

AGNI IN AYURVEDA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF ITS ROLE AND INTERRELATIONS WITH PHYSIOLOGICAL FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

Agni, often translated as the “digestive or metabolic fire,” occupies a foundational role in Ayurvedic physiology and pathology. Beyond mere digestion, *Agni* orchestrates the processes of assimilation, tissue nourishment, detoxification, immune vigilance, and mental clarity too. Classical Ayurvedic texts emphasize that optimal *Agni* underpins robust health and longevity, whereas its impairment heralds the onset of disease. *Agni*’s activity is governed by and intertwined with several key Ayurveda fundamentals like *Panchamahabhuta* (The five elemental components), *Tridosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), *Dhatu* (Seven primary body tissues), *Mala* (Waste products), *Prakriti* (individual constitution), *Ritu* (Seasonal cycles), and *Kala* (daily and life-cycle timing). This review delves into the various classifications and functions of *Agni*, elucidates its dynamic interplay with major physiological principles, and highlights its diagnostic and therapeutic significance in clinical practice. A holistic understanding of *Agni* enables practitioners to tailor individualized treatments and preventive strategies that align with the time-tested wisdom of *Ayurveda*.

KEYWORDS: *Agni*; *Ayurveda*; *Dosha*; *Dhatu*; *Prakriti*; *Indriya*; *Strotas*; *Ritu*; *Kaal*; *Digestive Fire*.

INTRODUCTION

AGNI in *Ayurveda* is reflected in the concept of *Pitta* of this system,^[1] because it carries out actions that resemble the qualities of fire likewise *Paka* (Digestion and cooking), *Dahana* (burning, combustion, and oxidation), and *Bhinna sanghata* (Splitting and disintegration). Additionally, *Pitta* governs *Tapana* (Heat production), *Parinamana* (Conversion and transformation), *Paravrtti* (Metamorphosis), *Prakasana* (Illumination), *Ranjana* or *Varnakara* (Coloration), and *Prabhakara* (The creation of luster or radiance). In general sense, the term *Kaya* or body itself has been equated to *Agni*.^[2] Classical texts state: "When *Agni* is extinguished, man dies; when it functions properly, he enjoys long life and good health; when it is disturbed, disease sets in." Thus, *Agni* is considered the very foundation of life.^[3]

Agni (Digestive/Metabolic fire) holds an integral position in *Ayurveda*, being deeply related to *Mahabhuta*, *Dosha*, *Dhatu* (Body tissues), *Mala* (Waste products), *Prakruti* (Constitution), *Ritu* (Seasons), *Kala* (Time), *Srotas* (Channels), *Indriya* (Senses), *Ahara* (Diet), *Chikitsa* (Treatment), *Dravyaguna* (Pharmacology), and *Rasashastra* (Alchemy and Medicines). This wide range of associations highlights the vital importance of *Agni* in maintaining health and life itself.

This review article aims to explore and understand the interrelation of *Agni* with various physiological factors, shedding light on its significance in maintaining balance within the body.

Agni and Panchamahabhuta

Agni possess similar properties like *Agni mahabhuta*.^[4] These properties are as follows:

- **Hot** (*Ushna*)
- **Sharp** (*Teekshna*)
- **Subtle** (*Sukshma*)
- **Light** (*Laghu*)
- **Dry** (*Ruksha*)
- **Clear** (*Vishad*)
- **Vision** (*Rupa*)^[5]

Agni and Dosha

When one closely examines the current editions of the classic *Ayurvedic* texts and related literature, *Pitta's* functions are strikingly similar to those of *Agni*. A helpful analogy is the role of physical fire in cooking food: fire makes food suitable for ingestion and digestion. Similarly, in the body, *Pitta* — by virtue of its "fiery" nature — prepares ingested food for assimilation and transformation.

To better understand the nature of *Pitta*, it is essential to examine its ***Panchabhautika*** (five-elemental) composition. Scholars like as *Charak*, *Sushruta*, and *Vagbhata* assert that the *Agni Mahabhuta* makes up the majority of *Pitta*.^[6] However, both *Charaka* and *Vagbhata* also describe *Pitta* as **fluid (*Sara*)** and **liquid (*Drava*)** in nature. These liquid properties are due to the influence of the ***Aap Mahabhuta*** within *Pitta's* elemental structure.^[7]

Therefore, even though *Pitta* is mostly fire-dominant, the presence of water elements explains its liquidity. ***Vagbhata*** clarifies that despite *Pitta's* liquid consistency (*Dravatva*), its primary functions — such as digestion and metabolism — are (*Agneya*) because of the activation of its ***Tejas*** component. In effect, during digestion, the *Tejas* aspect becomes predominant, temporarily overcoming its *Dravatva* (fluidity).

