or five basic elements. Naturally, each cell (Dhatuparamanu) consists of these five Bhutagni also. All the nutrients in this world that we eat also consist of the same five basic elements with their respective Agni or bioenergies. Thus, they are completely similar with respect to the five basic elements with their Bhutagni in our body cells as well in the entire outside nutrient. Acharya Charak has mentioned that the five Bhutagni digest their own part of the element present in the food materials. After the digestion of food by the Bhutagni, digested materials containing the elements and qualities similar to each Bhutas nourish their own specific Bhautika elements of the body. These Bhutagnis act after the Jatharagni present in the stomach and duodenum, acting on the food and causing their disintegration. In the modern physiological perspective, the action of Jatharagni can be equated with the digestion in the stomach and duodenum, and the action of the Bhutagni can be equated with the conversion of digested materials in the liver.

6. Dhatwagni

All the seven Dhatus (seven element tissues of the body) contain their own Agni to metabolize the nutrient materials supplied to them through their own Srotas.

1. Rasagni present in the Rasa Dhatu.
2. Raktagni present in the Rakta Dhatu.
3. Mamsagni present in the Mamsa Dhatu.
4. Medagni present in the Meda Dhatu.
5. Asthyagni present in the Asthi Dhatu.
6. Majjagni present in the Majja Dhatu.

7. Shukragni present in the Shukra Dhatu.

The seven Dhatu are formed after the action of agni on the ingested food some waste products are also formed. Each Dhatu receives its nourishment from the previous Dhatu receives its nourishment from the previous Dhatu. The seven Dhatwagni work at the cellular level. Acharya Charaka has mentioned the fact that that the seven Dhatus that are a support of the body contain their own Agni, and by their own Agni they digest and transform the materials supplied to them to make the substances alike to them for assimilation and nourishment.

4. CONCLUSION

Explaining briefly the digestive and metabolic functions of Agni, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that various types of dietetic materials are digested by their own Agni (*Bhutagni*), encouraged and enhanced by *Antaragni* (*Jatharagni*) which is further digested and metabolized by *Dhatwagnito* associate the body with the nutritional strength, complexion and happy life along with providing energy to the seven *Dhatus*. The *Tridosas*, *Dhatus* and *Malas* are maintained normal and healthy by the Agni itself, present in each of them. Such is the importance of Agni to life.

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