

AN OVERVIEW OF CONCEPT OF AGNI IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *Agni* is one of the most important contributions of Ayurveda to healthcare system. *Agni* is responsible for strength, health, longevity and it determines 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 digests 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*. By this article an attempt has been made to describe the concepts of *Agni* in *Ayurveda*.

Keywords: *Agni, Bhutagni, Dhatwagni, Jatharagni, Ayurveda*

INTRODUCTION

Solar energy is the source of any sort of conversion in the living beings. *Agni* represents this solar energy in the living beings. *Agni* has the capacity to convert the substance in any form because of its occult power. Maintenance of physiological actions in a state dependent on the normal state of *Agni* while the abnormal state of *Agni* contributes to pathological changes and absence of *Agni* results in death

of the living being. *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*. In relation to *Agni* Acharya Charak has given precise view that *Agni* is not in the form of flame as the terrestrial fire but it is represented in the form of liquid which is called as '*Pitta*' in Ayurveda [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 interchangeably also. Further, *Agni* is subdivided into thirteen kind's viz., one-*Jatharagni*, five-*Bhutagnis* and seven-*Dhatwagnis*. *Jatharagni* 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 parts of itself to the other *Agnis* also, thereby providing the strength. *Bhutagnis* are five in number, and present in the *Jatharagni* or *Pachaka pitta* itself. These are known as *Parthivagni*, *Apyagni*, *Taijasagni*, *Vayavyagni* and *Nabhasagni*. They help the *Jatharagni* the digestion of food, especially to digest those kinds of foods which are of identical nature [3]. *Dhatwagnis* seven in number, are present, one in each of the seven *Dhatus* (tissues) of the body [4], and each one is called by name of the *Dhatu* in which it is present such as *Rasagni*, *Raktagni*, etc.

Description of Agni in various Ayurvedic Classics:

In *Brahmasutra*, *Agni* was described as a sign of life in the body. Etymology of the term "*Agni*," Acharya Yasaka has given the: *Agni* = A + G + Ni. The word "A" denotes root "I," meaning "to go"; "G" denotes the root "*Anja*," meaning "to glitter" or root "*Daha*," meaning "to burn" and "*Ni*" means "to carry." The etymology was given by Yasaka, Shankaracharya (*vedantasutra shabda kalpa druma*) described that *Agni* carries everything in it. *Agni* is responsible for the maintenance of health and causation of disease as well as for decay (*Shabdakalpadrum*).[5] In *Shabdakalpa druma*, synonyms of *Agni* have been given collected which is 61 in number. These are e.g., *Vaishvanara*, *Paka*, *Sarva Amivachatana*, *Tanoonpata*, *Damunasa*, *Shuchi*, *Rudra*, *Vishwambhar*, etc (*Shabdakalpadrum*).[6]

Relation between Agni & Pitta in various Ayurvedic Classics:

According to Acharya Sushruta the origin of *Pitta* is from "*Tapa*," The main function of *Pitta* in Ayurveda digestion of ingested food, to maintain heat of body, it maintains the color, lusture, and formation of blood from *rasa*, etc. of the body [7]

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*. [8] and Acharya Marichi has also given own view that the *Agni* present in

the *Pitta* gives good or bad results when it is normal or vitiated stages [9]

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.[10]

According to Acharya Vagbhata, *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*”.[11]

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. *Samadoshah samagnishcha.....swasthya etibhidhiyate.*

Types of *Agnis*:

Types of *Agnis* describes in various classical Ayurvedic texts, as shown below.

- Acharya Charaka has described about 13 *Agnis*. *Jatharagni* – 1, *Bhutagni* – 5, *Dhatwagni* – 7 .[13]
- According to Acharya Sushruta, described five types of *Pitta*, which are indirectly types five *Bhutagnis* that are, viz. *Pachakagni*, *Ranjakagni*, *Alochakagni*, *Sadhakagni* and *Bhrajakagni*. [14]
- Acharya Vagbhata has described different types *Agni*, viz. – *Bhutagnis* – 5, *Dhatwagnis* – 7, *Dhoshagni* – 3 and *Malagni* – 3.
- Acharya Sharangadhara has recognized five types *pittas* only (*Pachak*, *Bhrajak*, *Ranjak*, *Alochaka* and *Sadhak*) .[15]
- Acharya Bhavamishra has followed Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata .[16]*Agni* has been divided into 13 types according to the function and site of action. These are:
 1. *Jatharagni* – one *Agni* present in the stomach and duodenum.
 2. *Bhutagni* – five *Agni* from five basic elements.
 3. *Dhatwagni* – seven *Agni* present, one in each of the seven *Dhatus*.

Accordingly, they are classified into three groups, namely *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*.

***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 *Dhatu*s), 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. [17]

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 *Dhatu*s *paramanus* (tissues).

Jatharagni is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (*Prasad*) and the waste products (*kitta*) in our body. [18]

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* de-

pend 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* [19]

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being.[20] 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 *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 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 *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 Vihara* (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 diseases [21]. 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*”[22]

AgniSamya 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.

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[23]. 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.

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 (*Dhatu paramanu*) 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 that we ingest for the

nutrition of our body. 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 .[24] 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.

Dhatwagni

All the seven *Dhatu* (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 *Dhatu* 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. [25]

CONCLUSION

Explaining briefly the digestive and metabolic functions of Agni, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that various types of dietic materials are digested by their own Agni (*Bhutagni*), encouraged and enhanced by *Antaragni* (*Jatharagni*), which is further digested and metabolized by *Dhatwagni* to associate the body with the nutritional strength, complexion and happy life along with providing energy to the seven *Dhatu*. The *Tridosas*, *Dhatu* 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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