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A DEEP INSIGHT INTO THE CONCEPT OF AGNI

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ABSTRACT

Agni is considered a crucial element in the transformation of food, aiding in its digestion and assimilation for human growth and development. It plays a significant role in maintaining overall health. The combined functions of Jataragni, Bhutagni, and Dhatwagni contribute to digestion and assimilation. Jataragni is responsible for digestion and supreme among all other forms of Agni. While Bhutagni corresponds to the five elements (Bhutas), and Dhatwagni operates within the tissues (Dhatus). Impairment of Agni is a key factor in disease development, highlighting its importance in understanding health disorders. Therefore, maintaining Agni properly is essential for an individual's overall well-being. A Deeper Understanding of Jatharagni, Bhutagni, and Dhatwagni Enhances Clarity on the Concept of Agni.This paper aims to explore and highlight some aspects of the idea of Agni.

INTRODUCTION

Health is a state where the dosha, Agni, dhatu, and all physiological processes are balanced, and the soul, sense organs, and mind are in complete well-being[1]. Proper maintenance of Agni is crucial for an individual's health. Agni plays a vital role in maintaining health, as it is the key factor for transformation and an integral part of the body. According to the Nyaya-Vaisheshika philosophy, Tejas (fire) is one of the Nava Dravyas (nine fundamental substances), in which Agni is inherently present[2] . It is represented by Tejas Paramanu (the indivisible atomic unit of fire), which is considered the fundamental unit responsible for the manifestation of fire and heat-related properties in the universe.

According to vachaspatyam, Agni is that which pervades all over body. In Ayurveda, the concept of Agni is manifested through Pitta. The etymological derivation of Pitta 'Tap Santape[3]' (meaning the production of heat) inherently indicates its connection with Agni. As per Siddhanta Kaumudi, the term has different meanings: Tap Dahe, signifying that Agni facilitates the digestion of ingested food, and Tap Ishwaryae, which denotes its role in attaining the eightfold benefits associated with yogic practices. Although Agni and Pitta share a similar conceptual foundation, there are distinct differences between them. The present study aims to explore the various implications of the concept of Agni.

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AIM

To examine the concept of Agni from an Ayurvedic perspective

OBJECTIVES

To understand the concept of agni and get an idea about jataragni, bhutagniand dhatwagni

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Data were collected from all ayurvedic texts including Bruhathrayee and Laguthrayee. 15 articles were collected and reviewed. Articles available in search engines were used.

LITERATURE REVIEW – CONCEPT OF AGNI

In Ayurveda, the term "Agni" refers to the process of digesting food and metabolizing nutrients. It transforms food into energy, which sustains all vital bodily functions. As Caraka emphasizes, there is no Agni apart from Pitta, and Pitta itself is Agni.

Concept of Agni and Pitha

According to Charaka, there is no Agni within the body that is separate from Pitta. The inherent fiery nature of Pitta performs all functions of Agni, such as Dahana (oxidation) and Pācana (digestion), making it recognized as Antarāgni (internal bio-fire). When weakened, it should be enhanced using substances with similar properties, while an excessive increase beyond physiological limits should be controlled with cooling agents [Sheetakriya]. Scriptural references also affirm that Agni is not distinct from Pitta[4].According to Acharya Sushruta, there is only one form of Agni in the body. When Pitta Dosha becomes vitiated or weakened, the process of digestion is affected, much like how the combustion of fuel is hindered by a weakened or impaired fire in the external world. The approach to treatment

in both cases follows a similar principle[3].Agni, represented by Pitta in the body[5]. Dalhana acharya states that Agni in this verse stated about pithoshma roopa vahni[6]. It determines both positive and negative effects depending on its balanced or imbalanced state. These effects include digestion or indigestion, vision or loss of vision, regulation or disturbance of body heat, normal or altered complexion, courage or fear, anger or joy, confusion or happiness, and other opposing qualities[4].Dalhana, the commentator on the Sushruta Samhita, has attempted to validate Sushruta's conclusion that Agni and Pitta are the same by employing Pratyaksha (direct observation), Anumana (inference), and Agama (authoritative scriptures).

While defining Swastha (a healthy state), Acharya refers to Sama Dosha and Sama Agni[1]. This indicates that Pitta and Agni are distinct from each other. Acharya Dalhana poses an interesting question to highlight the distinctions between Agni and Pitta. Acharya references examples such as Ghrita, Matsya, and Divasvapna, illustrating their varying interactions with Agni and Pitta.If Agni and Pitta were the same, such differences in their actions would not be observed.

