

CONCEPT OF AGNI WITH REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF LANGHANA IN SAMAVASTHA OF DISEASE

Dr. Shivani Bhawarekar^{1*}, Dr. Anand Kalaskar² and Dr. Ruchira Virkar³

¹PG Scholar (Rog Nidan Avum Vikriti Vigyan), SSAM, Hadapsar, Pune.

²Associate Professor (Rog Nidan Avum Vikriti Vigyan), SSAM, Hadapsar, Pune.

³PG Scholar (Rog Nidan Avum Vikriti Vigyan), SSAM, Hadapsar, Pune.

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***Corresponding Author**

Dr. Shivani Bhawarekar

PG Scholar (Rog Nidan
Avum Vikriti Vigyan),
SSAM, Hadapsar, Pune.

ABSTRACT

Agni is reflected in the concept of *pitta* in *Ayurveda*. The term *pitta* is derived from the root word 'tapa' which means to heat or 'to burn'.^[1] *Agni* is said to be one of the factors for a person to be alive, if *agni* ceases to function in the body, an individual cannot survive. Even when it gets disturbed because of different causes, it shows repercussions in the form of disease which eventually compromises the health status.^[2] As per classical *ayurveda* text, the diseases are caused due to *mandagni*.^[3] *Agni* tends to get imbalanced, due to daily consumption of *hetus* (causes), which leads to *mandagni*, that lets the food go undigested and leads to formation of *ama*, which is toxic in

nature and leads to many disorders in body. *Ama* is the undigested food in the body which results from the disturbances in *agni*. Formation of *ama* in body can lead to various diseases like *visuchika*, *alasaka*, *dandalsaka*, *amavish* etc. This pandemic has taught the world the value of prevention, hence preserving *agni* can ensure an early prognosis in *samavastha* of disease and decreases the need to do regular *shodhana* therapies for a healthy life.

KEYWORDS: Agni, Jatharagni, Langhana.

INTRODUCTION

Agni is the factor which is responsible for the digestion and assimilation of the food ingested by an individual. The functions of *agni* are growth, development, strength, complexion, happiness and growth of tissues. *Prakrit dhatus* are formed after receiving respective nutrients from metabolized food substances. *Prakrit* (Physiological) *agni* is responsible for longevity, complexion, strength, health, enthusiasm, built, luster, immunity (*ojas*) and body

temperature. Therefore, healthy state of body and diseased condition is entirely dependent on status of *agni*.^[4]

The main function of *agni* is to digest the food but in absence of food, it can digest the *doshas*, when the *doshas decrease*, it starts to digest the *dhatu*s and results in depletion of *dhatu*s which results in decreasing longevity.^[5]

The main cause that disrupts *agni* in present era is the adaptation of the sedentary lifestyle of the population. The sedentary lifestyle leads to many lifestyle disorders. These lifestyle disorders start their progression from imbalancing the *prakrit agni* and leading to formation of disease. Thereby, just maintaining the *prakrit* state of *agni* helps in prevention of many lifestyle disorders.

When *prakrit agni* in body is imbalanced, it leads to vitiation of *agni* and later leads to formation of *ama*, which is difficult to digest. The concept of *agni* helps in treating the *samavastha* of disease, due to presence of *agni's prakrit* function of *aahar pachana*. Hence, in *samavastha* the patient is suggested to undergo *langhana* and thus the *agni* is preserved while *langhana* helps in digestion of the *ama*, *vikrit doshas* and *vikrit dhatu*s.^[6]

A person who indulges in food according to his desires without considering whether the food is incompatible by its nature, by its combination, processing etc., yet lives on happily, does by the strength of his digestive fire(*agni*). Hence all efforts should be done to protect the digestive fire because when it is lost or when it gets seized by the *doshas*, the person gets seized by group of diseases, when it is normal the person enjoys long life free of diseases.^[7]

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

- i. To study the concept of *agni*, *pitta* in ayurvedic classical texts.
- ii. To study the importance of *agni* for maintaining health of an individual.
- iii. To study the role of *agni* during *langhana* in *samavastha* of diseases.

METHODOLOGY

This review article is based on the concept of *agni*, *ama*, *langhana*. The relevant topics are collected and compiled.

REVIEW OF AGNI

In *Brahmasutra*, Agni is described as a sign of life in the body. *Shankaracharya* (*Vedanta sutra shabda kalpa druma*) described that Agni carries everything in it. Agni is responsible for the maintenance of health and genesis of disease as well as for decay (*Shabdakalpa druma*). In *Shabdakalpa druma*, synonyms of Agni have been given collectively 61 in number. These are e.g., *Vaishvanara*, *Paka*, *Sarva Amivachatana*, *Tanoonpata*, *Damunasa*, *Shuchi*, *Rudra*, *Vishwambhar*, etc.

