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**Chaitali Bharat Pawar**

Department of Samhita and  
Sidhanta, CSMSS Ayurved  
College Sambhajinagar,  
Maharashtra, India

**Ujawala Divekar**

Department of Samhita and  
Sidhanta, CSMSS Ayurved  
College Sambhajinagar,  
Maharashtra, India

## Ayurvedic review of Agni

**Chaitali Bharat Pawar and Ujawala Divekar**

### Abstract

Agni is a key element of our body's metabolism and digestion according to Ayurveda. Assimilation, absorption, and digestion of ingested food are necessary for maintaining life and are carried out by agni according to Ayurveda. The word "agni" refers to the process of breaking down food and producing metabolic byproducts. Agni transforms food into energy, which is in charge of all essential bodily functions. Regarding the significance of Agni, Acharya Charaka stated that when Agni stops functioning, a person dies, but when Agni is in Sama Avastha, a person is completely healthy and lives a long, happy, and fulfilling life. But, if the Agni of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed and resulting in ill health and produces the diseases in body. Hence, Agni is said to be the base (Mool) of life.

**Keywords:** Agni, Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Jatharagni, Pitta

### 1. Introduction

Ayurveda has described an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body as Agni. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life, and is performed by Agni. In Ayurveda, the term "Agni" is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. 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 <sup>[1]</sup>. 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 <sup>[2]</sup>.

#### 1.1 Jatharagni

Jatharagni is the Agni or bioenergy present in the Jathara (Stomach and Duodenum). Grahani is the site of Agni. This is mainly responsible for the digestion of the ingested food. In the opinion of Dhanvantari, it is the Kala known as "Pittadhara": Kala responsible for the production of pitta, 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, colour, ojas (Essence of the Dhatus), 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 <sup>[3]</sup>.

Thus, Jatharagni depicts the physiological components of digestion and metabolism which takes place in the stomach and intestines. 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 panchmahabhuta and transforms it for utilization by the respective Dhatus paramanus (tissues). Jatharagni is also responsible for separation of the Ahara rasa into the Prasad bhag and Kitta bhag in our body <sup>[4]</sup>. All the Dhatvagni depend on the normal, healthy state of Jatharagni. If the Jatharagni is Tikshna or Manda, it will cause an excessive or retarded action of the Dhatvagni. This disturbed action ultimately leads to various disorders. Jatharagni controls the function of all other 12 Agnis. All the Agnis are totally dependent on the status of Jatharagni. <sup>12</sup>

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being. Namely Vishmagagni, Tikshanagni, Mandagni and Samagni.

**Corresponding Author:****Chaitali Bharat Pawar**

Department of Samhita and  
Sidhanta, CSMSS Ayurved  
College Sambhajinagar,  
Maharashtra, India

### 1.2 Vishamagni

This type of Agni changes between digesting food quickly and slowly. When this Agni is affected by the Vata Dosha, it leads to different types of udargata roga. Vata induced irregularity has features such as Adhmana (Flatulence), Shoola (Colic), Udavarta, Atisara (Diarrhea), Jathara gaurava (abdominal heaviness) and Antrakunjana (Borborygmi) and Pravahana (extra effort for defecation), sometime it digests slowly, sometimes normally and sometime produces symptoms such as above [5].

### 1.3 Tikshanagni

Tikshanagni is a state, where ahara digest very quickly, regardless of the type of food. Acharya Sushruta states that when the power of digestion is increased from normal to above normal, food digests very fast and produces Kshudha. When food is digested, the throat, the mouth cavity and the lips become dry with a burning sensation, Santapa (Burning sensation in whole body) and Daha (Local burning sensation). This condition is known as "Bhasmak Roga" according to Ayurveda [6].

### 1.4 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 even a small amount of Ahara. Udarashirogaurava (Heaviness of abdomen and head), Shwasa (Shortness of breath), Kasa (Cough), Praseka (Salivation) and Chhardi (Vomiting), Gatrāsada (Weakness of the body) [7].

### 1.5 Samagni

The Samagni digests and assimilates food properly within proper time. This thus increases the quality of the Dhatus. Individuals having Samagni are always healthy. Due to Tridosha balance whatever the person eats Agni digests the food if it is consumed in proper quantity and at proper time, with rules regulations of taking food [8].