	Agni	*Pitha*
Ghrta	*Agni vrudhi*	*Pitha samak*
Ajaksheera	*Agni vrudhi*	*Pitha samak*
Matsyam	*Agni mandya*	*Pitha vrudhi*
Divasvapna	*Samak*	*vrudhikara*

Tikshna Agni arises due to the predominance of Pitta Dosha, which further indicates that Pitta and Agni are distinct entities[6]. While explaining the pathophysiology of palitya, acharya mentiuons Agni and Pitha ars separate entities. Dalhana emphasizes a subtle distinction between Agni and Pitha, stating that Pitha possesses taste, attributes, and potency, whereas Agni lacks these qualities.Pitha is drava[liquid], Snigda [unctuous] and adhoga [moving downward]. But Agni is having opposite qualities[7]

Classification

Agni is considered innumerable due to its presence in every dhatu paramanu (cell) of the body. However, different classical Ayurvedic texts provide varying classifications of Agni.

According to Charaka, there are 13 types of Agni, categorized as follows: Jataragni (1), Bhutagni (5), and Dhatvagni [7][8].

According to Sushruta, Agni is classified into five types: Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Alochakagni, Sadhakagni, and Bhrajakagni[9].

Vagbhata has categorized Agni into various types, including Bhutagnis (5), Dhatvagnis (7), Doshagni (3), Malagni (3)[10], and Pitta (5)[11]

Agni can be classified in to three based on its function and site of action. These include:

1. Jataragni – Agni concerned with digestion of food in jatara
2. Bhutagni –Agni corresponding to the five mahabhutas
3. Dhatvagni – Seven Agnis, each present in one of the seven dhatus.

Functions of Agni

Dehagni, which encompasses all bodily entities responsible for digestion and metabolism, is the key factor influencing longevity, healthy complexion, strength, overall well-being, motivation, growth, luster, ojas, body temperature, and various other forms of Agni. The very existence of an individual is believed to depend on dehagni.If Agni ceases to function, life comes to an end. When Agni operates optimally, it supports a long and healthy life, whereas any imbalance in Agni leads to diseases, making it the fundamental determinant of health and longevity. The nourishment of body tissues, as well as the enhancement of ojas, strength, and complexion, is only possible when Agni functions properly. Without proper digestion andmetabolism, essential body tissues like rasa cannot be formed or sustained[12].

Jataragni

The Agni that act upon the kaya and jataram is termed as Kayagni[13]. Its location is in grahani. Grahani is the seat of Agni, named so because it retains food for proper digestion and assimilation. It holds the food just above the umbilical region and is sustained by Agni. With the support of Agni, Grahani retains undigested food and propels digested food forward. However, when Agni becomes weak and imbalanced due to improperly digested food (Vidagdha Ahara) and afflicted doshas (Sama Dosha – dosha associated with Ama), Grahani gets vitiated and releases food in an undigested form, known as Ama[14]. According to Dhanvantari, it is the Kala known as "Pittadhara," located at the entrance of the Pakvashaya (intestine), functioning as a barrier or bolt that regulates the passage of food through the digestive tract[15].

Jataragni is regarded as the supreme among all forms of Agni, as it governs the intensification and diminution of all other types of Agni.Therefore, one must carefully maintain Agni by providing appropriate fuel in the form of food and drink, consumed according to proper guidelines. This is essential, as the sustenance of life and strength depends on the balance of Agni[16].

It is of four types. Agni, the principle responsible for digestion and metabolism in the human body, varies in intensity and can be classified into four types: Tikshna (intense), Manda (weak), Sama (balanced), and Vishama (irregular)[17].Tikshna Agni is robust and can withstand various irregularities without disruption. In contrast, MandaAgni is highly sensitive, where even minor disturbances can impair its function. SamaAgni remains stable as long as there are no irregularities. VishamaAgni, on the other hand, is inconsistent—sometimes it is disturbed by irregularities, and at other times, it remains unaffected.

These four types of Agni correspond to different bodily constitutions. Individuals with a balanced state of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha tend to have SamaAgni, which functions in a stable and regulated manner. Those with a Vata-dominant constitution often experience VishamaAgni, leading to irregular digestion due to Vata's influence on the digestive fire. Pitta-dominant individuals generally have TikshnaAgni, characterized by strong and intense digestion. Conversely, individuals with a Kapha-dominant constitution tend to have MandaAgni, which results in slow digestion due to Kapha's suppressing effect on

the digestive fire[18].

Bhutagni

Agniresponsible for the transformation of heterologous elements to homologous ones. Each cell in human body is composed of panchamahabhuta[Prithvi, ap, teja, vayu and akasha]. The food that is consumed is also made up of the Pancha Mahabhutas (five fundamental elements).There are five types of Agni: Bhauma, Apya, Agneya, Vayavya, and Nabhasa. These Bhutagni correspond to the five Mahabhutas (fundamental elements) and are responsible for metabolizing and transforming the components of food that share a similar composition within the human body, such as Parthiva, Apya, and others.

