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Review Article

A CRITICAL REVIEW ON CONCEPT OF AGNI IN AYURVEDA AND ITS CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

Health is the state of mentally and physically well being. According to *Ayurveda*, when *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala* are in *Sama awastha* and *Indriya*, *Aatma*, *Mann* all are working properly then the person is considered as *Swastha*. For *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala* to be in the state of proportionality *Agni* should be normal (*Samagni*). *Agni* consist digestive (*Pak*) and different kinds of hormones, enzyme and co enzymes activities etc. which participate in digestive & metabolic functions. It is believed to be the agency for various types of metabolic transformations. During each and every second various procedure of transformations take place inside the human body. Enumeration of *Agni* varies in various classical Ayurvedic texts. According to various 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*. *Ayurveda* consider that no disease ever be develop without the derangement of *Agni*. Therefore in the management of each and every disease, *Agni* gets primary focus. Though in *Ayurvedic* literature, a detailed explanation of *Agni* is available but there is lack of its practical utility. So, this paper is a sincere effort to elaborate the practical utility of *Agni*.

INTRODUCTION

Agni in *Ayurveda* is reflected in the concept of *Pitta* of the system. The term *Pitta* is derived from the root "tap" or "to burn". This term is seen to have three meanings i.e., *Tap samtape* -refers to the generation of heat.^[1] *Tap Dahe*-refers to the act of burning of nutrition consumed and *Tap Aisvarye*- refers to that factor which is responsible to make one achieve the eight kinds of benefits. *Agni* is the term given in *Ayurveda* for the whole process of energy liberation through digestion at the level of G.I.T and metabolism at the level of tissues. Digestion, metabolism and assimilation i.e. whole process of biological conversion and utilization of energy symbolize by the term *Agni*. As we know that living beings are only able to utilize, conserve and transform the energy and this is the only process that makes them different from non-living, therefore being living and to

maintain the living state depends upon the normalcy of the process of energy transformation. Once this process is interrupted it results in death and when it is malfunctioning it results in disease. Every second our body tries to maintain the homeostasis by balancing the energy input and energy output though various ongoing chemical processes, whatever we eat or drink is just adjuvant to this process. Even medicines have no more role than being energy stabilizers, being acting on receptors or as catalyst that either promote or inhibit a chemical reaction to maintain homeostasis. *Ayurvedic* concept of physiology, including biochemistry of digestion and metabolism, envisaged in *Jatharagni*, *Dhatvagni* and *Bhutagni*.^[2] *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned that various types of dietic 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. *Agni* provides *Bala, Arogya, Ayu, Prana, Swasthyam, Varnam, Utsaha, Prabha, Ojha* and *Teja* to the body.^[3] The *Tridosas, Dhatus* and *Malas* are maintained normal and healthy by the *Agni* itself, present in each of them.^[4] So *Agni* plays an important role in maintains of healthy life of an individual.

Types of Agni

The manner in which the nutrition ingested is digested, the way in which its various components are metabolized into appropriate *Dhatu* or tissue element and how some of its constituents are broken down for being utilized for the production of energy required for vital activities, depends upon factors which are grouped under term *Agni*. According to Ayurveda there are 13 types of *Agni* in body namely- 7 *Dhatwagni*, 5 *Bhutagni* and 1 *Jathragni*. Among these 13 *Jathragni* is the prime one and nourishes the other *Agni*. *Jathragni* refers to the whole process of digestion in G.I.T, *Bhutagni* refers to the final digestion in liver *Agni* and *Dhatwagni* refers to tissue metabolism. All the enzymes responsible for the process of digestion and metabolism are refers to *Pitta*. Thus *Agni* is the resultant and *Pitta* is the initiator or it can be said that *Pitta* is the cause and *Agni* is the result.

Type of Agni vitiation:- *Vishmagni* due to *Vata dosha*, *Tikshnagni* due to *Pitta dosha* and *Mandagni* due to *Kaph Dosha*.^[5] In Ayurveda, four states of the digestive fire have been elaborated: *Vishmagni* (Irregular secretion of digestive enzymes): 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. In case of *Tikshnagni* (Hyper secretion of digestive enzymes) the digestive fire is disturbed by *Pitta*. In these cases, *Agni* is usually intensified. This type of *Agni* can easily digest even high amount of ingested food. Sometimes in the absence of fuel it start consuming body's own tissues (*Dhatu*). In case of *Mandagni* (Hypo secretion of digestive enzymes) 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. Due to sluggish metabolism food becomes *Vidagadha*. *Samagni* (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. *Samagni* is largely responsible for human body nutrition and building strong foundation of seven tissues.^[6]

Causes of Vitiation of Agni

Excessive (fast), indigestion, over eating and irregular eating, inappropriate food materials: these all kind of improper dietary habits causes vitiation of *Agni* as per vitiation of involvement of *Doshas*. Other factors that leads to vitiation of *Agni* are: Improper use of *Panchakarma, Emaciation* as a result of diseases, Seasonal perversion, Suppressions of natural urges. *Agni Dusthi* is the causative factor for most of the diseases. Being thus vitiated does not digest even light food. This undigested food becomes sour in taste and it works like poison and it gives rise to several diseases.

