

Review of Concept of Agni in Ayurveda

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Abstract

The term Agni is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. So it is the great source of energy in universe as well as in the body. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is essential for the maintenance of life and is performed by Agni in Ayurveda. Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all vital function of the body. About the importance of Agni, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that the individual dies after stoppage of the function of Agni, and when the Agni of an individual is in equilibrium state, then person is healthy and would lead a long, happy and enjoying disease free life. But, if the Agni of a person gets disturbed by any means, the whole metabolism would be disturbed, resulting in ill health. Hence, Agni is said to be the base (mool) of life. Out of thirteen types of Agni, viz,- one Jatharagni, seven Dhatwagnis and five Bhutagnis, Jatharagni is the leading one controlling all other kinds through its power.

Key words:- Agni, Jatharagni, Dhatwagnis, Bhutagnis

Introduction

Agni is one of the basic concept of Ayurveda. According to statement of Prakriti-purush siddhanta of Ayurveda, Agni of universe is same as Agni in our body^{1,2}. Food is important for the continuation of life in living beings and this food material gets converted into body constituents with the help of Agni. Kayachikitsa is nothing but the Agni chikitsa³.

The Sanskrit word Agni means “fire. According to Darshanas, all things in universe are made up of Mahabhutas. Agni is one of the Mahabhuta out of Panchamahabhuta. In Jain literature it is called as soul. In Pali language Agni called as Agni, which shows

impact of Agni concept on Buddhist tradition also^{4,5}. Veda described Agni as god itself. Solar energy is the source of any kind of conversion in living beings; this solar energy is expressed by Agni in the body. Because of its power, Agni has the ability to transform the material from complex to simpler ones. Maintenance of normal physiological activities depends on normal state of Agni, while it's abnormal state leads to pathological consequences in the body^{6,7}.

In Ayurveda the process of digestion and metabolism is described in the form of functions of Agni⁸. Agni primarily deals with the physiological processes such as Ahar Pachana (metabolism), Dhatu Utpatti (tissue formation) and Vyadhi Utpatti (pathogenesis) etc. Ingested food is digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life⁹. Agni transforms food in the form of energy and all the vital functions of our body needs energy. Agni is inferred by examining the capacity of food intake and digestion¹⁰.

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With the help of Agni, the body substances get nourished and can perform their functions normally. This can be understood in the terms of wear and tear phenomena of each body cell. It is quite clear that none of the body cells can do anything without the help of Agni, hence Prashama (alleviation) or Prakopa (aggravation) of Doshā (functional units of body), Dhātu (structural units of body) and Mala (metabolic waste) are dependent on the status of Agni¹¹. In other words, it can be said that equilibrium of other functional units is maintained through Agni. Agni and pitta are having Aadhar – Aadheya Sambandha (dependant relationships)¹². Agni resides in the body in the form of Pitta (functional unit). According to Sushruta Samhita, Pitta is the substratum for Agni. When Agni gets diminished the use of substances that provoke Pitta and when Agni is hyperactive use of dravyas that diminishes Pitta is advocated and in this way Agni is restored¹³.

Types of Agni:-

Acharya Sushruta has given names of all the Pitta in the form of Agni as Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Sadhakagni, Bhrajakagni, Alochakagni. In Charak Samhita thirteen types of Agni are stated viz,- one Jatharagni, seven Dhatwagnis and five Bhutagnis. Acharya Vagbhata follow the same pattern as Sushruta Samhita and Charak Samhita both Vagbhatas described different types of Agni, viz. – Audaryagni-one, Bhutagni- five, Dhatvagnis –seven, Doshagni–three and Malagni- three, Pitta –five. There are eighteen types of Agni according to Sharangadhara Samhita Bhutagni- five, Dhatvagnis – seven, Doshagni–three and Malagni- three. Bhavamishra accepted same as Charak Samhita¹⁴.

