ELABORATIVE CONCEPT OF AGNI

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ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, digestion of food is the important function which is performed by Agni. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is an important task for the maintenance of life, and is performed by the Agni. Agni is uncountable because of its presence in each and every cell of the body. But, the enumeration of the number of Agni varies in various classical Ayurvedic texts. 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 food and transforms it into Rasa and Mala. The five Bhutagnis act on the respective Bhutika portion of the food and thereby nourish the Bhutas in the body. The seven Dhatvagni act on the respective Dhatus by which each Dhatu is broken into three parts. In this way, the entire process of transformation consists of two types of products Sara (essential) and Kitta (excreta). Sara is taken for nourishment while the Kitta is thrown out, which otherwise defiles the body if it stays longer.

Keywords: Jatharagni, Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Kitta

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda as described an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body as Agni. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is essential for the maintenance of life, and is performed by 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). 

About the importance of Agni, Acharya Charak has mentioned that after stoppage of the function of Agni, the individual dies, and when the Agni of an individual is Sama, then that person would be absolutely healthy and
would lead a long, happy, healthy life. But, if the Agni of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed, resulting in ill health and disease. Hence, Agni is said to be the base of life.(2)

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION
In Brahmasutra, Agni has been meant to be a sign of life in the body. Great value of Agni has been shown by classical literature. Acharya Yasaka has given the etymology of the term “Agni,” which is as follows: 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 given by Yasaka, Shankaracharya (vedantasutrasabhdakalpadruma) illustrates that Agni carries everything in it. It moves everywhere and metamorphoses substances, burns, assimilates, glitters and grows. Agni is a pivot around which the remaining factors responsible for the maintenance of health and causation of disease as well as decay revolve (Shabdakalpadruma). (3)

In shabdakalpadruma, 61 synonyms of Agni have been compiled. These synonyms help in explaining the nature and functions of the Agni, e.g., Vaishvanara, SarvaPaka, Tannoopata, Amivachatana, Damunasa, Shuchi, Vishwambhar, Rudra etc. (Shabdakalpadruma). (4)

Importance of Agni
The properties of food are transformed into Ahar Rasa which gives nutrition to the body. This transformation is done by only Agni. (5)

Agni is the main agent which digests food. Such digested food has the ability to give Bala, Varna and Oja. That’s why it is said that if the Agni works properly then it gives us long healthy life. If it works imbalanced it creates many diseases. And if Agni becomes inactive (Shant) then person will die. (6)

The definition of a healthy person as per Ayurved also underlines the balanced performance of Agni. (7)

Elaboration of Agni
Agni is innumerable because of its presence in each and every Dhatuparamanu (cell) of the body. But, enumeration of the number of Agni varies in various classical Ayurvedic texts, as shown below

- Charaka has mentioned about 13 Agni.1-Jatharagni, 5-Bhutagni and 7-Dhatvagni. (8)
- According to Acharya Sushruta, five types of Agnis are illustrated, viz. Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Alochakagni, Sadhakagni and Bhrajakagni. However, there is an indirect reference of five Bhutagnis underlying in the brief description made to the transformation of food stuff. (9)
- Vagbhata has described different types Agni, viz. –Bhutagnis – 5, Dhatvagnis – 7, Dhoshagni – 3 and– Malagni – 3. (10)
- Sharangadhara has recognized five pittas only (Pachak, Bhrajak, Ranjak, Alochaka and Sadhak) (11)

Agni has been divided into 13 types according to the function and site of action. These are: Jatharagni – one Agni present in the stomach and duodenum.
Bhutagni – five Agni from five basic elements.

Dhatwagni – seven Agni present, one in each of the seven Dhatus.

Jatharagni

Jatharagni is present in the Jathara (stomach and duodenum). According to Ashtanga Hridaya, Jatharagni present in Grahani (duodenum), 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 dhatvagni. The strength of the Grahani is from Agni itself, and the strength of Agni is from grahami.\(^{(12)}\)

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 Dhatusparamanus (tissues).

