



A SYSTEMIC REVIEW ON ANNAVAHA SROTASA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda has its holistic approach to understanding the *Purush Sharir* through different theories like the *Srotas*, the concept of *Srotas* is a unique contribution to the understanding of the anatomy of the human body. There is a description of *Srotas* by 13 *Acharya Charak* and 11 pairs of *Srotas* by *Acharya Sushrut*, both *Acharyas* described *Annavaaha Srotas* and its *Moolas*. *Acharya Dhanwantari* all parts of the body formed at the same time due to *Vayu*. *Vayu* along with *Pitta* demarcates channels according to purpose; similarly, entering *Mamsa* (flesh) demarcates muscles. *Matrija Bhava* and *Pitraj Bhav* are helpful in the origin of *Annavaaha Srotas*. In the classics, *Acharya* says about three Pillars of life viz *Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahamacarya*. *Ahara* is a basic need of all living things. *Annavaaha Srotas* is one of the types of *Srotas* described in all important *Samhita*.

Keywords: *Ayurveda*, *Annavaaha Srotasa*, *Agni*, *Annapachan*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is a science of life that aims toward the maintenance of good health and cure of diseases. It is based on its own fundamental concepts like *Triguna*, *Tanmatra*, *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha*, *Saptadhatu*,

Agni, *Rasa*, *Vipaka*, *Srotasa*, *Aashaya*, etc. which are distinctly different from modern medical science. These form the basis for understanding the pathology and treatment of disease. *Acharya Charaka* indicates

the need for a detailed study of body and body parts to the *Chikitsaka* (physician) for expertise.¹

Srotas are the base of the transformation of nutrients in biological elements, being the metabolic Centre of that particular dhatu, transport of nutrients and waste products. “*Srusarati*” means to flow, to exude, to ooze, to filter, to permeate. *Srotasis* the functional channel within the living body, concerned with one exclusive vital function. Though conceptually *Srotas* are innumerable, a certain number are assumed according to their specified function, so they are 13 in number according to *Acharya Charak*² and according to *Acharya Sushrut*.³

ANNAVAHA SROTAS

Annavaaha Srotas are the *Srotas* or canals that transport 'Anna' or food. This is related to the alimentary tract, often known as the gastrointestinal tract or digestive tract. The *Annavaaha Srotas* are the channels in the body that convey the food and drinks we consume. The food we take and place in our mouths travels down the food pipe called the oesophagus to the stomach. The meal is partially processed here and then transferred to the intestines for further digestion. It travels from our mouth to the stomach and then to the intestines to be digested and changed into a form that the body tissues can absorb and use. Thus, the unrestricted movement of food from the upper passages to the lower passages of the gastrointestinal or digestive tract is needed for the body to procure nutrition. The movement of food takes place in the channels of the body and these channels leading from the mouth to the intestines are called *Annavaaha Srotas*. (*Anna*-- Food, *Vaha* - Carry, *Srotas* - Channels).

ORIGIN OF ANNAVAHA SROTAS

According to *Sushruta*⁴

Annavaaha Srotas have their roots in- *Aamashaya* (Stomach) and *Annavaahini Dhamani's* (The channels which carry the food) When the *Annavaaha Srotas* gets injured or obstructed (blocked) or damaged it causes the below-mentioned symptoms:

1. *Aadhmaana* – Distension of abdomen
2. *Shula* – Pain abdomen (Colic)
3. *Anna Vidweshha* – Aversion toward food
4. *Chardi* – Vomiting

5. *Pipasa* – Thirst

6. *Aandhya* – Blindness

7. *Maranam* – Death

According to *Charaka*⁵

The *Annavaaha Srotas* are 2 in number. They are rooted in *Aamashaya* - Stomach and *Vama Parshva* - (Left lateral side of the abdomen or belly). When *Annavaaha Srotas* gets vitiated or damaged, it causes the below-mentioned symptoms: -

1. *Anannaabhilasha* - No interest in food or aversion towards food.