Jatharagni is the chief among all types of Agni supplying strength to all the other kinds of Agni, present especially in the Jathara Pradesh (stomach and duodenum). Prime location of Jatharagni is Grahani (duodenum), it is so called because it holds the food for a particular time inside the Amasaya (stomach) to facilitate digestion. This is “Pittadharakala,” of Sushruta Samhita, located at the entrance of the Pakvashaya (intestine) and acting as a doorkeeper to the door of the pathway/channel of food. Ayu(Life), Swasthya (health), Prabha (valour), Ojas (essence of the dhatus), Bala (strength) of all the Bhutagni and Dhatvagni depends on Jatharagni¹⁵. The power of the Grahani is from Agni itself, and the

strength of Agni is from Grahani. When the Agni gets imbalanced, functions of Grahani also get affected and causes illness. Broadly Agni is classified into 13 types according to the function and site of action¹⁶. These are:

(a). **Jatharagni – One** (residing in Jathar), Agni present in the stomach and duodenum.

(b). **Bhutagni – Five** Agni, from five basic elements.

(c). **Dhatwagni – Seven** residing in each of the seven Dhatus.

a) **Jatharagni:-** It is considered important as all ingested food comes to the Jathar and subjected to Jatharagni action. Panchbhautik food articles are digested by Jatharagni and converted by the respective dhatus paramanus for use. Separation of digested food into Prasad bhaga (nutrient portion) and Kitta Bhaga (waste portion) is also done by Jatharagni. Jatharagni is linked with all the Dhatwagnis and interferes in their Dhatus Paka Prakriya (tissue formation) and other related metabolic processes. If Jatharagni is Tikshna (hyperactive) or Manda (hypoactive), Dhatwagni also results in slow or hyperactive respectively. Ultimately, this disturbed and interrupted behavior of Jatharagni contributes to different disorders. The principal Agni that regulates the functions of all the other Agnis.

Vishamagni, Tikshanagni, Mandagni and Samagni are the four classifications of Agni according to its power of digestion.

- **Samagni :-** When all Doshas are in equilibrium state, Agni is called as Samagni. Persons having Samagni are healthy. Digestive functions are proper; there are no episodes of gas, colic and constipation. Samagni digests and assimilates food properly at the proper time. The Samagni is characterized by regular, strong and appealing appetite that is easily satisfied with normal food. This thus maintains the quality of the Dhatus (supportive tissues) of the body.

- **Vishamagni:-** The Agni, which gets affected by irregular qualities of Vatadosha is called as Vishamagni. Sometimes it digests properly sometimes not, hence sometimes digestion is proper and sometimes improper. There are episodes of alternating cycles of heavy appetite with lack of appetite and food intake is irregular in Vishmagni. This type of Agni switches between digesting

food quickly and slowly digesting food. Vishmagni is disturbed by variability of Vata. During Vishmagni improper digestion and metabolism takes place i.e. sometimes performs normal functions followed by abnormal one and manifest flatulence, abdominal pain, upward movement of Vata inside the Koshtha, diarrhea and heaviness in abdomen, intestinal gurgling and straining exercise for evacuation of stools. Vishmagni creates different types of Vatavyadhi and is responsible for krura koshtha¹⁷.

· **Tikshnagni:-**When Agni gets affected by hot, liquid, and Tikshna qualities of Pitta, digestive capacity of Agni increases tremendously so that it can digest any type of food. Tikshnagni is a state of very quick digestion of food, regardless of the type of food. When the power of digestion is elevated from normal to above normal, food digests very quickly and produces hunger or excessive desire for food within short span of time. After digestion of food, the throat, the mouth cavity and the lips become dry with a feeling of burning sensation. This condition is termed as “Bhasmak Roga” in Ayurveda. Tiksnagni state gives rise to manifestation of Pittaja Vikaras.

· **Mandagni:-**When Agni gets affected by Snighdha (oily), Sheet (cold), Manda (slow) qualities of Kapha, it is called as Mandagni. It can't digest food even in small quantities because plenty of Aamadavyas remain in Aahar Rasa. The Sama Rasa while circulating in the body being unable to enter Strotas and cause Strotorodha vitiates Dhatus and cause diseases. “Mand” means slow acting. Mandagni is a state of slow digestive power or low digestive capacity. Here the Agni is disturbed by Kapha. Because of excessive Kapha, there are episodes of poor appetite, sluggish metabolism and tendency to weight gain despite optimal food consumption. Excessive mucus or phlegm production and congestion are prominent features. Those who are having Mandagni eat very little and find it difficult to digest even the small amount of food and manifest heaviness in abdomen and head region, cough, dyspnea, excessive salivation, vomiting and weakness of the body. Mandagni state may leads to manifestation of many kaphaja vikaras.

b) Bhutagni:- Bhutagnis are fine and subtler Agnis located in the five Mahabhutas (five basic elements). Every cell of the body is consists of the five Mahabhutas.