Jatharagni is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (Sara) and the waste products (kitta) in our body.\(^{(13)}\)

Jatharagni is directly related to Dhatvagni 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 Dhatvagni. 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. \(^{(14)}\)

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being under the influence of Doshas namely Vishamagni, Tikshanagni, Mandagni and Samagni.\(^{(15)}\)

According to Hareet Samhita, Samagni depends on whether the Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) are in normal stage. When the Pitta is dominant, the condition is known as Tikshnagni. When Vata is dominant the condition is known as Vishamagni and Kapha is dominant, the condition is known as Mandagni.

a) Samagni: When all the three Doshas are equally active, then the function of digestion of Jathargni is balanced. This situation of Jathargni is called “Samagni”. The Samagni digests food properly at the proper time i.e. between 6 to 8 hrs from previous meal. Any change in food type is tolerated by Samagni. If a person having Samagni then Guru Aahar (Heavy) is digested properly & there is no indigestion like in Mandagni. Also if Laghu Ahar (Light) is taken then no occurrence of hunger & hunger intolerance like Tikshnagni. This provides the good nourishment to body & Person has healthy life.\(^{(16)}\)
b) Vishamagni: When Vata Dosha is dominant, then the function of digestion of Jathargni is unbalanced & irregular. This situation of Jathargni is called “Vishamagni”. This type of Agni digesting food sometimes quickly and sometime slowly. Sometime Guru Ahar may be digested too quickly and sometime Laghu Ahar may digest slowly. Sometime the person is very hungry & some time not. There is no fix pattern of digestion & hunger.\(^{(17)}\)

c) Tikshnagni: When Pitta Dosha is dominant, then the function of digestion of Jathargni is very quick & sharp. This situation of Jathargni is called “Tikshnagni”. Tikshnagni digest food very quickly, regardless of the type of food. The person having Tikshnagni, need to take food at regular interval of 4-5 hrs and quantity of food is also moderate. He cannot tolerate the hunger and thirst.\(^{(18)}\)

d) Mandagni: When Kapha Dosha is dominant, then the function of digestion of Jathargni is slow. This situation of Jathargni is called “Mandagni”. Mandagni digest food slowly, that it take more time for digestion of Laghu Ahar also i.e. 8-10 hrs. Person having Mandagni, eat very little food in quantity. If he eats Guru Ahar then he will not take food again for long period of time and he may also suffer from indigestion.\(^{(19)}\)

In Ayurveda the Jirna-ahar lakshanas are describe which indicates the proper and complete digestion of food. These are Udarshudhi, Utsaha, Vegotasraga, Laghuta, Kshudha, Pipasa.\(^{(20)}\)

### 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. Naturally, each cell 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. 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.\(^{(21)}\) 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.

### Dhatvagni

All the seven Dhatus contain their own Agni to metabolize the nutrient materials supplied
to them through their own Srotas. After action of Jatharagni and Bhutagni on food “Aahar Ras” i.e. ‘Sara’ part is formed. This Aahar Ras or Sara is absorbed by small intestine & reaches the heart through systemic blood circulation. In this process “Saman Vayu” play major role. After that through Dashadhamani it spread all over body by VyanVayu. Rasagni present in the Rasavah Srotas. Raktagni present in the Raktavah Srotas. Mamsagni present in the Mamsavah Srotas. Medagni present in the Medavah Srotas. Asthyagni present in the Asthivah Srotas. Majjagni present in the Majjavah Srotas. Shukragni present in the Shukravah Srotas. This Ahar Rasa is reached to Srotas of Dhatu where the Dahtvagni is present. Which act this nutritious part and synthesize the stable Dhatu, Mala, Upadhatu of that Dhatu and nutritious part for next Dhatu. Each Dhatvagni has got a speciality to synthesize and transform the constituents suitable to its particular Dhatu. This action is a sort of selective action. 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.**(22)**

**CONCLUSION**

After a detailed discussion on Agni, it is concluded that all Agni in their regard have their own importance. But, one conclusion that can be drawn after going through the details is that in regard of treatment Agni is an important role. All the diseases occur due to imbalance or malfunctioning of Agni. If Agni digests food properly and regularly, it gives us Bala, Varna, Utsaha, Oja, Prabha and healthy life. Explaining briefly the digestive 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 Dhatus.

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