2. *Arochaka* – Anorexia.

CONCEPT OF ANNAVAHA SROTAS

The *Srotas* or channels which carry Anna or Food are called *Annavaaha Srotas*. Some authorities equate the *Annavaaha Srotas* with the digestive system or the gastrointestinal tract. But this opinion does not seem to be correct. The first half of the alimentary canal represents the *Annavaaha Srotas* while the latter half is representative of the *Purisavaha Srotas*.

Mula Sthanas: (i) *Amasaya* (ii) *Vama Parswa*⁶ (ii) *Annavaahi Dhamanis*⁷ Regarding the *Mula Sthana*, *Amasaya* is a common organ accepted by all the authorities. There is a difference of opinion regarding the second organ, *Vama Parswa*, and *Annavaaha Dhamanis*. These terms have not been clarified by ancient scholars or commentators. Some opine that *Vama Parswa* can be correlated with the oesophagus, while *Annavaaha Dhamanis* stand for *Grahani* and *Kshudrantra*. *Susruta* mentions two *Annavaaha Srotas* and the term *Dhamani* is used in plural. Leaving aside the controversial points, it is clear that *Amasaya* is the important most organ of this system. This obviously indicates that the food ingested is in *Ama* or *Apakwa* stage in the *Annavaaha Srotas*. Though the process of digestion starts at an earlier phase in the mouth, the *Amasaya* plays the most important role in the further mechanism.

Agni: Every *Srotas* has *Agni* in itself, may it be *Dhatwagni* or *Bhutagni*. All these are derivative of *Jatharagni*, the basic power of transformation, and form the basic component of *Annavaaha Srotas*. Hence physiology of *Annavaaha Srotas* is dependent on the condition of *Agni*. *Jatharagnimandya* affects the

whole body, but the pathogenesis starts from *Annavaha Srotas*.

Paka:⁸ Food ingested undergoes many changes through the action of *Jatharagni*. These changes are needed for further metabolism and absorption. The process of such changes is nominated as *Paka*, which occurs at three different levels. *Madhura Avasthapaka*, *Amla Avasthapaka*, and *Katu Avasthapaka*. All these have different actions and results on the body tissues. The first two *Avasthapakas* are attributed to the *Annavaha Srotas* and the last, *Katu Avasthapaka* is related to the *Purisavaha Srotas*. *Madhura Avasthapaka* takes place in *Amasaya* with help of *Kledaka Kapha*, while *Amlapaka* occurs in *Grahani*. As explained above, many of the dietetic rules are advised by considering the stage of *Paka*. For example, *Usna* food helps in the secretion of *Bodhaka* and *Kledaka Kapha*, thereby helping in *Madhura Avasthapaka*. The same is true with *Snigdha* food. *Usna* food is also responsible for the proper secretion of *Pachaka Pitta* leading to *Amla Avasthapaka*.

CONCEPT OF AGNI

The concept of *Agni* in *Ayurveda* is quite different than of the philosophical concept. Various Indian philosophies describe *Agni* as an important *Tatva* (element) of the universe. *Vaisesika* opines that *Agni* is one of the *Karana Dravya* which is eternal and one of the material causes of the entire universe. It further mentions types of *Agni*; one among them is *Audaryagni* which resides in the body of the animate world performing the function of digestion and metabolism. *Ayurveda* deals with this kind of *Agni* only. These may be biochemical or biophysical or any other type of bio-transformations. *Ayurvedic* classics describe 13 types of *Agnis* according to their locations and functions of transformation at different levels of digestion and metabolism. But this is not the final figure. *Acharya Vagbhata* says that each of the *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, etc. have their own *Agni*. This is how the number of *Agni* cannot be limited. With the help of its own *Agni*, each body substance gets nourished and can perform its normal functions. This can be understood in the terms of digestion & metabolism processes at the gross and cellular levels. Each cell of the body gets