Ayurveda depicts the theories of digestion and metabolism in form of *Agni* and *Pitta*. As wrongly interpreted, the term *agni* does not mean as liver bile as it is generally considered. The assumption of the term *Pitta* as the liver bile is as misleading as it is to render the terms *vata* and *kapha* as equivalents of wind and phlegm. But now the question arises what is *pitta* if it is not liver bile and how this concept is concerned with digestion and metabolism? So, the term *pitta* in *Ayurveda* is derived from Sanskrit root “*tapa*” and that it has three meanings viz i) *tapa dahe*-meaning to burn, ii) *tapa santape*-meaning to heat, iii) *tapa aishwarye*-meaning to enable the achievement of *animadi* or eight-fold achievements.^[8]

It is seen that, *Ayurveda* conceptualizes *pitta* which is comparable to *agni*/ digestive fire, as the functions it performs in the body resemble to those of the fire i.e., *agni* viz *paka* or *pachana*. Hence, *Charaka* is seen to have expressed the view that *agni* in the body is implicit in *pitta*. *Sushruta* has treated the *pitta* of the body and *agni* as identical. *Chakrapani* has clarified the implications of the term *agni* used in the context of the description of the properties and functions of *pitta*.

Pachaka pitta with Relation to Agni

The concept of *Pachaka Pitta* has been described by the three main authorities by *Ayurveda* viz., *Charaka*, *Sushruta* and *Vagbhata* in distinct periods. According to *Charaka* (about 5th century B.C.), *koshthagni* is the leader of all factors concerned with digestion and metabolism in the body of all living beings. He observed that the seat of *agni* is in region above the *nabhi* (umbilicus). This seat of *agni* is also known as *grahani*, because it receives and retains the food during its digestion. The anatomical structure of *grahani* is supported by *agni*. It retains food which is yet to be digested, while the digested portion of it (the food) is moved down (to the *pakwashaya*) on either side.^[9]

Sushruta (about 4th century B.C.) and *Vagbhata* (around 5th century A.D.) both provided in-depth descriptions of this idea. They have mentioned about the *kala* viz, the *pittadhara kala* that covers the region between the *amashaya* and *pakwashaya*. It was noted that the *kala* that forms between *amashaya* and *pakwashaya* is referred to as *pittadhara kala* and the portion of the *koshtha* it forms is referred to as the *grahani*.

Charaka described the concept that *Koshthagni* is the supreme force over all elements that are involved in the body's digestion and metabolism. All these factors are derived from it. Their activities normal and abnormal are dependent upon an increase or decrease of *jathargni*. The *agni* involved in digestion of food i.e., *jatharagni* is considered the absolute form of *agni*, as it is called base of all *Agni*'s. Since *Jatharagni* is responsible for boosting all other *agnis*, its decrease will result in a decline in all *agnis*.

Types of Agni

Types of *Agni*'s described in various classical *Ayurvedic* texts, as given below.

Acharya's	Types of Agni			
Acharya Charaka	Jatharagni-1	Bhutagni-5	Dhatwagni-7	—
Acharya Sushruta	—	Bhutagnis (five types of pittas, which are indirectly five types of <i>Bhutagnis</i>)	—	—
Acharya Vagbhata	Doshagni-3	Bhutagnis-5	Dhatvagnis-7	Malagni-3.

Abnormal forms of Agni^[10]

Of the all forms of *agni* described below, the only physiological *agni* is *samagni*, other three are considered pathological which results after many different causes.

1. *Samagni*: Those individuals with equilibrium of doshas are considered to have the *samagni*. The *samagni* helps in the digestion of food ingested appropriately. *Samagni* gets disturbed due to incompatible foods, irregular food habits and comes to its natural form by regulating diet habits.
2. *Tikshnagni*: It is the intense form of the *agni* hence this *agni* digests the heavy foods in short span of time. This *agni* tolerates all types of bad foods ingested by individual like heavy foods, incompatible foods, irregular meals.
3. *Mandagni*: This *agni* is slow and weak in nature, takes more time even to digest light food. Even during digestion *mandagni* shows symptoms like dryness of mouth, flatus in abdomen and heaviness in body.

4. *Vishamagni*: According to *Charaka*, *Vishamagni* is the opposite of *samagni*. It is unpredictable, sometimes it properly digests the food and sometimes it does not.

This is all about the concept of *agni* and *pitta*. The two main concept of *agni* and *pitta* are interlinked to each other.

Causes of vitiation of *agni*^[11]

The causes responsible for the *agni dushti* (vitiation of *agni*) are.

