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, Kostrhagni, 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 kinds 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 Dhatu (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 Brahmatsutra,-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, Damunasas, 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 Shrusrut 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 Vagbhatt, Pitta is of five types, in which type the Pitta are located in between the Pakvashaya and Amashaya, (in Grahan) 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 samagnischa……..swasthya etibhidhiyate.

Types of Agnis:

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

- 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 Agnis, viz. – Bhutagnis – 5, Dhatagnis – 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 Dhatus), 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 Dhatus 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 depend 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 faces 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 Prakrtva (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 Vaisamya:
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 Dhatus (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.
7. Shukragni present in the Shukra Dhatu.

The seven Dhatus 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. The seven Dhatwagni work at the cellular level. Acharya Charaka has mentioned the fact that that the seven Dhatus 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 Dhatus. The Tridoshas, Dhatus and Malas are maintained normal and healthy by the Agni itself, present in each of them. Such is the importance of Agni to life.

REFERENCES
6. Ibid Synonyms of Agni

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