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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF AGNI IN KRIYA SHARIR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO METABOLIC HOMEOSTASIS

[1*]Dr. Snehal Alone, [2]Dr. Sampada Sant, [3]Dr. Vaidehi Kadam, [4]Dr. Nikita Pawar

[1,2,3,4]PG Scholar, R.A. Podar medical (Ayu.) college, Mumbai.

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***Corresponding Author**

Dr. Snehal Alone
PG Scholar, R.A. Podar medical (Ayu.) college, Mumbai.

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ABSTRACT

Agni is the fundamental physiological principle in Ayurveda responsible for digestion, metabolism, and transformation at systemic and cellular levels. In Kriya Sharir, Agni governs the functional integrity of Dosha, Dhatu, and Mala, thereby maintaining health and preventing disease. Modern physiology explains similar regulatory mechanisms through the concept of metabolic homeostasis, which ensures internal stability by coordinating enzymatic, hormonal, and cellular metabolic activities. This review critically analyses the Ayurvedic concept of Agni with special reference to its role in metabolic regulation. Classical Ayurvedic texts were reviewed and correlated with contemporary physiological principles to understand the functional similarities between Agni and metabolic homeostasis. Balanced Agni (Samagni) reflects an efficient metabolic state, whereas deranged Agni leads to metabolic imbalance and disease manifestation. The review highlights that Agni can be interpreted as the Ayurvedic representation of metabolic homeostasis, offering a holistic and integrative approach to understanding metabolism, preventive healthcare and disease pathogenesis.

KEYWORDS: Agni, Ama,Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Homeostasis, Jatharagni.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda emphasizes the maintenance of health through balance of Dosha, Dhatu, Mala, and Agni. Among these, Agni holds supreme importance as it governs digestion, metabolism, and transformation at both gross and subtle levels. Ayurveda conceptualizes Agni as *Dehagni*, as

it is the vital force that transforms ingested food into usable energy. This energy sustains all physiological activities, supports tissue nourishment, promotes vitality and radiance, and maintains overall health.[1] Acharya Charaka emphasized that Agni is essential for life, as its cessation leads to death. When Agni remains in a balanced (Sama) state, it ensures good health. Thus, maintaining the equilibrium of Agni is the primary goal of Swasthya, as it regulates digestion, metabolism, and overall bodily harmony.[2] Agni is also described in classical texts by several alternative names such as Vaisvanara, Vahni, Sukra, Suchi, and Bahula, each term reflecting a distinct attribute or functional aspect of Agni.[3]

Rationale of study

Agni is the core regulatory factor of digestion and metabolism in Kriya Sharir and is regarded as the foundation of health in Ayurveda. Balanced Agni ensures proper nourishment, tissue formation, and physiological equilibrium, while its impairment leads to disease. The Ayurvedic concept of Agni closely corresponds to metabolic homeostasis described in modern physiology. Classical texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya describe various forms of Agni regulating metabolism at different levels. Hence, this study aims to critically review the concept of Agni in Kriya Sharir and highlight its relevance in maintaining metabolic homeostasis, supporting better academic clarity and integrative understanding.

Concept of Agni in Ayurveda

Agni is etymologically derived from the *Ang* dhatu with the *Gat* pratyaya, signifying expansion and diffusion. It represents the principle that permeates the body, facilitating transformation and functional activity.[4] Acharya Charaka equated Agni with Kaya, emphasizing that Kaya Chikitsa primarily focuses on the regulation and preservation of Agni. Hence, Agni is regarded as the fundamental Mula sustaining life.[5] According to Yaska, the term is derived from *"daha"* meaning to burn and *"ni"* meaning to carry, indicating that it denotes the principle which carries and sustains the process of combustion.[6] Agni is defined as the factor responsible for Paka (digestion and transformation) of Ahara (food), Dosha, Dhatu, and Mala. According to Sushrutacharya, Agni does not exist independently of Pitta.[7] In other words, Agni is expressed as an inherent quality (guna) of Pitta rather than as a separate entity. Chakrapaṇidatta explains that disturbance of Agni results in derangement of the normal equilibrium of the physiological Dosas, thereby initiating pathological changes in the body.[8] It is not merely digestive fire but a collective term representing all metabolic and

enzymatic activities in the body. According to Charaka Samhita, Agni is responsible for Digestion of food, Nourishment of tissues, Maintenance of strength and complexion, Development of Ojas, Preservation of life.

Classification of Agni

Ayurveda describes 13 types of Agni, emphasizing multi-level metabolic activity:

1.Aacharya Charak [9]: 13

Jatahragni -1, Bhutagni- 5, Dhavatgni-7

2.Aacharya Sushrut [10]: 5

Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Alochakagni, Sadhakagni, Bhrajakagni.

1. Jatharagni

Located in the gastrointestinal tract. Responsible for primary digestion. Governs the functioning of all other Agnis. Jatharagni also performs the vital role of breaking down and transforming the consumed food into absorbable components, thereby facilitating proper digestion and separation of nutrients.[11]

2. Bhutagni (5 types)

Act on Panchamahabhuta components of food. Enable assimilation of nutrients suitable for the body. After the action of Bhutagni, the digested food is transformed in such a way that each constituent possessing qualities analogous to a particular Mahabhuta selectively supports and strengthens its corresponding elemental component in the body.[12] All food we eat which is also made of these panch mahabhutas with their respective Agni or bioenergy.

