

CONCEPT OF AGNI AND ITS CLINICAL IMPORTANCE IN DAY TO DAY PRACTICE OF AYURVEDIC DRUGS

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ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, the term “Agni” is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. *Agni* converts food in the form of biological 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, luster, *oja*, *teja* (energy) and *prana* (life energy). 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 *samagni*, 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. Vagbhatta says that root of all diseases is *Mandagni*. And *Samagni* is for health. There are a variety of physical and psycho-physical diseases developed due to loss of agni simply from indigestion to death. As discussed in different *samhitas*. Like – *Agirana*, *Aamdosa*, *Aamvisha*, *alask*, *visuchika*, *Ghradhnirog*, *bhayajatisar*, *Sokajatisar*, *Urustambh* etc. So understanding of *agni* concept is need of Ayurvedic physician to determine the status of agni during prescribing drugs and drug doses along with prescription of *Aahar and Vihara*.

Key word:- *Agni*, *Agirana* (Indigestion), *Jatharagni*, *Dehagni*, *Mandagni*. And *Samagni*

INTRODUCTION

The term of *Agni*, in common language means fire. However, in the context of the functioning of a living organism, which maintains its integrity and performs its vital activities, by converting in *Pakadi-Karmas* or bio-physical and 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 processing with its innumerable vital activities, this term does

not actually mean fire. In these sequences, the term *Agni* comprehends various factors which participate in and direct the course of digestion and metabolism in living organism.[1]

Synonyms of agni: - 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*).[2]

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*. *Jatharagni* – 1, *Bhutagni* – 5, *Dhatvagni* – 7 (Ch.Chi.15/38).[3]
- 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.)[4]
- 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).[5]
- Bhavamishra has followed Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata (Bh.Pu.Kh.-3/169,180).[6]

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 *AshtangaHridaya*, *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*s), 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).[7]

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*sparamanus (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).[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).[9]

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being namely *Vishamagni*, *Tikshanagni*, *Mandagni* and *Samagni*. (Cha. Chi. 15/51),[10]

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 *Dhatus* (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 *VataDosh*, it creates different types of *udargataroga*.
- 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 condi-

tion is known as "*BhasmakRoga*" 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 (*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 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).[11] 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 diges-

tion 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 *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 *RaktaDhatu*.
3. *Mamsagni* present in the *MamsaDhatu*.
4. *Medagni* present in the *MedaDhatu*.
5. *Asthyagni* present in the *AsthiDhatu*.
6. *Majjagni* present in the *MajjaDhatu*.
7. *Shukragni* present in the *ShukraDhatu*.

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).[12]

Material and Method:-

Various Ayurvedic, modern literature, text books, articles, and journals are studied for Topic title “Concept of Agni and its Clinical Importance in day to day practice of Ayurvedic Drugs” this review work.

Review & Discussion:- Exploring the historical background of *Agni* we find that the *Vedas* bear a handful of literature about

the *Agni*. From this it becomes evident that the existence of *Agni karma* was there in the society in *pre vedic period*.

Rig veda application of *Agni* is indicated for the remedy of different gynaecological and obstetrical diseases. Specific treatment by *Agni* and its material was advised for the vaginal and uterine disease (10/162/1-4).

Yajurveda again emphasized the use of *Agni* as therapy for *sheeta*. It is indicated that use of *Agni* in case of *sheeta and sheeta induced disease*. (23/10/01).

Samaveda bears elaborated description about *Agni* which is clear by enumeration of a separate chapter as ‘*Agnaneyakanda*’. In this veda *Agni* is given special names as *Parmeshwar, Aatma, Vaishwanar* etc. It is considered as the life existing in the creatures of the universe and which spreads/propagates all over the area is called *Agni*.

Atharvaveda has identified *Agni* as God and treatment for diseases from the verses it becomes clear that *Agni* was used to protect the body from the invading microorganisms. (5/23/1,3,5).

In *Brahmasutra*, *Agni* has been meant to be a sign of life in the body. *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*).[13]

Agni as Pitta ?

