



AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE OF AGNI AND ITS APPLIED ASPECT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT The role of fire is well known in traditional systems of medicine, which use the great elements of nature for healing purposes. However, one system in particular is built around a profound understanding of our biological fires [1]. *Agni* is the invariable agent in the process of *Paka* (digestion, transformation). Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life, and is performed by the *Agni* [2]. *Agni* is believed to be the agency for any kind of transformation. It is a known fact that at each and every second multiple procedures of transformations take place in the body. These may be bio chemical or bio physical or any other type of bio transformations. Due to these constant transformation procedures, body grows, develops and lastly destroys too. Thinking on this line; it can be said that life is nothing but a constant process of transformations. Diseased state of the body is also some pathological changes either functional or structural. Thus, the principle of *Agni* becomes vital as either the healthy or the diseased state can only be understood with understanding of changes [3]. *Ayurveda* emphasises that all the diseases are the result of weak state of *Agni*. Improper functioning of *Agni* leads to various gastrointestinal disorders as well as various metabolic disturbances. The aim of this article is to review the important role *Agni* plays in managing the health of a healthy individual as well as in interpreting the disease process and planning the line of treatment of a disease [4].

KEYWORDS : *Agni*, Metabolism, *Ayurveda*, Disease, Digestion etc.

INTRODUCTION:

The Sanskrit word *Agni* mean "fire" [5]. Darshan said that, all things in universe made from *Mahabhuta*. *Agni* is one of the *Mahabhuta* out of five *Panchamahabhuta* [6]. *Ayurveda* has described an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body as *Agni*. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable 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, lustre, *Oja*, *Teja* (energy) and *Prana* (life energy) [7].

About the importance of *Agni*, *Acharya Charaka* 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 (*Mool*) of life [8].

According to modern medicine, metabolic processes, division and multiplication are going on in all cells (*Dhatu Paramanu*) of our body from birth till death. The cell is the functional unit of the body. According to *Charaka*, the constituent parts of the body, if further divided into the atoms, are sure to become innumerable, as such cells or atoms are exceedingly numerous, very minute and ultra-sensory.

In the conjunction and disjunction of cells, the activating factors are *Vata* and the nature of action [9]. In *Sushruta Samhita*, we can see how the "*Avayavaas*" are formed from "various *dhatu*." [10] Thus, based on *Charaka* and *Sushruta*, the above cells can be considered as "*Dhatu Paramanus*." For these constant processes in all cells, a biological energy is constantly essential, without which the survival of our body will be quite impossible. The same biological energy is provided by *Agni* in *Ayurveda*. This *Agni*-provided biological energy in the cells (*Dhatu Paramanu*) of our body is of two types: potential and kinetic.

Agni may be correlates with digestive (*Paka*) and different kinds of hormones, enzyme and co-enzymes activities etc. which participate in these digestive & metabolic functions. Due to increased activity of *pitta* in *Yuvavastava* (young stage) digestive & metabolic rate are higher. Vigour & vitality of human being is also maintained by balanced activity of *Agni*. It is necessary for proper growth & development of the body & their parts [11]. Due to advancement in age, depletion of *Agni* is taking place (in old age) which cause

instability in *Agni*, ultimately leads to decrease decay, atrophy, decay due to defective digestion in metabolism [12].

Synonyms of Agni:

In *shabdakalpadruma*, 61 synonyms of *Agni* have been compiled. These synonyms help in explaining the nature and functions of the *Agni*, e.g., *Vaishvanara*, *Sarva Paka*, *Tanoonpata*, *Amivachatana*, *Damunasa*, *Shuchi*, *Vishwambhar*, *Rudra* etc. (*Shabdakalpadrum*).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

- To emphasize the Concept of *Agni* and *Ahara-paka* (Metabolic transformations) in *Ayurvedic* classical literature.
- To re-evaluate, discuss, and elaborate the *Ayurvedic* concept of *Agni* & *Ama*.
- To evaluate the process of digestion and metabolism in *Ayurvedic* classical texts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This article is based on a review of *Ayurvedic* texts. Materials related to *Agni*, *Agnimandya* and other relevant topics have been collected. The main *Ayurvedic* texts used in this study are *Charaka Samhitha*, *Astanga Sangraha*, *Astanga Hridaya* and available commentaries on these texts. We have also referred to the various websites and scientific journals to collect information regarding current researches on the relevant topics.