nourishment from digested food and utilizes it according to its own necessity. This function is carried out with the help of some organelles of the particular cell. This procedure can easily be co-related with *Agni Karma*. This is how all these *Agni* are important for sustaining life. In the disease state vitiated *Dosha*, *Dhatu* or *Mala* can be corrected with the treatment of respective *Agni*. But this is a comparatively difficult and more complex procedure because any of the classics don't have a clear-cut description of a particular kind of *Dravya* for particular *Dhatvagni* or *Doshagni* etc. So, till today the question has remained unanswered whether the *Dhatvagnijanya Vikaras* can be dealt with through the media of *Jatharagni* or not because references regarding the interrelationship of *Jatharagni* and *Dhatvagni* are found in almost all classics.

IMPORTANCE OF AGNI

Acharya while describing the importance of *Agni* says that it is responsible for the *Ayu*, *Bala*, *Varna*, *Swasthya*, *Upacaya*, *Prabha*, *Oja*, and *Prana*. The *Prasama* or *Prakopa* of *Doṣa*, *Dhatu* and *Mala* are depended on the status of *Agni*. In other words, it can be said that homeostasis of *Doṣa*, etc can be maintained through *Agni* as per *Acharya Charaka*. By seeing the importance of *Agni*, *Acharya Susruta* enlisted equilibrium of *Agni* as a Characteristic feature of health. *Agni* is placed among the twelve *Prana* of the body, which reflects its importance for maintaining life. The *Agni* can also be quoted as a synonym of *Ayu* in the form of *Jivita*.

THE PROCESS OF ANNAPACHAN (DIGESTION) ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA:

Prana Vayu takes *anna* (food) to the *Koshtha*. Here it is disintegrated by *Drava* (fluid) and made smooth by *Sneha*. *Samaan Vayu* increases the *Agni*. Thus, the time is taken, and balanced food gets digested properly leading to the promotion of life span. *Agni* performs the *Pachan Karma* (digestion) below *Amashaya* for division into *Rasa* (nutritive fraction) and *Mala* (waste fraction) as the same cooks the rice grains with water kept in the vessel into boiled rice.⁹

DISCUSSION

The concepts of *Srotasa* described in *Ayurveda* are the channel system for transportation and transformation of *Sharir Bhava* and *Dhatu* pertaining to important phenomena essential for continuity of life. *Annavaaha Srotasa* is related to structural and functional units associated with mechanical and chemical digestion in the mouth, stomach, and small intestine as well as absorption from the stomach and small intestine. Here absorption of food material forms the first dhatu i.e., *Rasa Dhatu*. Justifies *Annavaaha Srotasa* as unique or super controller of all *Srotas*.¹⁰

Thus, *Aamashaya* should also be applicable to the oesophagus (food pipe) and most parts of the small intestine because they too carry food. According to *Acharya Charak*, *Annavaaha Srotas* contains *Mukh*, *Gala*, *Vamaparshwa (Ananalika)*, *Amashaya*, and *Laghuanttra*. In the distal part of *Aamashaya*, food gets processed by *Pachak Pitta*, *Jatharagni*, *Bhootagni* as well *Samaan Vayu*, and this process of digestion gets continued till the end of the small intestine after that it is excreted in the form *Mala* after a specific time.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Annavaaha Srotasa described in *Ayurvedic* epics is related to structural and functional units associated with mechanical and chemical digestion in the mouth, stomach, and small intestine as well as absorption from the stomach and small intestine where absorption of food material forms the first *Dhatu* i.e., *Rasa Dhatu*. Without the state of *Sama Agni*, proper health can't be gained and hence the main aim of *Ayurveda* for healthy being and cure of ailments can't be achieved. *Annavaaha Srotas* is the main proper mechanism in the food being taken by the individual and this mechanism is carried through *Agni* only.

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