A CONCEPTUAL STUDY OF AGNI AND IT’S RELATION TO VARNA, AN AYURVEDIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Agni literally means fire. In Ayurveda the theory of Agni is of prime importance. It is an essential factor of digestion and metabolism that transforms food into a form of energy that our body needs. Acharya Charaka has described that Agni is a cause of Ayu (life), Varna (complexion), Bala (strength), Swasthya (health), Upachaya (nourishment), Prabha (Lustre), Oja, Teja, and Prana. So these factors are somehow dependant on Agni for their physiological state. Varna is the factor that is clearly visible to eyes if get deranged due to some pathological conditions. Ayurveda says that all the diseases occur due to abnormal functioning of Agni. This change in physiological state of Agni leads to develop many symptoms as per involvement of doshas, strotas etc. Since Varna depends on Agni for it’s normal state, vitiation of it may lead to change in Varna (Vaivarnya) that is described in various classical texts of Ayurveda. This knowledge of Agni and Varna relation is therefore important for treating Vaivarnya (change in the Varna) with Agni chikitsa, too.

KEYWORDS: Agni, Varna, Dosha, Strotas, Vaivarnya.

INTRODUCTION

Agni literally means fire. In Ayurveda the theory of Agni is of prime importance. It is an essential factor of digestion and metabolism that transforms food into a form of energy that our body needs. Agni helps various tissues of the body to produce secretions, metabolic reactions and other processes needed to create energy. Agni helps in maintaining nutrition and excretion at cellular level. Agni is a biological fire that governs metabolism. Therefore digestive abilities depend upon the strength of Agni.
About the importance of Agni Acharya Charaka has mentioned that Agni is a cause of Aayu (life), Varna (complexion), Bala (strength), Swasthya (health), Upachay (nourishment), Prabha (lustre), oja, teja (energy) and Prana (life energy) (Ch. Chi 15/3). So if the functions of Agni gets disturbed then above factors may get affected in varying degree. The factor Varna is one of the important factor as it is clearly visible to eyes if get deranged due to some pathological conditions. It is one of the function of prakrut Pitta dosha also (Ch. Su 12/11). Agni in Ayurveda is reflected in the concept of Pitta of the system. Various examples are available in our classical texts that reflects Pitta is same as Agni.

Ayurveda says that all diseases occur due to poor functioning of Agni (Mandagni) (Va Ni 12/1). This change in the physiological state of Agni leads to develop many symptoms as per involvement of doshas, strotas etc. Since Varna depends on Agni for it's normal state, vitiation of Agni may lead to change in Varna (vaivarnya) that is described in the pathophysiology of many diseases. So efforts should be made to evaluate the relation of Agni and Varna as per Ayurveda that will be helpful for treating Vaivarnya with Agni chikitsa too, rather than only concentrating on rakta dhatu.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

- Physiological aspect of Agni

In Ayurveda, the term “Agni” is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. In Brahmasutra, Agni is said to be a sign of life in the body. 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.” The etymology given by Yasaka, Shankaracharya (vedantasutra shabda kalpa druma) 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). In shabdakalpa drum, 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).
Agni is innumerable because of its presence in each and every dhatu paramanu (cell) 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.

Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of our body. Therefore, Ayurveda considers that Dehagni is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, lusture, oja, teja (energy) and prana (life energy). (Cha. Chi. 15/3).[1]

- **Agni and pitta relation**

The origin of Pitta is from “Tapa,” which means: combustion/digestion – to give nourishment to the body by digestion of ingested food and to maintain heat – by means of heat, it maintains the color, lusture, etc. of the body (Su.Su.-21/5).[5]

So the question arises whether the Agni and Pitta are same or different from each other. Different views have been suggested regarding Pitta and Agni by different Acharyas. Some Acharyas consider Pitta to be Agni while others speak differently.

According to Acharya Sushruta, there is no existence of any other Agni in the body without Pitta, because when there is increased digestion and combustion in the body due to Ushna guna of Pitta, it is termed as Agni (Su. Su. 21/9).[6] Acharya Marichi has also emphasized that the Agni is the biological fire that remains inside the Pitta which is responsible for good or bad effect on the body when it is normal or vitiated (Cha. Su. 12/11).[2] Acharya Vagbhata also supports the same that Agni is nothing but a fire inside Pitta. When Pachak Pitta leaves it's Drava guna (liquidity), then it is said to be Agni. This pachak pitta also governs the other four pitta types and give them strength for their activity (Va. Su 12/10-12).[7] Thus if pachak pitta that means Agni remains in normal state then Bhrajak pitta will also get normally formed and will be able to perform it's function of giving normal colour to skin (Va. Su 12/15).[8]

According to Acharya Sushruta, five types of Agnis are illustrated, viz. Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Alochakagni, Sadhakagni and Bhrajakagni. The Bhrajakagni is responsible for
maintaining normal skin colour, lusture of the body.

