



A REVIEW ON THE CONCEPT OF AGNI AND ITS CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT In Ayurvedic literature, the elaborate description of the functioning of human body, is comprised within the term “sharira vichaya”. Though similar to modern physiology, it has some unique specialities like dosha, dhatu, manas etc. Agni i.e. the biological fire is one of the principal components of body physiology. The term agni means present everywhere. It is divided into three types viz. jatharagni, bhutagni and dhatvagni, that work together to maintain homeostasis in the body. Amongst these, jatharagni is the principle agni which comprises pitta dosha which digests food and splits it into essential and non essential parts. It is also responsible for favourable or ill effects in the body depending upon it's presence in healthy or vitiated state. The processes of metabolism, catabolism, transformation, digestion, deterioration of toxins are all brought about by Agni. It functions at various levels and intensities to maintain a healthy living status. Normal and optimized properties of Agni are good health, life span, strength, nourishment, glow, lustre and healthy ojas. Impaired Agni is the root of all imbalances and diseases. It is also stated that normally functioning Agni maintains life, it's alteration brings about diseases and death results on it's loss. This concept is also crucial during the treatment procedures, like while prescribing medicaments, deciding drug dosages and pathya-apathya, it is required to determine, restore and strengthen the Agni. Therefore, understanding the concept of Agni is vital for maintaining health, disease diagnosis and their treatment.

KEYWORDS : Agni, Pitta, Jatharagni, Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Biological fire

INTRODUCTION

The word Agni has been derived from “Angati Vyapnoti iti Agni”, which means that, the substance that co-exists with every matter is termed as Agni. It is also stated as “Angati urdhawam gachchati iti” which means the one which moves upwards. The literal meaning of Agni is fire but practically it is co-related with the heat, temperature, reactions and combustion in environment. As in Ayurveda, the factors present in external environment are also present in some form in human body, Agni in human body is present as digestive fire and Pitta. It plays a significant role in functioning, metabolism, and maintaining homeostasis in body.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The data was derived from various Ayurvedic classical texts, relevant modern medical science books, Ayurvedic and allied pharmacological dissertation works, websites and research & review articles published so far using PubMed, Medline, Google Scholar and manual search.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ancient references of Agni-

Agni is described in Rigveda as a supernatural power, also considered as a deity. In Atharvaveda, the term Vaishvanar has been used for Agni present in human body. Acharya Charaka has described agni as a vital component for healthy life. Acharya Sushruta has defined the pitta present in human body as pachakagni or digestive fire. Acharya Bhela has termed it as ushma and teja.

Origination of Agni-

The pattern of origination of Agni is similar to that of the Indriyas, as they all originate from the Avyakta progressing to Mahat, Ahankaar and Triguna. The Rajas and Tamas guna lead to formation of pancha tanmatras which are the minute predecessors of pancha mahabhutas viz Akash, Vayu, Agni, Jala and Prithvi and subsequently transform into them.

Agni has also been described as originating from Vayu mahabhuta. It is formed by the dominance of Satva and Rajoguna.

Agni is also stated as 'satva-rajobahula', meaning the dominance of satva and raja guna are responsible for formation of agni.

The Agni is present in nitya or eternal form and anitya or transient

forms, the former being present as atomic constitution and the latter in three forms viz in body, senses and subjective manifestation.¹

The Agni present in the loka or environment is manifested in purusha or being as abhisantapa or temperature. Agni has a vital role in formation of Pitta dosha, Rakta & Asthi dhatu, and Mutra.

Site of Agni-

Agni is situated in the body as pitta and carries out the beneficial or detrimental effects depending upon it's physiological or pathological state.

It is situated in body in location of Pitta which are sweat, plasma, lymph, blood, stomach etc. and specific locations of Pittabheda i.e. pachaka, ranjaka, sadhaka, alochaka, bhrajaka in pancreas, stomach-liver-spleen, heart, eyes, skin.²

General location	Specific locations	
Sweat	Pachaka Pitta	Pancreas
Plasma	Ranjaka Pitta	Stomach-liver-spleen
Lymph	Sadhaka Pitta	Heart
Blood	Alochaka Pitta	Eyes
Stomach	Bhrajaka Pitta	Skin

The pachakagni is located in proximity of grahani or pittadhara kala which initiates from pyloric end of stomach and terminates into large intestine.³

Classification of Agni-

Agni is broadly classified into three types Jatharagni, Bhutagni and Dhatvagni, the principle agni being jatharagni. The bhutagnis are further sub-classified into akashagni, vayavyagni, agneyagni, apyagni, bhaumyagni and dhatvagnis into rasagni, raktagni, mamsagni, medo-agni, asthyagni, majjagni, shukragni, comprising a total of 13 agnis. Specific categories of entities in the body having specific attributes can be nourished only by the substances having the same attributes.⁴

- Jatharagni is the chief Agni among all the forms of Agni. The intensity and attenuation of all other twelve forms of Agni are dependent on it.