This fire-like action of *Pitta* can be seen in its ***Pakadi karmas*** — the transformation processes such as the digestion of food and the separation of ***Sara*** (nutrient essence) from ***Kitta***. This is why *Pitta* involved in digestion is specifically termed ***Pachaka Pitta***.^[8]

In summary, the *Pitta* complex contains a critical constituent imbued with ***Agneya Guna***, which enables it to carry out the transformative chemical processes of digestion. The interplay of ***Agni*** and ***Mahabhutas*** within *Pitta* underpins its vital physiological actions in the body.

Agni and Dhātu

Each of the body's seven *Dhatus*, or elemental tissues, has its own *Agni* to break down the nutrients that are given to it by their respective *Srotas*. From the basic ingredients found in the *Annarasa*, or essence, of the diet we eat, each *Dhatvagni*, or the bioenergy found in each *Dhatu*, synthesizes and alters the vital *Rasa Dhātu* needed for that specific *Dhatu* or cell. The ability to create and modify the components appropriate for its specific *Dhatu* is a specialty of each *Dhatvagni*. This is an example of a selective action. *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned

the fact that the seven *Dhatus* that are a support of the body contain their own *Agni*, and by their own *Agni* alter the substances that are provided to them in order to make them suitable for their assimilation and nutrition. The representative *Dhatu's* rise (*Vridhhi*) and fall (*Kshaya*) are caused by the *Dhatvagni*. The corresponding *Dhatu* rises as a result of the *dhatvagni's* hypo function. On the other hand, decreased *Dhatu* generation (*Kshaya*) results from hyper functioning (*Atideepti*). As a result, the metabolism of each *Dhatu* depends upon the actions of the *Dhatvagni*, prior to and following the *Dhatu*.

Agni and Mala

The deviated *Agni* hampers digestion process. When *Agni's* potency is reduced, an intermediary metabolic product called *Aama* (Undigested metabolite) is created. *Aama* due to its sticky nature obstructs the channels of the body, vitiates *Doshas*, contaminates tissues and disturbs body functions, and cause diseases.^[10]

The purpose of *Jala Nimajjana Purisha Pariksha* is to determine the state of *Agni* and the existence of *Aama* in the body. *Aama* is thought to be a significant contributor to numerous systemic diseases in addition to gastrointestinal ailments. The purpose of *Jala Nimajjana Purisha Pariksha* is to identify *Aama* early on. Stool that sinks in water is a sign that *Aama* is present in the body. It indicates the lack of *Aama* in the body if it floats in water.^[11]

Agni and Doshaj prakruti

Agni Type	Description	Dominant Dosha	Agni Characteristics	Health Implication
<i>Tikshna Agni</i>	Sharp/Intense	<i>Pitta</i>	Very strong digestion	Can lead to quick digestion, possible tissue depletion
<i>Manda Agni</i>	Mild/Weak	<i>Kapha</i>	Slow digestion	Causes heaviness, sluggish metabolism
<i>Vishama Agni</i>	Irregular	<i>Vata</i>	Unstable digestion (sometimes fast/slow)	Leads to bloating, gas, erratic appetite
<i>Sama Agni</i>	Balanced/Regular	<i>Balanced Doshas</i>	Normal digestion	Ideal state, supports overall health

The **first three Agnis** (*Tikshna*, *Manda*, *Vishama*) are **considered pathological**, forming part of **Grahani Dosha** (Digestive disorders) while ***Sama Agni*** is the **ideal and healthy state** where digestion, absorption, and metabolism are optimal.