In the body, specific categories of entities with distinct attributes can only be nourished by substances that share the same characteristics. This means that Parthiva entities, which are primarily composed of Prithvi Mahabhuta (earth element), can only be nourished by Parthiva substances in food. This principle applies to the entire body, ensuring that each elemental component is sustained by corresponding nutrients[19].

Dhatwagni

The seven fundamental components that sustain the body, known as Dhatus (tissues), undergo metabolism and transformation, resulting in two types of products: Sara (nutrient essence) and Kitta (waste). This transformation is facilitated by seven specific metabolic entities called Dhatvagni, each responsible for processing its corresponding Dhatu.

Rasa (plasma) is first transformed into Rakta (blood), which then gives rise to Mamsa (muscle tissue). From Mamsa, Medas (fat tissue) is formed, followed by Asthi (bones). Asthi then produces Majja (bone marrow), which leads to the formation of Shukra (reproductive tissue). Finally, the refined essence of Shukra contributes to the creation of Garbha (embryo)[20].

Dhatwagni are

- Rasagni
- Raktagni
- Mamsagni
- Medagni
- Majjagni
- Asthyagni
- Shukragni

CONCEPT OF AGNI AS A WHOLE

Agni encompasses all metabolic processes related to the digestion and assimilation of food. Among all forms of Agni, Jataragni is considered the most vital, as it governs the primary stage of digestion within the body. It can be understood as the action of various digestive enzymes operating at different levels of the digestive tract to break down food. All substances, particularly dietary substances (Ahara Dravyas), which exhibit six types of Rasas (tastes), are said to produce specific Rasas as a result of JataragniPaka (the digestive transformation). This process marks the formation of Ahara Rasa or Anna Rasa (nutrient essence derived from food)[21].

Rasas	Vipaka		
	Charaka[22]	Susruta[23]	Vagbata[24]
Madura	Madura	Madura	Madura
Amla	Amla	Amla	Amla
Lavana	Madura	Lavana	Madura
Tikta	Katu	Tikta	Katu
Katu	Katu	Katu	Katu
Kashaya	Katu	Kashaya	Katu

From a modern physiological perspective, the function of Jataragni can be compared to the digestive processes occurring in the stomach and duodenum, while the role of Bhutagni aligns with the metabolic conversion of digested nutrients in the liver[25].That can be correlated with Hepatic Portal circulation or Splanchnic Circulation in Hepatic portal System[26].

The liver is a vital metabolic organ that regulates energy metabolism in the body, serving as a central hub that connects various tissues, including skeletal muscle and adipose tissue. After food is digested in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, glucose, fatty acids, and amino acids are absorbed into the bloodstream and transported to the liver via the portal vein circulation.In the postprandial state (after eating), glucose is stored as glycogen or converted into fatty acids and amino acids. Within hepatocytes, free fatty acids combine with glycerol-3-phosphate to form triacylglycerol (TAG), which is either stored in lipid droplets or released into circulation as very low-density lipoprotein (VLDL) particles. Meanwhile, amino acids are metabolized for energy or used in the synthesis of proteins, glucose, and other bioactive molecules. During fasting or exercise, the liver releases fuel sources like glucose and TAG into circulation, where they are metabolized by muscle, adipose tissue, and other extrahepatic tissues. Adipose tissue undergoes lipolysis, releasing non-esterified fatty acids (NEFAs) and glycerol. Muscle breaks down glycogen and proteins, releasing lactate and alanine, which are transported back to the liver. The liver then utilizes alanine, lactate, and glycerol as precursors for gluconeogenesis, producing glucose to maintain energy balance[27].

Hormones and enzymes also act as catalyst in metabolic transformation similar to that of dhatwagni in Ayurveda. Hormones and enzymes also act as catalyst in metabolic transformation similar to that of Dhatwagnis in Ayurveda. For example function of asthi dhatu is dharana [bearing / supporting] similar to bones and cartilages. They are made of Calcium and phosphorous. Level of those is maintained with the help of parathormone, calcitonin and 1,25 dihydroxy cholecalciferol[28].These can be considered as asthyagni[29].

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda describes Agni as a vital element that aids in food digestion and plays a crucial role in metabolic activities. Agni plays a crucial role in digestion and metabolism within the body. It is responsible for digesting, absorbing, and assimilating ingested food, which is essential for sustaining life. Agni operates in the body through Pitta and directly influences overall health, as both wellness and illness are determined by its proper or improper functioning. Therefore, Agni is considered the foundation of life. Since Agni governs

all forms of transformation in the body, maintaining its balance is essential for good health.

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