- *Abhojana* (absence of taking timely meals),
- *Ajeerna* (indigestion),
- *Ati bhojana* (over-eating),
- *Vishamashan* (untimed meals),
- *Asatmyakar bhojana* (unwholesome meals), *Ati guru* (heavy to digest foods),
- *Sheeta, ruksha* (cold and dry foods),
- *Dushta bhojana* (vitiating meals),
- *Mithya yoga of virechana, vamana and sneha karma* (contrary use of emesis and purgation therapy) leading to *ati karshana* (excessive emaciation),
- *Vaishamya in desha, kala and ritu* (contrast in geographical place, time period and seasons)
- *Vega vidharan* (suppression of natural urges).

Concept of *ama* and its effects on body

Ama as a concept has been discussed by *Acharya's* but *Acharya Vagbhata* was the first one to define it. According to him, due to hypofunction of *agni*, the food which is not completely digested or properly digested leads to formation of immature or improper *rasa* in *amashaya* and due to its retention, it undergoes fermentation and putrefaction. (*Vagbhata*).

The food that goes undigested due to dysfunction of *agni* results in *ama*.^[12] *Ama* can be said to be partially digested food substances that are toxic to body. *Ama* is one of the cause from which the diseases in the body manifests. (Definition by Bhavmishra).

The *aahar rasa*, a form of the *rasa dhatu*, is the first byproduct of digestion. Hypofunction of *agni* can lead to the improper formation of *aahar rasa*, which then results in improper formation of *rasa dhatu*, which is ultimately known as *ama*. This *ama* circulates in body along with the *rasa dhatu* and causes diseases when a favorable environment is found.

The causes of *ama*, in addition to hypo functioning of *agni* are^[13]

- due to abstinence from food for long periods
- indigestion,
- overeating,
- irregular diet habits,
- consumption of cold substances,
- mithya yog of panchakarma,
- wasting of tissues,
- suppression of *adharniya vega* and mental stress and emotions viz anger, grief.

Effects of Ama

When the *ama* gets mixed with the *doshas*, *dhatu*s and *mala* it is termed as *saama*. The disorders that result from this complex are called as the disease's *saamavastha*.^[12] Hence it is considered that the *ama* is capable to vitiate *doshas*, *dhatu*s and *malas* and cause diseases. The *ama* initially vitiates the *rasa dhatu* as it is the first *dhatu* to be formed and moves along with *rasa dhatu* in the body. Once it gets a suitable environment, it settles there and causes disease. The management of any disease caused by *ama* is *langhana*.

Langhana is defined as the less intake of *aahar* for a specific period. It helps to increase the *agni* which is suppressed by the *ama*. After the earlier stage of *langhana*, the *agni* starts getting in its normal form, and becomes enough to do *pachana* of the *ama*. Thus *langhana* helps the preservation as well as restoration of the *agni* in *samavastha* of the disease.

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda has thoroughly described *agni* and its *benefits*. Following the rules and regulations in the modern era is crucial for maintaining healthy *agni* and thereby one's health. *Agni* has been compared to the *Pachaka pitta* in the body. It has been explained how the *agni* functions on the food ingested in stomach. The *agni* is mainly of three types i.e., *jatharagni*, *dhatvagni* and *bhutagni*. All these three *agni* work at different levels in the body to complete the process of digestion, metabolism, and assimilation.

The *agni* which is responsible for the digestion is *jatharagni* and is known to be the absolute source of *agni*. This *jatharagni* is situated in the *grahani*. When the *jatharagni* gets disturbed by many factors, it leads to the suppression or aggravation of *agni*, which results in an

abnormal condition of *agni* and can cause a disease in the body. The improper state of *agni* can be either *mandagni*, *tikshnagni*, *vishamagni*.

Abnormal form of *agni* is responsible for improper digestion in body which leads to improper formation of the *aahar rasa* which later ferments into an uncooked substance called as the *ama*. Once this *ama* is formed it circulates in the body along with the *aahar rasa* and harbors the diseases in body. Suppression or aggravation of *agni* is a known cause of disease, which leads to formation of *ama* which is also considered as an important factor in the pathogenesis of the diseases. So, in this diseased state when the individual is advised to undergo *langhana*, the *langhana* usually works on the *saamavastha* of the disease to digest/eliminate *ama* from the body and restore back the normal form of *agni*.

The continuous accumulation of *ama* with continuous consumption of *hetu's* reaches a state in body where the *shodhan* therapies are must to eliminate the aggravated doshas in the body. Hence, the concept of the physiological state of *agni* i.e., *samagni* enhances the need to preserve the *agni* so that it can minimize the effect of *ama* on body and can reduce the use of *shodhan* therapies. Its works as a prevention method in early state of formation of diseases.

CONCLUSION

Agni is the factor responsible for good health, life span, happiness etc. So, it is important to maintain the agni in its natural form. Lack of proper diet, sedentary lifestyle can cause the agni to disrupt but it can be brought back to its natural form by doing *langhana*. As long as, all types of Agni's are maintained in its normal and physiological form, the individual will be healthy. The synergistic concept of Pachaka pitta, Agni and Ama can help an individual to lead a healthy state of body.

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