

CONCEPT OF AGNI – AN AYURVEDIC REVIEW

Durgesh Gupta¹, A.C. Kar²¹M.D. (Ayu), ²Professors, ^{1,2}Department of Vikriti Vigyan, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS, BHU, Varanasi, India

ABSTRACT

Agni is responsible for strength, health, longevity; vital breath and it determine the quantity of food to be consumed. The word *agni bala* is used to denote the superiority, mediocrity and inferiority nature of *agni* and accordingly it digest the good amount, moderate amount and less amount of food respectively. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is necessary for the maintenance of life, and is performed by the *Agni*. According to the functions and site of action, *Agni* has been divided into 13 types, i.e. one *Jatharagni*, five *Bhutagni* and seven *Dhatvagni*. *Jatharagni* is the most important one, which digests four types of food and transforms it into *Rasa* and *Mala*. This article revolves around the details of *Agni* described in various texts of *Ayurveda*.

Keywords: *Agni, bhutagni, dhatvagni, jatharagni.*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda has described an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body as *Agni*. In *Ayurveda*, the term “*Agni*” is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic 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) and *prana* (life energy)¹. The *audaryagni* present inside the abdomen of animals is known by various names such as *Vaiswanara*, *Audarya tejas*, *Kayagni*, *Jatharagni*, *Kosthagni*, and *Pachakagni*. This *agni* is not in the form of flame as the terrestrial fire but is in the form of liquid which is called as ‘*Pitta*’ in *Ayurveda*. ‘There is no *agni* apart from *pitta* and *pitta* itself is

agni’ asserts *Caraka*.² The term ‘*Pitta*’ is used to designate its physical or material form and the term “*Agni*” to designate its functions. Sometimes these are used interchanging also. Further, *Agni* is subdivided into thirteen kind’s viz., one- *Kosthangni*, five-*Bhutagnis* and seven-*Dhatwagnis*. *Kosthagni* is the chief of all the other kinds. It is present inside the *amasaya* (stomach and small intestines) and *pakwasaya* (large intestine), it attends to the function of digestion of food and contributes moities of itself to the other *agnis* also, thereby providing them with strength. It is also known as *Pachaka pitta*. Though composed of all the *panchamahabhutas* it is predominantly *tejas (agneya)*, though it is liquid in form it is devoid of the qualities of liquid viz. *sita* (cold), *snigdha* (moist),

etc and is called *Anala* (fire) due to its predominant functions of *paka* (cooking, digestion)³. *Bhutagnis* are five in number, and present in the *kosthagni* or *pachaka pitta* itself. These are known as *parthivagni*, *apyagni*, *taijasagni*, *vayavyagni* and *nabhasagni*. They help the *kosthagni* in the digestion of food, especially to digest those kinds of foods which are of identical nature⁴. *Parthivagni* specially helps in the digestion of *parthiva* kind of food, *apyagni* the *apya* kinds of foods and so on. These *bhutagnis* derive their strength (functional capacity) from the *kosthagni* itself. *Dhatwagnis* seven in number, are present, one in each of the seven *dhatu*s (tissues) of the body⁵, and each one is called by name of the *dhatu* in which it is present such as *Rasagni*, *Raktagni*, etc. Each of them is specific by itself (in its composition and function) and suitable only to particular *dhatu* in which it is present (*dhatu visista*). Each *dhatwagni* attends to the digestion of *Posakansa* (nutrient material) supplied to that *dhatu* by circulating *rasa dhatu*. The *dhatwagni* present in the *mamsa dhatu* can digest the nutrient material required for *mamsa dhatu* only but cannot digest those of other *dhatu*s, similarly is the case with the other *dhatwagnis*. This is what is known as *visista* or specificity of *dhatwagnis*. The *dhatwagnis* also derive their strength from *kosthagni* itself, and so depend on it for their functioning. If the *kosthagnis* is normal, the *dhatwagnis* are also normal, if the *kosthagnis* are weak, the *dhatwagnis* are also weak and if the *kosthagnis* is powerful the *dhatwagnis* are also powerful. *Vagbhata* says that even the

dosas and *malas* also have their own *agnis*. These are also related to *kosthagni*⁶. An attempt has been made to understand *Agni* through *Ayurvedic* perspective. In this article definition, *Kosthagni Vyapara*, Importance of *Agni*, *Agni Samya* and *Vaisamya* Effect of *Agni Vaismaya*, will be described.

Kosthagni Vyapara (functions of digestive fire)- The food ingested, is acted upon by the normal *Kosthagni* vis a vis *pachaka pitta* and cooked properly to produce two substances, the *Sarabhaga* or the *Ahara rasa* (the essence of food) and *Kitta bhaga* (the waste products of food). The *sarabhaga* or *ahara rasa* undergoes further changes being acted upon by the *bhutagnis* and gets converted into *Rasadhatu*- the first *dhatu* (first tissue) of the body. The activities of *kosthagni* and *bhutagnis* together form the *Ahara paka* or digestion of food. The *rasadhatu* contains the nutrient materials derived from the food and required by the *dhatu*s (tissues), This *rasa dhatu* circulates all over the body supplying the nutrients to all the other *dhatu*s, which utilize this material for their growth (metabolism)⁷.

Importance of Agni - *Bala* (strength), *varna* (colour), *swasthya* (health), *utsaha* (enthusiasm), *upacaya* (development of the body), *prabha* (complexion), *ojas* (strength), *tejas* (valour), *vaya* (age), and even *ayu* (life) - all depend on *Agni* and its function (fire-like activity). So long as *agni* is normal, man can have a healthy and long life, loss of *Agni* leads to loss of life⁸. Foods containing the nutrient materials of the *dhatu*s can be of help to the *dhatu*s, only after they are cooked (digested) well by the *Agni*.

Agni Samya and Vaisamya (normalcy and abnormalcy)- Existence of all the different kinds of *agnis* in their required *pramana* (quantity), *gunas* (qualities) and *karmas* (functions) is known as *Agni Samya* (normalcy). While *vrddhi* (increase) and *kshaya* (decrease) in these aspects is known as *Agni Vaisamya* (abnormalcy) *Vrddhi* (increase) and *kshaya* (decrease) are known as *tikshna* (strong, powerful) and *manda* (weak) respectively. Both these are abnormal, and give rise to many diseases in the body.

Kosthagni: The *kosthagni* (gastric fire, digestive activity) present in man, is of the following four kinds⁹:

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 *doshas* respectively.)
2. **Visamagni** (the erratic) 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 *vatakara ahara vihara* (foods and activities which increase *vata*) and given 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 belchings, 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 *pittakara 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 viharas* (foods and activities which increase *kapha*) and gives rise to disease of *kapha* origin.

Except *samagni*, the first type, which is *prakrta* (normal), the remaining three are *vaikrta* (abnormal), and lead to the production of various diseases¹⁰. 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*”¹¹

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 other¹². 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 copious (large) in *Mandagni* and less in the other two.

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 *Dhatvagni* to associate the body with the nutritional strength, complexion and happy life along with providing energy to the seven *dhatu*s. The *Tridosas*, *Dhatu*s 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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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Dr. Durgesh gupta

M.D. (Ayu) Department of Vikriti
Vigyan, Faculty of Ayurveda, IMS,
BHU, Varanasi, India

Email: durgeshgupta4516@gmail.com

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