Types of Agni:

Agni is innumerable because of its presence in each and every *Parmanu* of the body. According to the functions and site of action, *Agni* has been divided into 13 types, i.e. one *Jatharagni*, five *Bhutagni* and seven *Dhatvagni*.

- Charaka* has mentioned about 13 *Agnis*. *Jatharagni* – 1, *Bhutagni* – 5, *Dhatvagni* – 7. [14]
- 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 *Bhutagni* underlying in the brief description made to the transformation of food stuff. [15]

Table No.1: showing types of Agni according to different Samhitas

Types of Agni	Charaka	Sushruta	Vagbhata	Sharngha	Bhavmishra
Jatharagni	+	---	+	---	+
Bhutagni	+	+	+	---	+
Dhatvagni	+	---	+	---	+

Doshagni	---	---	+	---	---
Malagni	---	---	+	---	---

- Vagbhata has described different types Agni, viz. – Bhutagnis – 5, – Dhatvagnis – 7, – Dhoshagni – 3 and – Malagni – 3.
- Sharangadhara has recognized five pittas only (Pachak, Bhrajak, Ranjak, Alochaka and Sadhak).[16]
- Bhavamishra has followed Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata.[17]

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

Jatharagni:

Jatharagni is the Agni or bioenergy 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 Dhatvagni. 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.[18]

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.[19]

Jatharagni is directly related to Dhatvagni 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 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.[20]

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being [21] namely Vishamagni, Tikshnagni, Mandagni and Samagni. According to Hareeta Samhita, Samagni depends on whether the Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) are in normal stage. When the Pitta is higher than normal, the condition is known as Tikshnagni. When Vata and Kapha are higher than normal, the condition is known as Mandagni.

(a)Samagni: The Samagni digests and assimilates food properly at the proper time. This thus increases the quality of the Dhatus (supportive tissues of the body). Persons having Samagni are always hale and healthy.

(b)Vishamagni: This type of Agni changes between digesting food quickly and slowly. When this Agni is affected by the Vata Dosh, it creates different types of Udargata Roga.

(c)Tikshnagni: Tikshnagni means very quick/very sharp/very fast. Tikshnagni is a state of very quick digestion of food, regardless of the type of food. Acharya Shushruta states that when the power of digestion is increased from normal to above normal, food digests very quickly and produces hunger or the desire for food. When food is digested, the throat, the mouth cavity and the lips become dry with a burning sensation. This condition is known as "Bhasmak Roga" according to Ayurveda.

(d)Mandagni: "Mand" means slow. The meaning of the Mandagni is slow digestive power or digestive capacity. Those who are having Mandagni eat very little and are unable to digest the smallest amount of food. Dhanvantri says that Agni digests the least amount of food in the greatest amount of time.

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 bio energies. Thus, they are completely similar with respect to the five basic elements with their Bhutagni in our body cells as well in all the outside nutrient, that we ingest for the nutrition of our body.

Acharya Charaka 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.[22] 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 (seven element tissues of the body) contain their own Agni to metabolize the nutrient materials supplied to them through their own Srotas.

- Rasagni present in the Rasa Dhatu.
- Raktagni present in the Rakta Dhatu.
- Mamsagni present in the Mamsa Dhatu.
- Medagni present in the Meda Dhatu.
- Asthyagni present in the Asthi Dhatu.
- Majjagni present in the Majja Dhatu.
- Shukragni present in the Shukra Dhatu.