Agni and Ritu

Ritu (Season)	Effect on Agni⁽¹²⁾	Recommended Diet
<i>Varsha</i> (Monsoon)	<i>Agni</i> becomes weak due to body weakness, land vapors, rainfall, and <i>Amla Vipak</i> of water.	Use honey with meals, sour salt, balsamic foods. Consume old wheat and <i>Rakt shaali</i> rice with <i>Sanskrit yush</i> .
<i>Sharad</i> (Autumn)	<i>Pitta</i> increases; <i>Agni</i> weakens due to liquid property of <i>Pitta</i> .	Drink <i>Hansodak</i> water. Eat <i>Madhur</i> , <i>Laghu</i> , and <i>Tikt Rasa</i> (sweet, light, bitter) foods.
<i>Hemant</i> (Early Winter)	Cold weather strengthens <i>Agni</i> in healthy individuals.	Consume <i>Snigdha</i> , <i>Amla</i> , <i>Lavan</i> foods. Include milk, milk-based products, <i>Ikshu Vikar</i> (Sugarcane products), fat, oil.
<i>Shishir</i> (Late Winter)	More cold than <i>Hemant</i> , similar effect – stronger <i>Agni</i> .	Same diet as <i>Hemant</i> : <i>Snigdha</i> , <i>Amla</i> , <i>Lavan</i> foods. Include milk, <i>Ikshu Vikar</i> , fat, oil, rice, and hot water.
<i>Vasant</i> (Spring)	<i>Kapha</i> accumulated during winter is stimulated by sun rays, weakening <i>Agni</i> .	Eat <i>Guru</i> (Heavy), <i>Amla Rasa</i> (Sour), <i>Snigdha</i> (Unctuous), and <i>Madhur</i> (Sweet) foods.
<i>Grishma</i> (Summer)	Sun absorbs moisture (<i>Snigdha Aansh</i>); <i>Vata</i> increases; heat weakens the body and <i>Agni</i> .	Consume <i>Madhur</i> (Sweet), <i>Sheetal Drav</i> (Cool liquids), and balsamic (Soothing) foods. Avoid excessive heat exposure.
<i>Ritu Sandhi</i> (Seasonal Transition)	Environmental changes impact <i>Agni</i> (may increase or decrease based on the upcoming <i>Ritu</i>).	Adjust diet gradually according to the incoming season to protect <i>Agni</i> .

Agni and Srotas

Every *Srotas* has *Agni* in itself, may it be *Dhatwagni* or *Bhutagni*. All these are derivative of *Jatharagni*, the basic power of transformation and forms the basic component of *Annavaha Srotas*. A reference to *Annavaha Srotas* would appear to be necessary at this stage. it may be recalled that, the terms *Mahastrotas*, *Kostha*, *Amasaya*, *Pakvasaya*, *Kshudraantra*, *Brahadantra* etc., were used to designate the Gastro-intestinal tract with which the *Jatharagni* and *Bhutagnis* are intimately concerned. The use of the term *Annavaha Srotas* has also a relevance to the structure mentioned above.^[13]

Agni and Indriya

All sense and motor organs (*Indriya*) and mind (*Manas*) are evolved from *Panchamahabhuta*. The *Bhutagni* is responsible for digestion and replenishing their corresponding substances with the attributes of smell, taste, radiance, touch, and sound, respectively. Thus *Bhutagni* acts on nourishment of their corresponding *Indriya*, too. *Bhutagni*, nourishes its respective

Guna in the body. The smell, taste, sound, touch, and feeling of the food nourishes respective *Indriya* in the *Purusha*.

After ingestion, the food material is first dealt by *Jatharagni*. After this process, reduction of the foodstuff to elemental substances is carried out. Based on their physiochemical properties, the substances are classed under *Panchabhautika* groups i.e. *Parthiva*, *Apya*, *Agneya*, *Vayavya*, and *Nabhasa*. *Agni* present in the molecules of each group, the *Parthivagni* in *Parthiva* group the *Apyaagni* in *Apya* group and so forth, digests the entire molecules leading to complete changes in its qualities.^[14]

CONCLUSION

Agni, the digestive and metabolic fire, holds a foundational role in Ayurvedic physiology, pathology, and therapeutics. It is intricately linked with all vital functions of the body, influencing the transformation and assimilation of food, tissue metabolism, elimination of waste, and overall vitality. The diverse types of *Agni*—particularly *Jatharagni*, *Dhatvagni*, and *Bhutagni*—highlight its multi-layered presence and importance across bodily systems. Its interrelationship with *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, *Malas*, *Prakruti*, and even external factors like *Ritu* (Season) and *Ahara* (Diet) underscores its central role in maintaining health or leading to disease when imbalanced. Recognizing the type and state of *Agni* is, therefore, essential for diagnosis, preventive care, and therapeutic interventions in Ayurveda. Sustaining a balanced *Agni* through appropriate lifestyle, diet, and treatment is key to achieving optimal health and longevity.

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