There are five Agnis in each of the five basic elements, namely - Akashagni, Vayvagni, Tejoagni, Aapyagni and Parthivagni. All the nutrients in this world also consist of the same five basic elements with their respective Agni or bioenergies. Thus, Bhutagni digests all the ingested nutrient and converts them to absorbable form and provides nutrition to the whole body. These Agnis are responsible for the molecular metabolism and help in synthesis and break down of materials at molecular level.

The five Bhutagnis digest their own part of the ingredient present in the food materials. Digested materials containing elements and qualities identical to each Bhuta nourish their own unique Bhautika elements of the body after the digestion of the food by the Bhutgni. Food present in the stomach and duodenum is first acted upon and integrated by Jathragani and then Bhutagni acts on it. The functions of Jathragani can be correlated with the digestion in the stomach and duodenum and the functions of the Bhutagni can be equated with the conversion of digested materials in the liver.

Dhatus are the support systems of the body. All the seven Dhatus (seven element tissues of the body) possess its own Agni to metabolize the nutrient materials supplied to them through their own Srotas Viz,- Rasagni in Rasa Dhatu, Raktagni in Rakta Dhatu, Mansagni in Mansa dhatu, Medoagni in Meda dhatu, Asthyagni in Asthi dhatu, Majjagni in Majja dhatu, Shukragni in Shukra dhatu. Each Dhatvagni has got a speciality to synthesize and transform the constituents suitable to its particular Dhatu. Each Dhatvagni synthesizes and transforms the essential nutrient of Dhatu required for that particular Dhatu or cell from the basic nutrients present in the Anna Rasa. This action is a sort of selective action. Acharya Charaka has mentioned the fact that each Dhatu contain their own Agni, by which they digest and transform the materials supplied to them to make the substances alike to them for assimilation and nourishment.

Importance of Jathragni:-

Among all kinds of Agni, Jathragni is the prime Agni, since it controls all types of Bhutagnis and Dhatvagnis. Aggravation or diminution of Jathragni results in Bhutagni and Dhatvagni being exacerbated or diminished. Therefore by all means one has to secure Jathragni by consuming suitable wholesome diet and

proper lifestyle.

Agni Samyata and Agni Vaisamyata:- Agni is samya when it performs all the functions and maintains equilibrium of Doshas, Dhatus and Malas. Vruddhi or kshaya in these aspects is known as Agni Vaishmya. Tikshanagni Vishamagni & Mandagni are abnormal conditions and may leads to many disease conditions.

Effect of Agni Vaishmya:-

Ingested food will not be properly digested if any kind of Agni Vaishmya is there. In Mandagni condition food will remain Apakwa or undigested, in case of Tikshanagni there will be Dagdhapaka and in case of Vishamagni there will be Pakwa- Apakwa Awastha and also different from one period of digestion to the other. In such conditions there will be production of Aama in the Rasa Dhatu.

Agni converts the Ahara Dravya into Ahara-Rasa and then with the help of Dhatwagni and Bhutagni the Poshak Ansha is made available to body. Hence, any kind of Vikriti (vitiation) i.e. hypo or hyper functioning of the "Agni" is the prime cause of pathogenesis of any disease. Agnimandya (loss of appetite), Aamanirmiti (undigestion), Strotorodha (obstruction) can occur and these events responsible for the outbreak of any disease. This vicious cycle if not treated timely, may increase the intensity of any disease.

Conclusion

Agni is responsible for the development of strength apart from the digestive process, which has two facets, namely strength to prevent the incidence of illness and decay in the human body and strength to perform physical exercises. Many intermediate, undigested or unmetabolized byproducts are produced due to vitiated Agni and appear to block the body's micro channel. Therefore, Doshas accumulate and ultimately precipitate in the form of disease. Ayurveda emphasizes that most diseases are the byproducts of Agnidushti, hence restoring Agni and improving Agnidushti is the core concept of treatment of every disease.

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