Each Dhatvagni or the bioenergy present in each Dhatu synthesizes and transforms the essential Rasa Dhatu required for that particular Dhatu or cell from the basic nutrients present in the Anna Rasa or essence of the diet that we consume. 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.[23]

Causes of Vitiation of Agni:

Factors which may vitiate Agni are as follows:

- Dietetic indiscretions – excessive fasting, over eating, irregular eating, heavy, cold, dry, dehydrated, putrid food, excess liquid intake.
- Dietetic incompatibilities – Diet not compatible to habitat, climate, body constitution, digestive capacity, combination, quantity etc.
- Improper administration of Shodhana therapies esp. Vamana, Virechana, Basti, Snehana.
- Suppression of manifested natural urges.
- Sedentary lifestyle (Lack of physical activity).
- Incompatible activities – Exercise after Snigdha (unctuous) diet, exercise or sexual indulgence during indigestion.
- Unhygienic conditions and emaciation as a result of chronic disease affliction.
- Psychological factors – Mental tensions, emotional instabilities like anger, anxiety, fear, lust, greed, jealousy, depression etc. [24]

DISCUSSION:

Agni and Pitta:

The origin of Pitta is from "Tapa," which means: (1) combustion/digestion – to give nourishment to the body by digestion of ingested food, (2) to maintain heat – by means of heat, it maintains the colour, lustre, etc. of the body.[25] Now, there is a question as to whether Pitta and Agni are both the same or are different? Does any area exist of Agni without Pitta, or is it that Pitta is Agni? This should be clearly understood. Different views have been suggested regarding Pitta and Agni by different Acharyas. Some Acharyas consider Pitta to be Agni while others speak differently.

According to Acharya Sushruta, there is no existence of any other *Agni* in the body without *Pitta*, because when there is increased digestion and combustion in the body due to *Ushna-guna* of *Pitta*, the treatment is like *Agni*. [26] Acharya Marichi has also emphasized that the *Agni* present in the *Pitta* gives good or bad results when it is normal or vitiated. [27] Chakrapani has 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 Shusruta has described five types of *Agni* 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*, *Deepana*, *Bhedana*, etc. [28]

According to Hemadri, *Pitta* is of five divisions, which are located in the interior of the *Pakvashaya* and *Amashaya*, although it is composed of *Panchabhutas*. Because of an increase of (predominance qualities of) *Tejas-bhuta*, it is devoid of liquidity (although it is a liquid). Also, because it does not possess *Snigdha* (viscosity), *Sheeta* and such other properties of *Apa-bhuta*, it is called by the term "Anal" because of its function of *Paka*. It cooks the food, dividing it into essence and waste separately. Being localized there, it bestows grace (help) to the other *Pitta* present there and also the other *Dhatvagni* present in the *dhatu* by giving them strength (power of functioning), which is known as "*Pachaka Pitta*." [29]

Agni and Prakriti:

Agni have strong relation with different types of *Prakrities* (personalities). In *Vata Prakriti* individual *Vismagni* (unstable digestive & metabolic power) is very common. In person having *Pitta Prakriti*, *Agni* is very potent. *Mandagni* is common in *Kapha Prakriti* individuals. Homeostasis is also maintained by the proper functioning of the *Agni*. Seasonal variation also affects the functioning of *Agni*. [30,31,32,33]

Agni verses Ama:

In Ayurveda, the theory of *Agni* or biological fire is of prime importance. *Agni* is among the critical factors in determining optimal health and internal homeostasis. On the contrary, *Ama* is a toxin or pathogen, responsible for aetiology of all diseases. Major cause behind *Ama* production is impairment of *Agni*. *Ama* can be explained in Ayurveda that it is the unhealthy, indigested food. It is the dry form of the food which is considered to be waste product for the body. This *Ama* is formed by *Mandhagni* which form *Rasaja* and food indigestion which act on sub cellular level and form disease.

Due to *Mandhagni* these undigested food particles start get accumulated in the body and form *Ama Dhoshha*. It is again explained as the undigested formed which is formed due to the weakness of *Jhatharagni* and *Dhatvagni* is called as *Ama*. These are divided into three *Pakaavastha* as- In first *Avastha* due to weakness of *Jhatharagni* *Ama* get accumulated in *Amashya* (stomach). In second *Avastha* due to weakness of *Dhatvagni* the *Dhatu* didn't get digested and form *Ama* which is known as *Ama visha*. In third *Avastha* the mostly undigested food gets accumulated and forms *Ama*. [34]

Agni verses Diseases: [35,36]

"**Rogah Sarveapi mandagnau**" All the diseases are manifested due to *Mandagni*. To correct these diseases, we have to treat the *Agni* primarily.

