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BRIEF REVIEW OF AGNI AND ITS ROLE IN BODY FUNCTIONS W.S.R TO AYURVEDIC FUNDAMENTAL

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ABSTRACT

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*. Different examples are available in our classics to indicate that *Pitta* is the same as *Agni*, but some doubt arises behind this concept, that *Pitta* is *Agni*. *Agni* is innumerable because of its presence in each and every *Paramanu* of the body. Consumption of food may be various forms i.e. eatables, beverages, linctus (licked) and masticable foods, which is wholesome if consumed in suitable quantity and free from contamination. These substances undergo metabolic transformation by the effect of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*. During its normalcy it is responsible for longevity, complexion, strength, health, enthusiasm, well built, luster, immunity (*Ojas*), temperature, other *Agni*'s (*Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*) and other vital functions all are dependent on *Jatharagni*. Therefore, healthy state of body and diseased condition is entirely dependent on status of *Agni*.

KEYWORDS

Agni, *Ojas*, Digestion, *Jatharagni*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the ancient Indian system of life sciences and Medicine, its historicity going back to the Vedas. Its classical knowledge and practice which is based on its own physics and biology, its unique pronature holistic health and disease concepts and diagnostics as well as its own material medica. The entire basic physics and biology of Ayurveda are greatly different from the modern basic sciences and the understanding of the structure and function of human body, the pathology and diagnostics are based on its own theories of *Triguna* (*Sattva*, *Raja* and *Tama*), *Tanmatra*, *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*) and *Agni*.

Agni is the cause of all diseases means majority of the diseases are outcome of malfunctioning of the *Agni*, which rightly has been called as central to health. *Agni* plays not only vital role in absorption of macro as well as micronutrients, but is destructive to pathogens also.

Material and Methods:

This concept is based on a review of Ayurvedic texts. Materials related to *Kala*, *Agni* and other relevant topics have been collected and compiled. The main Ayurvedic texts used in this study are *Charak Samhita*, *Susruta Samhita*, *Astanga Samhita*.

CONCEPT OF AGNI

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. *Acharya Yasaka* 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."¹ 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*)².

SYNONYMNS

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*)³.

PITTA AND AGNI

There is an ambiguity exist that regarding *pitta* and *Agni*. Is there a separate *Agni* apart from *Pitta* or is *Pitta* itself the *Agni*. Different views have been suggested regarding *Pitta* and *Agni* by different *Acharyas*. Some *Acharyas* consider *Pitta* to be *Agni* while other speaks differently. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, there is no existence of any other *Agni* in the body without *Pitta* because when the qualities/properties of *Agni* are diminished, the use of substances of similar qualities/properties have been prescribed and when the properties are greatly increased, resorting to cold

treatments have been advocated. Acharya Marichi has also emphasized that the Agni present in the Pitta gives good or bad results when it is normal or vitiated. Chakrapani has commented on "Pittantargata" that the function of Pitta inside the body is not combustion but its work is to provide heat of Agni. According to Hemadri, Pitta is of five divisions, which are located between the Pakvashaya and Amashaya, although it is composed of Panchabhutas⁴.

TYPES OF AGNI

- Acharya Charaka has mentioned about 13 Agnis. Jatharagni – 1, Bhutagni – 5, Dhatvagni – 7⁵.
- **Jatharagni/Pachakagni-** digestive secretions.
- **Bhootagni-** are elemental enzymes that are responsible for micro-elemental converters.
- **Dhatwagni-** are 7 corresponding tissue building enzymes
- According to Acharya Vagbhata has described different types Agni, viz. – Bhutagnis – 5, – Dhatvagnis – 7, – Dhoshagni– 3 and Malagni – 3⁶.
- Acharya Sharangadhara has recognized five pittas only (Pachak, Bhrajak, Ranjak, Alochaka and Sadhak)
- Bhavamishra has followed Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata.

JATHAR AGNI

Jatharagni

Jathara means Gastrum) is the prime Agni that nourishes the other Agni. Jatharagni refers to the whole process of digestion in digestive tract. It is related to the gastro-intestinal tract, converting the gross food particles into smaller particles which are then able to be absorbed. 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.