The panchabhoutik composition of pitta is Tej or Agni mahabhuta (Su. Su 42/5). This tej mahabhuta is also responsible for Varna formation as said by Acharya Sushruta (Su. Sha 2/35).

Varna

Varna according to Unadi-s III, a covering, outward appearance, exterior form or figure, to paint.

Varna according to Shabdakalpadrum is incentive to shine or get lightened

Varna is formed under the influence of Tej mahabhuta (Su. Sha 2/35). Acharya Charaka has said that normal Varna is one of the function of prakrut Pitta (Ch. Su 12/11).

- Diseases where Agni vitiation and subsequent Varna changes seen are as follows

  Jwara (Fever) - Acharyas has said that Jwara is caused due to vitiated doshas that hampers the function of Agni and they further described the lakshana of Vaivarnya in purvaroopa of the disease (Ch. Chi 3/29). The same is supported by Acharya Sushruta (Su. Ut 39/25).

  In doshaj type of Jwara also there is change in varna at different site of body like in Vataj jwara Reddish tinge (arun varna) is observed over nails, eyes, face, skin etc. Likewise in pittaj jwara greenish yellow and in kaphaj jwara white colour is observed at same site.

  Gulma (Abdominal lump) - Acharya Charaka has described that Gulma aggravates when the digestion is poor while it subsides when the same is stimulated (Ch. Chi 5/112). In all cases, pacification and aggravation of doshas are dependant on Agni and hence one should always protect Agni and avoid etiological factors (Ch. Chi 5/136). Hence Acharya Vagbhata mentioned that in vataj gulma arun varna is seen over skin, nails etc (Va. Ni 11/42,43).

  Pandu (Anemia) - It is the disease where colour change in the skin is felt magnificent. Acharya charak has said that there is "Hat_anal" that means the activity of agni is greatly reduced (Ch. chi 16/13). He also implies that there is change in the colour of skin i.e vaivarnya to pandu, harit, haridra etc and complexion and strength also get too much diminished.

  Udar - Acharya Charaka has said that Udar is the disease specially caused due to Mandagni i.e poor agni (Ch.chi 13/ 15). Hence in the type of Udar disease it is stated that there is
change in the colour of skin as in Vatodar appearance of blackish reddish tinge in the nails, eyes, face etc (Ch.chi 13/25).[19]

**Atisar (Diarrhoea)** – In the story of Atisar mentioned in Charak Samhita, it is said that in Yadnya of King Prushadh, cow meat is eaten by the people which is heavy to digest. This lead to Mandagni (decreased activity of Agni) which ultimately gave rise to Atisar Disease in the community (Ch.chi 19/4).[20] In the Atisar disease Acharya Yogratnakar has mentioned that there is change in the colour of faeces in Atisar disease (Y.R Atisar nidan 8,9).[21] The action of “Shoshyaman Vanhi” (Agni present at the pakvashaya) which is responsible for 3rd Avasthapaka of food that helps to absorb water and gives colour to the faces is greatly reduced in the Atisar hence the consistency and colour of faeces changes.

**Kushta (Skin disease)** – Ayurveda has mentioned all the skin disease under a single heading Kushta. As stated in skin disease, change in the skin colour is a classical feature and prodromal symptom of the disease (Ch.chi 7/11).[22] But regarding this disease Acharyas have not clearly mentioned the Agni vitiation in disease pattern. In Charak Samhita the causative factor of kustha disease are given (Ch.chi 7/4-8).[23] These factors are more over similar to the causative factors of Agni vitiation that are explained in Grahani chikitsa chapter. (Ch.chi 15/42-44).[24] Also in the treatment of Kushta disease repeated Shodhana chikitsa is mentioned (Ch.chi 7/41).[25] The Shodhan Chikitsa is a type of Apatarpana as said by Acharya Vagbhata, and this Apatarpana is mainly done when Agni Vitiation by doshas occur (A.H.Su 8/20, 21).[26] So we can say that in Kushta disease also the colour change is indirectly due to Agni only.

**CONCLUSION**

From the above review from different Ayurvedic texts we may conclude that Agni is a prime Factor in our body which not only help in digestion but also responsible for vital functioning of the body. While taking the meaning of Varna, a broad terminology must be adopted as given in Monnier-Williams dictionary; to paint i.e Varna means not only giving colour to the skin but also to different substance of the body which is experienced in the case of Atisar disease mentioned by Acharya Yogratnakar. Other aspect of Varna should also be taken into consideration that means lusture which can be seen in case of Jwara (fever), Gulma, Pandu (Anemia) etc. So all over we can say that Varna in different aspects depends on Agni for it’s physiological state. Hence while treating Varna change i.e Vaivarnya anywhere in the body, we should should treat Agni too along with other treatment modalities.
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