- *Agirana*, *Aamdosha*, *Alasak*, *Aamvisha*, *Sokajatisar*, *Visuchika*, *Urustambh* and *Ghrahni-roga* etc. are diseases related to *Agni*.
- *Vata rogas*; pain & paralysis associated with *Vishamagni*
- *Pitta rogas*; acidity & *Daha* associated with *Tikshnagni*
- *Kapha rogas*; anorexia & *Aam* associated with *Mandagni*.
- Infectious disease; associated with *Samagni*.
- *Vishamagni* when affected by the *Vata-dosha* it leads *Udargata-roga*.
- *Tikshnagni* digest food quickly and produces hunger due to which throat, mouth and lips become dry (*Bhasmak Rogas*).
- *Mandagni* and *Vishamagni* lead accumulation of *Ama* and *Rasa-dhatu-dushti* which produces symptoms like *Srotorodha*, *Balabhramsa*, *Anilmudhata*, *Alasya*, *Nisthiva*, *Malasanga* and *Aruchi*.
- In elder age (geriatric condition) potency of *Agni* lost leads to degeneration, decay, atrophy and defective metabolic functioning followed by disease pathogenesis
- Reduced *Dhatvagni* leads formation of *Ama* in *dhatu* which resulted improper *dhatu- vriddhi*.

- Strong *Dhatvagni* utilizes nutrients quickly and destroy the *Dhatu* itself thus resulted *Dhatukshaya*.

Significance of Agni: [37,38]

(1) Physiological significance of Agni:

Majority of the diseases are outcome of malfunctioning of the *Agni* which rightly has been called as central root to health. *Agni* not only plays vital role in absorption of macro as well as micronutrients, but is destructive to pathogens also. The food that is not properly digested is referred as "*Ama*" in Ayurveda and it is nothing but a toxin or pathogen responsible for diseases.

Proper functioning of digestive fire is evident from normal tone of the digestive-system, circulatory-system, strong immunity or resistance against diseases, proper tissue growth and body complexion. It is also the source of intelligence, nutrition and awareness in the body. It coordinates many physiological processes of the body from the digestion, reabsorption, sensations and formation of energy. This affects both body and mind of the human being. It makes coordination between the both of them which leads to a healthy lifestyle.

(2) Pathological significance of Agni:

If digestive fire is not functioning properly, one has poor digestion, improper blood-circulation, poor complexion, low energy levels, flatulence and poor immunity against diseases. Thus, promoting proper functioning of the digestive fire is treating the root cause of the diseases, according to *Ayurvedic* principles. Thus, a vicious cycle of impaired *Agni* and the production of *Ama* is established.

Understanding basic relationship between *Ama* and *Agni* is of prime importance in treating the diseases. Maintaining good appetite, use of digestive stimulants and ensuring regular bowel movements are of prime importance in enkindling the digestive fire and preventing the production of root cause of all diseases, *Ama*. This shows *Agni* has the most important role in *Dosha*, *Dhatu* balance in the body and it will produce diseases as it gets imbalance in the body. In *Ayurveda* it has been said that with decrease in functions of these thirteen types of *Agni* there will be production of disease.

CONCLUSION:

In this article after a brief discussion on *Agni*, *Ama*, *Pitta* and their correlations it shows that *Agni* as a vital component which help in digestion of food and responsible for metabolic activities. *Agni* transformed food in nutritional energy which responsible for physiological functioning of body. *Agni* not only performs functioning of digestion but also contributes to the strength, lustre, *Oja*, *Teja* and *Prana* (life energy). *Samagni* resembles healthy physical and mental status while vitiated *Agni* (*Mandagni*) resulted diseased condition. *Agirana*, *Aamdosha*, *Alasaka*, *Aamvisha*, *Sokajatisar*, *Visuchika*, *Urustambh* and *Ghrahni-roga* etc. are diseases related to *Agni*. The good conduction of *Aahar* and *Vihara* along with *Ayurveda* remedies help to manage diseases of *Agni*.

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