

A REVIEW ARTICLE ON PHYSIOLOGICAL ASPECT OF “AGNI”

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ABSTRACT

The term *Agni*, in common language, means fire or we can say the bio-energy of the body is *Agni*. It converts food into the form of energy which is responsible for all the vital functions of the living creature. *Agni* maintains its integrity and performs its vital activities, by converting- in *Pakadi karmas* or bio-physical or bio-chemical processes- the foods consumed in various ways- licked, masticated, drunk etc., not only into its various structural and functional constituents but also to provide the *Shakti* or energy necessary for proceeding with its innumerable vital activities. 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 *Bhutagni* act on the respective *bhautika* portion of the food and thereby nourish the *Bhuta* in the body. The seven *Dhatvagni* act on the respective *dhatu* 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.

KEYWORDS: *Agni, Jatharagni, Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Sara, Kitta.*

INTRODUCTION

The factor responsible for forwarding the *rasa* and *rakta* (blood) etc. tissues in next (higher) *dhatu*s e.g. the transformation process in the body has been indicated as *agni*. Again the factor which stands first in all the individuals.^[1] About the importance of *Agni*, *Acharya Charak* has mentioned that after stoppage of the function of *Agni*, the individual dies, and when the *Agni* of an individual is *sama*, then that person would be absolutely healthy and would lead a long, happy, healthy life. But, if the *Agni* of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed, resulting in ill health and disease. Hence, *Agni* is said to be the base (*mool*) of life.^[2]

Agni- its utility in Health- The main functions of internal (bodily) *agni* are *dahana* (oxidation or combustion) and *paka* or *pachana* (physical and/or chemical transformation) of the *ahara*.^[3]

Types of *Agni*

Agni is innumerable because of its presence in each and every *dhatuparamanu*(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*.^[4] *Jatharagni*–1, *Bhutagni*– 5, *Dhatvagni*-7

1. *Jatharagni*

Jatharagni is mainly concerned with chemical processes involved in gastro intestinal digestion or we can say digestion in *Jathar* or *Koshtha*. *Acharya Charaka* says that *Koshthagni* is considered to be the leader of all factors concerned with metabolism in the body. All other *Agnis* are derived from it. Their activities or otherwise, are dependent upon an increase or decrease of *Jatharagni*.^[5] According to *Vagbhata* *Pitta* is stated to be located in an area between the *Pakwashay* and *Amashay*; in its constitution, it is, *Panchabhautic*; it is *drava* or liquid in consistency, in spite of which it performs action similar to *Anala* or *Agni*, largely due to the accession of its *tejas* component over the rest. This fact is inferred from the way in which it performs *pakadikarmas* (chemical actions) viz., it digests the food, and separates the *sara* (the nutrient fraction) from the *kitta* (the residue fraction).^[6]

2. *Bhutagni*

According to *Charak* the digestion of food by *jatharagni* leads to the breakdown – *sanghatbheda* of the former into five distinct physiochemical groups viz., *parthiva*, *apya*,

agneya, *vayava* and *nabhasa*.^[7] The *agni* moiety present in substances belonging to each group is, then, stated to digest the substance of that group, leading to a radical change in their qualities- *vilakshanaguna*. Thus, food substances are rendered fit for being assimilated into and built up as parts of the corresponding *bhuta* class of substances present in dhatus. This process of assimilation is stated to be mediated, as it were, by the seven *dhatvagnis*, present in each *dhatu*.^[8]

According to *Sushruta* this animated organism is composed of five *mahabhutas* and the food of living organic being necessarily partakes the character of its corporeal components. The food which consists of the five *mahabhutas*, is digested, and its turn, by five *bhutagnis* and each of its principles proceeds to augment its own analogue (*sajatiyata*) in the human organism.^[9]

3. *Dhatvagni*

Agnis concerned with the *pakas* of *ahardravayas* previously dealt with by five species of *dhatvagnis*. *Dhatvagnis* are seven in number, corresponding to the seven *dhatu*s. They are *Rasagni*, *Raktagni*, *Mansagni*, *Medagni*, *Asthyagni*, *Majjagni* and *Shukragni*. According to *Charak* the nutrients that support the body are subjected to *paka* again, being acted upon by the seven *dhatvagnis*, leading to the formation of two products., the *kitta* and *prasada*.^[10]

Four functional states of the *agni*^[11]

1. *Mandagni*

Due to the influence, predominantly, of *kapha*. The one which does the delayed *pachan* of the food even though taken in very less quantity, is called as *Mandagni*. Complications are *Udarpidaa*, Heaviness in *Shiras*, *Prasek*, *Chardi* and *Shvaas*.

2. *Tikshnagni*

Due to the influence, predominantly, of *Pitta*. *Tikshnagni* easily digests even a very heavy meal, in a very short space of time. It is stated to produce parched throat, palate and lips, heat and other complication.

3. *Vishmagni*

Due to the influence, predominantly, of *Vata*. In this state, the action of *agni* is irregular and fitful. It sometimes helps the process of complete digestion and, at other times, produces

distention of the abdomen, colicky pain, constipation of the bowel dysentery, ascites, heaviness of the limbs and loose motions.

4. *Samagni*

Due to the influence of the normally equilibrated *doshas*, which would represent the normal states of the functioning of the *agni*.

CONCLUSION

After a detailed discussion on *Agni*, it is concluded that according to *Ayurveda*, the *gunas* (qualities, properties) potentially present in *ahardravayas* are activated by *jatharagnipaka* and actualized by *bhutagnipaka* in the final stages of digestive process, in the *adho-amashya* or *pittashay* or *pachyamanashay* before they are utilized in *dhatupaka*. The various factor of the body like life, complexion, strength, health, metabolic process, growth and development, lusture, *ojas* and *tejas*, various factors responsible for transformation and metabolism of the tissues and even *prana* (life) are due to *agni*. Until the digestive fire is in balanced (*yukta*) stage, individual remains healthy for a long period and when it becomes abnormal and imbalances (*vikrata*), the individual become ill. If the digestive fire is completely lost, the person dies. So *agni* is the root of life.

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