3. Dhatvagni (7 types)

Act at the tissue level. Transform nutrients into specific Dhatus (Rasa to Shukra). These Agni namely a) Rasagni b) Raktagni c) Mansagni d) Medagni e) Asthiagni f) Majjagni g) Shukragni. Aacharya Charaka has described that the functioning of Agni is highly specific in nature. Each of the seven Dhatus possesses its own Dhatu-agni, which selectively processes and converts the received nutrients. Through this subtle and precise metabolic activity, known as Suksma Paka, nourishment is appropriately transformed and delivered to the respective Dhatus according to their individual requirements.[13]

Functions of Agni (Physiological Perspective)

Agni performs several vital functions such as Ahara Pachana (digestion of ingested food), Dhatu Poshan (nourishment and regeneration of tissues), Varna Prasada (maintenance of complexion), Bala and Ojas Utpatti (immunity and vitality), Utsaha and Medha (energy and cognitive function). From a modern view, these functions parallel enzyme systems, hormonal regulation, mitochondrial activity, and cellular metabolism.

Agni and Metabolic Homeostasis

Metabolic homeostasis refers to the regulation of biochemical reactions to maintain, Energy balance, Glucose homeostasis, Lipid and protein metabolism, Acid–base equilibrium. Agni functions similarly by Regulating digestion and absorption, controlling tissue metabolism, Maintaining Dosha equilibrium. Disruption of Agni mirrors metabolic disorders such as Diabetes mellitus, Obesity, Malabsorption syndromes and Dyslipidaemia. Thus, Agni may be interpreted as the Ayurvedic representation of integrated metabolic homeostasis.

Types of Agni Based on Functional State

Ayurveda describes four functional states of Agni.

1. 1.Samagni- Samagni represents the balanced and normal state of Agni, in which food is digested efficiently and at the appropriate time. This well-regulated Agni ensures proper nourishment and qualitative enhancement of all Dhātus. Therefore, the presence of Samāgni has been described as a fundamental criterion in the definition of a Swastha Purusha.[14]
2. 2.Vishamagni- Vishamagni represents a functional state of Agni characterized by irregular and inconsistent digestion. In this condition, the digestive power fluctuates, resulting in periods of normal metabolic activity alternating with episodes of impaired digestion.
3. 3.Tikshnagni- This type of Agni digests ingested food at a rapid rate. According to Acharya Sushruta, when the digestive capacity becomes excessively strong, even beyond the normal level, food is digested very quickly, resulting in an early and repeated sensation of hunger.[15]
4. Mandagni- Mandagni denotes a sluggish state of digestive fire in which food is digested at a very slow rate, reflecting a reduced capacity of digestion.

Among these, Mandagni is considered the root cause of most diseases.

Pathological Aspect of Agni

Impaired Agni leads to formation of Ama, a toxic, undigested metabolic by-product. Ama obstructs channels (*Srotorodha*) and disrupts tissue metabolism, resembling: Accumulation of metabolic waste, Oxidative stress, Chronic inflammation. According to Sushruta Samhita, improper Agni results in systemic disease progression.

Clinical Importance of Agni in Kriya Sharir

Diagnosis of disease is incomplete without assessing Agni. Treatment principles (Deepana, Pachana, Langhana) focus on Agni correction. Preventive medicine in Ayurveda emphasizes Agni maintenance. In Kriya Sharir, Agni acts as a functional bridge between structure and physiology.

Critical Analysis

In Kriya Sharir, Agni is not restricted to digestion but represents the body's capacity for transformation, nourishment, and maintenance of health. This broader view helps in understanding why classical texts consider Agni central to both health and disease. Modern physiology describes metabolism through enzymes, hormones, and biochemical pathways. Although this provides scientific precision, it often studies metabolism in fragmented parts. In contrast, the Ayurvedic description of Jatharagni, Bhutagni, and Dhatvagni presents metabolism as a continuous and coordinated process, which closely resembles digestion, absorption, and tissue metabolism explained in modern science. The functional states of Agni, especially Mandagni, offer meaningful insight into chronic disorders through the concept of Ama formation. Therefore, Agni can be correlated with metabolic homeostasis, offering a preventive understanding of metabolism that complements modern concepts well.

DISCUSSION

Agni is the fundamental physiological principle in Ayurveda responsible for digestion, metabolism, and transformation. When milk is consumed, it does not directly nourish the tissues. First, it undergoes Jatharagni Paka, where its *guru* and *snigdha* qualities are modified, making it suitable for absorption. Thereafter, through Bhutagni, the Panchabhautika components of milk are transformed into bio-compatible forms. Finally, Dhatvagni acts sequentially, converting the essence of milk into Rasa Dhatu, and subsequently contributing to the formation of Raktha, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, and Shukra. This stepwise transformation demonstrates that nourishment is not dependent on the substance itself, but on the functional integrity of Agni. The same milk, when Agni is balanced, promotes *Brimhana*

and *Ojas*, whereas in Mandagni it produces Ama, leading to disorders like *Ajeerna*, *Gaurava*, and *Kapha-pradhana vikara*. Thus, Ayurveda emphasizes that Agni determines the fate of Ahara, not the Ahara alone.

CONCLUSION

Agni is the cornerstone of physiological functioning in Ayurveda and plays a role analogous to metabolic homeostasis described in modern science. Understanding Agni in Kriya Sharir provides deep insight into digestion, metabolism, immunity, and disease pathogenesis. A balanced Agni ensures health, while its derangement initiates pathological processes. Hence, Agni can be regarded as the Ayurvedic foundation of metabolic regulation and systemic homeostasis.

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