



APPLIED ASPECT OF AGNI IN AYUVEDA SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

According to *Vedas* the ancient texts of India and *Ayurveda*, *Agni* is worshipped in its divine form as the bringer and sustainer of life. When we honor our *Agni* thus, we become mindful of what we eat and how we accept it in ourselves. The term *Agni* is best represented by biological fire. *Agni* is vital at physiological and pathological levels. As we take food stuffs to feed ourselves for nutrition, in the same way digestive fire also require constant feeding, therefore to carry out various biochemical pathways going on in our body. *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.

KEYWORDS: *Vedas, Agni, biochemical.*

INTRODUCTION

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. But, the enumeration of the number of *Agni* varies in various classical Ayurvedic texts. According to the 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*. The five *Bhutagnis* act on the respective *bhutika* portion of the food and thereby nourish the *Bhutas* in the body. The seven *Dhatvagni* act on the respective *dhatu*s by which each *Dhatu* is broken into three parts. In this way, the entire process of transformation consists of two types of products – *PRasad* (essence) and *Kitta* (excrete). The former is taken for nourishment while the latter one is thrown out, which otherwise defiles the body if it stays longer.

TYPES OF AGNIS

Agni is innumerable because of its presence in each and every *dhatu paramanu* (cell) of the body. But, enumeration of the number of *Agnis* varies in various classical Ayurvedic texts, as shown below Charaka has

mentioned about 13 *Agnis*. *Jatharagni* – 1, *Bhutagni* – 5, *Dhatvagni* – 7 (Ch.Chi.15/38).

- 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 *Bhutagnis* underlying in the brief description made to the transformation of food stuff. (Sh. Su.21/10.)
- 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*) (Sha.Sa.Pu.Kh.- 5/32).
- Bhavamishra has followed Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata (Bh.Pu.Kh.-3/169,180).

Agni has been divided into 13 types according to the function and site of action. These are:

1. ***Jatharagni*** – one *Agni* present in the stomach and duodenum.
2. ***Bhutagni*** – five *Agni* from five basic elements.
3. ***Dhatvagni*** – seven *Agni* present, one in each of the seven *dhatu*s.

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 *dhatu*), 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 (As.Hr.Sha.3/50-54).

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 *Dhatu 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 (As.Hr.Su-12/8).

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* (Cha. Chi. 15/39-40). *Jatharagni* is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being (Cha. Chi. 15/51), 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*.

- a) **Samagni:** The *Samagni* digests and assimilates food properly at the proper time. This thus increases the quality of the *Dhatu* (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 Shushrut 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 bioenergies. 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 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 (Cha. Chi. 15/13, 14). 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 *Dhatu* (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 *dhatu*s 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)

DISCUSSION

The *Ayurvedic* concept of *Agni* or fire is critically important to our overall health. *Agni* is the force of intelligence within each cell, each tissue, and every system within the body. Ultimately, it is the discernment of *Agni* that determines which substances enter our cells and tissues and which substances should be removed as waste. In this way, *Agni* is the gatekeeper of life. In fact, according to *Ayurveda*, when the *Agni* is extinguished, death soon follows. *Ayurveda* identifies a vast range of functions for which *Agni* is directly responsible, but it also teaches us that impaired *Agni* is at the root of all imbalances and diseases. *Ayurveda* identifies 13 distinct subtypes of *Agni* in the body, each defined by its specific physiological function as well as its location in the body. The mother of all of them is *Jathara Agni*, the central digestive fire that governs the digestion and assimilation of food. But there are many other fire components in the body's cells, tissues and organs that govern things like sensory perception and the nutrition of specific tissues. Localized manifestations of *Agni* also determine which substances can cross cell membranes and maintain cellular memory in our DNA. A poor diet, an un-supportive lifestyle, and unresolved emotions can easily hinder *Agni* by dampening any of these qualities throughout the system. Similarly, nurturing the qualities of *Agni* in a very general way has the potential to benefit *Agni* throughout the body. Hence understanding of *Agni* in one of the important concepts for the understanding of disease process as well as to prescribe principles of treatment.

CONCLUSION

Agni is the term given in *Ayurveda* for the whole process of energy liberation through digestion at the level of digestive tract and metabolism at the level of tissues. Digestion, metabolism and assimilation i.e. whole process of biological conversion and utilization of energy is symbolized by the term *Agni*. *Agni* is derivative of *Tejas* (fire) *Mahabhuta* it carries metabolic transformations in which the inherent feature is change.

When the *Agni* is extinguished man dies, when a man is induced with it adequately, he lives long in good health, when it is de-arranged, he begins to ail. Therefore the function of *Agni* is said to be the main stay of life. The

food which is considered the nourishing factor of the *Sharira*, *Dhatu*, *Ojas*, *Bala*, *Varna* and other things, that very food too, is dependent for its nutrient action on the *Jatharagni* as from the undigested food, the *Sharira Dhatu* cannot be formed.

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