The Prasad Bhaga once again gets divided into 3 fragments. The first portion forms the Sthanika Dhatu (Local tissue) or nourishes it. The second portion forms the Poshaka Dhatu The supporting tissue or tissue responsible in the formation of its subsequent Dhatu. The third portion helps in the formation of Upadhatu's (sub-tissues). The Kitta Bhaga gets eliminated as tissue wastes and is finally eliminated from the body after joining the main metabolic wastes of digestion. During Dhatu Pak process heat and energy is liberated which is used for body functions⁷.

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being namely Vishamagni, Tikshanagni, Mandagni and Samagni. According to Hareet 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 *Mandgni*.

In Ayurveda, four states of the digestive fire *Jatharagni* have been elaborated⁸,

1. **VishamaAgni (Variable):** Here the digestive fire is disturbed by *Vata*. Because of variability in *Vata*, there are episodes of alternating cycles of strong appetite with loss of appetite and forgetfulness to consume foods. Gaseous-distension of the abdomen and constipation are striking signs. Cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery, enlarged spleen, abdominal tumour, colic, flatulence, wind and eructation are outcome of *VishamaAgni*.

2. **TeekshnaAgni(High):** Here, the digestive fire is disturbed by *Pitta*. In these cases, *Agni* is usually high and both *Pitta* and *Agni* share same properties. In these cases, immunity against diseases is good. Because of variability in *Pitta*, there are episodes excessive appetites. There are increasing chances of developing diarrhoea, bleeding - diathesis and toxæmia (toxins in the blood). abdominal colic, anaemia, burning sensation, diarrhoea, haemorrhage, haemophilia, hepatitis, hepatomegaly, hyperacidity, jaundice, pain, pyuria, sour

belching, tuberculosis, urine diseases, vertigo, yellow skin are outcome of *Teekshna Agni*.

3. **MandaAgni(Low):** Here the digestive fire is disturbed by *Kapha*. Because of variability in *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 striking features. Blood circulation is poor and one can easily get attacks of chest congestion to sinusitis. Bronchial asthma, bronchitis, cough, excessive salivation from the mouth, fatigue and nausea are hallmark of *MandaAgni*.

4. **SamaaAgni(Normal):** Normal digestive fire is characterised by strong and appealing appetite that is easily satisfied with normal food. Digestive functions are proper; there are no episodes of gas, colic and constipation. *SamaaAgni* is largely responsible for human body nutrition and building strong foundation of seven tissues.

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 (*dhatuparamanu*) 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 bioenergy. 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. 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.

Dhatvagni¹⁰

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*.

1. *Rasagni* present in the *Rasa Dhatu*.
2. *Raktagni* present in the *Rakta Dhatu*.
3. *Mamsagni* present in the *Mamsa Dhatu*.

4. *Medagni* present in the *Meda Dhatu*.
5. *Asthyagni* present in the *Asthi Dhatu*.
6. *Majjagni* present in the *Majja Dhatu*.
7. *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 *AnnaRasa* 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 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 (Cha. Su. 28/15).

Importance of Jatharagni

Functions of various *Agni* elaborately discussed above in which *Jatharagni* is the chief among all types of *Agnis* because function of *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni* depends on this. Aggravation or diminution of *Jatharagni* results in aggravation or diminution of *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*. Therefore by all means one has to protect *Jatharagni* by consuming suitable wholesome dietetics and behaviour because longevity and strength depends on normal state of *Agni*. On the contrary one, who consumes unwholesome diet due to greed, succumbs to disease caused by the vitiation of *Grahani*¹¹.

CONCLUSION

Agni is a basic essential of life and has been a proof of our evolution and a source of lot of innovations through ages. Even today much of our life activities depend on Agni and its utility in one or the other form. Human body too needs fire for the mechanisms of life to keep going and the life element depends on the quality and quantity of fire located in the system.

Explaining briefly the digestive and metabolic 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. If the Agni is functioning normally, the *Dosha*'s also remain in an undisturbed form and support our body, mind and life. On the contrary if the Agni gets disturbed, the *Dosha*'s too will get disturbed and cause many diseases by attacking the body's defences. Hence understanding of Agni is one of the important concepts for the understanding of disease process as well as to prescribed principles of treatment.

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