### 1.6 Bhutagni

Bhutagni is the one that is present in a basic element (Bhutas). Each Bhuta or element of nature making up our body composition is said to have a fire of its own. These fires take the essential parts of the nutrition and metabolize them so as to support selves. There are five Agnis in each of the five basic elements, namely.

1. Prithvi or Parthiva Agni (Fire within the Earth element)
2. Apya Agni (Fire within the water element)
3. Taijasa or Agneya Agni (Fire within the fire element)
4. Vayaveeya Agni (Fire element within the wind or air element)
5. Akasheeya/Naabhasa Agni (Fire within the space or Ether element)

Each and Every cell in our body is composed of the five Mahabhuta or five basic elements. Naturally, each cell (Dhatu paramanu) 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 the entire outside nutrient that we ingest for the nutrition of our body. Acharya Charaka 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 18 nourish their own specific bhutika elements of the body [9].

The Ahara which we take comprises of the Panchmahabhuta of nature which compensate their counterparts in the body. Example: The parthiva amsha (Earth part or solid part of the food) of the Ahara first gets digested by the Jatharagni. When this digested food reaches the tissues, it further gets digested by the parthivagni. After this Parthiva amsha of the food nourishes the Parthiva Guna's of those Dhatus, Srotas and the whole body. The same process takes place with Apya amsha, tejasa amsha, vayavya amsha and Nabhasa amsha of the food. Firstly, they are digested by the Jatharagni. Later their minute parts reach the tissues as per respective Bhutagnis.

**2. Material and Methods:** Laghutrayies (Yogratnakara, madhav nidan) and Bhrihatrayies (Charaka samhita, sushruta samhita)

### 3. Discussion

The study of Agni can be summarized according to the following points:

1. General description of Agni in various Ayurvedic texts.
  2. Normal physiological function of different types of Agni.
- In Brahmasutra, Agni has been meant to be a sign of life in the body. Great value of Agni has been shown by classical liter- ature. Acharya Yasaka has given the ety- mology 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 et- ymology 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) [10].

In shabdakalpa druma, 61 synonyms of Agni have been compiled. These syn- onyms help in explaining the nature and functions of the Agni, e.g., Vaishvanara, Sarva Paka, Tanoonpata, Amivachatana, Damunasa, Shuchi, Vishwambhar, Rudra etc. (Shabdakalpadrum) [11].

#### 3.1 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 [12].

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 re- garding 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, the treatment is like Agni [13]. Acharya Marichi has also emphasized that the Agni present in the Pitta gives good or bad results when it is vitiated [14].

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 Shusrut has de- scribed 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. [15].

According to Hemadri, Pitta is of five divisions, which are located in the interior of the pakvashaya and amashaya, although it is composed of panchab-hutas. Because of an increase of (pre- dominance qualities of) tejas bhuta, it is devoid of liquidity (Although it is a liq- uid). 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 dhatus by giving them strength (Power of functioning), which is known as "Pachaka Pitta".

#### 4. Conclusion

Acharya Charaka has mentioned that various types of dietic materials are digested by their own Bhutagni, encouraged and enhanced by Antaragni (Jatharagni), which is further digested and metabolized by Dhatwagni to associate the body with the nutritional strength, complexion and happy life along with providing energy to the seven dhatus. When the Agni is in a normal condition it supports life unconditionally. When this Agni gets morbid or contaminated it becomes a cause for many diseases. It is also said that all the diseases have their origin in the morbid Agni i.e., a disturbed Agni is the chief culprit in the causation of all psychosomatic diseases. We know that the morbid doshas cause diseases by attacking and disturbing the normalcy of body's tissues which are the mainstays of defense, immunity and maintenance of health. The morbidity of these doshas in the form of pathological increase or decrease always depends on the status of Agni. If the Agni is functioning normally, the doshas also remain in an undisturbed form and support our body, mind and life. On the contrary if the Agni gets disturbed, the doshas too will get disturbed and cause many diseases. Hence understanding of Agni in one of the important concepts for the understanding of disease process as well as to prescribed principles of treatment.

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