

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 *Dhatu* 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* (excrete). *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).⁽¹⁾ 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. *AcharyaYasaka* 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* (*vedantasutrashabdakalpadruma*) 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 (*Shabdakalpadrum*).⁽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*, *Tanoonpata*, *Amivachatana*, *Damunasa*, *Shuchi*, *Vishwambhar*, *Rudra* etc. (*Shabdakalpadrum*).⁽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 *grahani*.⁽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 *Vishmagni*, *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 *Vishmagni* 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 *Jatharagni* is balanced. This situation of *Jatharagni* 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

Udgarshudhi, 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 *Dhatu*s 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 *Dhatu*s.

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