Concept of Pitta and Agni

Pitta is same as *Agni*, since it performs *Dahan, Pachan* and similar actions performed by fire, hence *Pitta* is known as *Antaragni*. It is explained from the way in which it performs the *Pakaadi Karmas* i.e. it digests food, separates *Sara* from *Kitta* of the food, because of this, it is known as *Pachakpitta*. *Pachakpitta* has following synonyms: *Jatharagni, Kosthagni, Antaragni, Dehagni* etc. While being place in an area between *Amashaya* and *Pakavashya*, directly participates in the digestion of food and at the same time, support to and augments the functions of remaining *Pittas*, present elsewhere in the body.^[7]

Significance of Agni

Physiological significance: 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 in not properly digested is referred as "*Ama*" in Ayurveda and it is nothing but a toxin or pathogen responsible for array of 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.

Pathological significance: If digestive fire is not functioning properly, one has poor digestion, languid 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* are 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*. With the advancement of science we are evidenced that the world is threatened more not by communicable diseases rather by non-communicable diseases. Alarming increase in obesity, cardiac diseases, diabetes all are outcome of deranged metabolism and comprises the syndrome of metabolic diseases. Now a day there is paradigm shift in the outlook for the management of such diseases from curative to conservative one. Now modern medical science also advocates dietary and life style management for the restoration of health.

There are various drugs mentioned in Ayurveda that plays important role at *Jatharagni* level, *Bhootagni* level and *Dhatavagni* level like *Trikatu* i.e. equal amount of three herbs namely *Sunthi* (*Zingiber officianalis*), *Maricha* (*Piper nigrum*) and *Pippali* (*Piper longum*) is supposed to work on *Jatharagni* at the level of *Madhuravasthapaka* and *Amalavasthapaka*. They are believed to intensify salivary flow and gastric juice secretion, and help in digestion. Medicinal plants that are acts at *bhootagni* level are *Bhringaraja* (*Eclipta Alba*) *Picrorhiza kurroa* (*Kutaki*) *Cucurma longa* *Andrographis paniculata*. These are well known medicinal plant for its usefulness in liver diseases. Drug Acting on *Dhatwagni* are; *Rasagni-Khajoora* (*Phoenix dactylifera*), *Nagarmotha* (*Cyperus rotandus*), etc, *Raktagni-Manjistha* (*Rubia Cordifolia*), *Sariva* (*Hemidesmus indicus*), *Khadira* (*Acacia catechu*), *Mandoora* (Incinerated iron oxide) etc., *Mamsagni- Guggulu* (*Commiphora Mukul*), *Kshara*, *Eranda* (*Ricinus communis*), etc. *Medagni-Kanchanara* (*Bauhinia variegata*), *Guggulu* (*Commiphora Mukul*), *Triphala*, *Louhabhasma*, *Agnimantha* (*Premna integrifolia*), etc. *Asthyagni-Laksha* (*Laccifer Lacca*), *Asthisrinkhala* (*Cissus quadrangularis*), *Nagabala* (*Sida veronicaefolia Lam*), *Godanti*, *Muktapisti*, *Shallaki* (*Boswellia serrata*) etc. *Majjagni-Guduchi* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), *Aswagandha* (*Withania somnifera*), *Rajatabharma*, etc. *Shukragni-Kapikacchu* (*Mucuna pruriens*), *Vidarikanda* (*Ipomoea Digitata*) etc.^[8]

CONCLUSION

The concept of *Agni* is a basic concept of *Ayurveda*. *Agni* is believed to be the agency for any kind of transformations takes place in body. These transformations may be of biochemical or bio physical or any other type. The main type of *Agni* i.e. *Jatharagni* situated below the *Amashaya* in *Garahani* is activated by *Samana Vayu* and digests the food which is taken in proper *Matra* and in proper manner. Observing these entire factors one should take meal according to the main principles mentioned in our *Ayurvedic* literature i.e. *Ahara-vidhivisesayatanas* and *Ahara Vidhividhana*, in order to increase the longevity of life. Everybody should advocates dietary and life style management in case of derangements of *Agni* in any form. Significance of *Agni* has been seen in both the healthy (physiological) and diseased condition (pathological).^[9] In healthy condition it is necessary for maintenance of health while in diseased condition it is important for diagnosis as well as treatment of the particular disease. *Agni* is important in all types of treatment like *Shamana*, *Shodhana* and *Shastrakarma*.

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