CONCEPT OF AGNI – AN AYURVEDIC REVIEW

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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- 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.

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.
etc and is called Anala (fire) due to its predominant functions of paka (cooking, digestion). 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 nature. 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 dhatus (tissues) of the body, 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 dhatus, similarly is the case with the other dhatwagnis. This is what is known as visista or specificity of dhatwagnis. The dhawagnis 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 kosthagnis. 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 bhutaganis and gets converted into Rasadhatus- the first dhatu (first tissue) of the body. The activities of kosthagni and bhutagnis together form the Ahara paka or digestion of food. The rasadhatus contains the nutrient materials derived from the food and required by the dhatus (tissues), This rasa dhatu circulates all over the body supplying the nutrients to all the other dhatus, which utilize this material for their growth (metabolism).

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 life. Foods containing the nutrient materials of the dhatus can be of help to the dhatus, 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 pramanas (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 kinds:

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 is 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 faces and flatus and such other troubles to the body. It is normally found in persons of vata prakriti and kapha prakriti (constitution originating from the combination of two and all the three doshas respectively.)

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 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. 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”

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. 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 di etic 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. The Tridosas, 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.

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