The origin of *Pitta* is from “*Tapa*,” which means: (1) combustion/digestion – to give nourishment to the body by digestion of ingested food, (2) to maintain heat – by means of heat, it maintains the color, lusture, etc. of the body (Su.Su.-21/5).[14]

Now, there is a question as to whether *Pitta* and *Agni* are both the same or are different? Does any area exist of *Agni* without *Pitta*, or is it

that *Pitta* is *Agni*? This should be clearly understood. 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 *Ushnaguna* of *Pitta*, the treatment is like *Agni* (Su. Su. 21/09).[15] Acharya Marichi has also emphasized that the *Agni* present in the *Pitta* gives good or bad results when it is normal or vitiated (Cha. Su. 12/11).[16]

Chakrapani has commented on “*Pittantargatta*,” that the function of *Pitta* inside the body is not combustion but its work is to provide heat of *Agni*. Besides this, Acharya Sushruta has described five types of *Agnis* as the variety of *Pitta*. Acharya Bhoj also considered *Pitta* as *Agni*, digestive fire is included within *Agni*, which is specially meant for different enzymatic activities of the body, i.e. *pachana*, *deepan*, *bhedana*, etc. (*ChakrapaniTika* on Cha.Su.-12/11).[17]

According to Hemadri, *Pitta* is of five divisions, which are located in the interior of the *pakvashaya* and *amashaya*, although it is composed of *panchabhutas*. Because of an increase of (predominance qualities of) *tejasbhuta*, it is devoid of liquidity (although it is a liquid). Also, because it does not possess *snigdha* (viscosity), *sita* and such other properties of *apa bhuta*, it is called by the term “*Anal*” because of its function of *paka*. It cooks the food, dividing it into essence and waste separately. Being localized there, it bestows grace (help) to the other *Pitta* present there and also the other *dhatvagni* present in the *dhatu*s by giv-

ing them strength (power of functioning), which is known as “*Pachaka Pitta*” (As.Hr.Su.12/10-12).[18]

Different examples are available in our classics to indicate that *Pitta* is the same as *Agni*. But, some doubts arise behind the concept of whether *Pitta* is *Agni*, e.g.

- Why indulgence of aggravating factors like *katu*, *vidahi*, etc. reduces the strength of *Agni* instead of enhancing it.
- Appropriate example to highlight the above concept that ghee alleviates *Pitta* but enhances *Agni*.
- The quotation of Acharya Sushruta, *Samadoshahsamagnishcha* (Su. Sha. 15/48)[19] has clearly indicated that *Pitta* and *Agni* are not the same.

CONCLUSION

Agni may be correlated with digestive & metabolic fire in the body. It is the substance secreted in our body, which is directly responsible for chemical changes in the body. It consists digestive (*pak*) enzymes and different kinds of hormones, and co-enzymes activities etc. which participate in these digestive & metabolic functions. It is a logical conclusion that *Ama* is produced due to hypo-functioning of *Agni*. At any level of the three *Pakas* (digestion and metabolism i.e. *Madhur*,

Amla & *Katuavasthapaka* & *vipaka*) due to hypo-functioning of the *agni* concerned unwanted chemical substances are produced known as *Ama*. Hypo-functioning of any *Agni* specially of *Jatharagni* is likely to affect the function of other too, leading to formation of *Ama* in the different stage of *Paka-karma*. Lastly we can say that *Agni* plays very important role in growth, development & maintenance of the body. So very Ayurvedic Physician and

Surgeon should have proper Knowledge of Agni and its Clinical Implimentation.

As described by Vagbhatta all diseases are due to lack of *agni*(*Mandagni* a functional type of *agni*) due to *Mandagni* , *Rasaj* and *Annajagirana* these produse deformity at sub cellular levele. A lot indigested and unwanted material circulate in body due to *Mandagni* and *agirana* it is called *Aamvisha*.(A.H.Ni.12/1. & A.H.SU.13/27)[20,21] Chakrapani also described the *kal* (in how much time the Drugs and food should be metabolized)two and three for *Aushad* and *Aahar* respectively.

So it is much more importance before pre- scribing the drugs assessment for *ja- ranshakti* (Digestive power) of *agni* must assured and knowledge of concept of *agni* is compulsory to one and all (ie physician and surgeons) in field of Ayurveda.

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