The jatharagni is situated in the grahani or pittadharakala. It acts on the four types of food, namely lickables, drinkables, eatable, masticables

and leads to their breakdown, digestion, assimilation and absorption with the help from *vayu* and *kapha* *bhedas*. It divides the intaken food into *sara* (essential) and *kitta* (non-essential) parts, the *sara* part is absorbed into the bloodstream and the *kitta* part is transported ahead for further digestion & transformation into waste products. It strengthens and aids the other *agnis* and *pitta*-*bhedas* in their functioning.

Jatharagni in modern physiological perspective, represents all the digestive enzymes and hormones produced or secreted in the GIT, that are responsible for digestion of different components of ingested food.

- The *bhutagnis* are described as located in the respective *mahabhutas* and in the hepatic tissue. They digest and transform the respective *bhutas* of *ahara* or the components of food homologous to them, after it has been broken down by *jatharagni*. They also aid the process of assimilation by converting each *bhuta* in ingested food into the respective *bhuta* of the body tissues.

According to the modern physiological perspective, the *bhutagnis* are responsible for finer molecular metabolism and assimilation. The action of *bhutagni* can be regarded as identical to the conversion of digested food in the liver into simpler forms under the influence of enzymes and hormones. The action of *agneyagni*, *apyagni*, *bhaumyagni* can be co-related with the protein, lipid and carbohydrate metabolism.

- The site of *dhatvagni* are the *dhatu*s themselves or the lower part of GIT. Each *dhatu* constituent in the body has its own transforming *Agni* and *srotas* or micro channels. After the termination of *bhutagni* paka of the food substances, the *dhatvagni* paka continues. *Dhatvagni* act upon the *dhatu* homologous components of diet for metabolization and transformation into specific *sharira dhatu*s. After formation of *dhatu*, they are then absorbed via the respective *srotas* (microchannels) and permeated into the organs for utilisation.
- In the modern physiological perspective, *dhatvagnis* are the tissue transformers responsible for transformation of substances at tissue level to be utilised or reserved as per use.



On the basis of intensity, *agni* can be categorized as,

- Tikshanagni**- Owing to the dominance of *pitta* *dosha*, the individuals with this particular *agni* can easily digest large quantities of *guru* or heavy diet. It is capable of tolerating irregularities.
- Mandagni**- The individuals with *kapha* *dosha* dominance pertain to have *mandagni*. This refers to mild digestive power. Even small irregularities in food habits or small quantities of *guru* *ahara dravyas* can impair the digestion.
- Vishamagni**- Due to the dominance of *Vata* *dosha* in their constitution, the individuals have *vishamagni* which refers to that the intensity of *agni* varies according to various factors. It is irregular in nature.
- Samagni**- This type of *agni* is balanced due to balanced *tridosha* and is responsible for a healthy status of living. It refers to normal intensity and functioning of *agni* as per the physiological needs of individual.⁵

Role of Agni-

Agni is responsible for Longevity, Complexion, Strength, Health, Enthusiasm, Anabolism, Lustre and Immunity. It is also crucial for nourishing the body, body *dhatu*s or tissues, *oja*, complexion. It aids in digestion of food and therefore leads to formation of *rasadi dhatu*s.^{6,7}

Vitiation of Agni-

Agni is vitiated by numerous factors like,

- Minimal intake of food
- Indigestion

- Excess food intake
- Variations in food intake
- Food not in harmony with *sharira dosha-dhatu*
- Heavy-chilled-dry-degraded food
- Side effects of *vaman-virechana-snehana* procedure gone wrong
- Nutrition deficit in body due to disease
- Variations in living habitat-time-season
- Suppression of natural urges leads to vitiation of *agni*.⁸

Ayurveda states that *mandagni* or weak digestion is the sole cause of all diseases. The *agni* on vitiation, is unable to digest even small quantities of food. The undigested food attains a sour taste due to fermentation and attains toxic properties, thus giving rise to several diseases. Low intensity of *jatharagni* leads to indigestion of *ahara-rasas*, which is termed as *Ama* and leads to outbreak of diseases due to *dosha* vitiation. Significance of *Agni*-

The importance of *Agni* is described in the definition of healthy in Ayurveda as *Agni* in *sama pramana* or equilibrium contributes to a healthy living status. It also infers that for the *dosha dhatu mala* to be normal, the *Agni* should be *samagni*.

The significance of *Agni* is stated as the *agni* when extinguished terminates life, when physiologically contained leads to a healthy living status, leads to diseases when vitiated and therefore is the sole cause for life.

A strong & healthy *Agni* is able to digest even varying amount of food or food which is not in harmony with our body, therefore contributing to a healthy living.⁹

CONCLUSION

Agni assessment is an important criterion in Ayurveda as the treatment depends on subject's efficiency of digestion and assimilation of drug as well as diet.

The concept is crucial during the treatment procedures, like while prescribing medicaments, deciding drug dosages and *pathya-apathya*, it is required to determine, restore and strengthen the *Agni*.

Therefore, *Agni* should be properly assessed and evaluated in healthy as well as diseased prior to initiation of treatment modalities and special measures should be taken for maintenance of proper functioning of *Agni* through various *ahara*, *vihara* and *aushadhi*.

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