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Physiological Aspect of *Agni*, *Agnibala Pariksha* & Factors Affecting *Agni*: A Review

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ABSTRACT

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* is said to be *Pittoshma* i.e. the combination of *Pitta* and *Ushma*. *Agni* can be correlate with digestive fire as it performs functions such as digestion & metabolism. According to modern science, gastric juice, enzymes functioning at gastrointestinal level, all are responsible for digestion, absorption and metabolism. Function of *Agni* is likely to be compared with gastric juice and different enzymes. *Agni* is responsible for strength, health, longevity, therefore it is necessary to understand the power of *Agni* & its assessment to maintain health of a healthy individual.

KEYWORDS

Jatharagni, Agnibala, Agnibala Pariksha, Digestion, Healthy life



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INTRODUCTION

The term *Agni* generally means fire. But *Agni* in Ayurveda, is reflected in the concept of *Pitta* within the body. *Pitta* has been described as *Agni* (fire), since it performs fire like actions i.e. *Paka*, which refers to *Pachana* (digestion), *Dahana* (combustion or oxidation), *Parinaman* (conversion). *Agni* is represented by different types like *Teja*, *Pitta*, etc. According to *Acharya Charaka*, the number of *Agni* enumerated are over 13 as one *Jatharagni*, five *Bhutagni* and seven *Dhatvagni*. Also *Sushruta* is seen to have described five *Agni* viz. *Pachakagni*, *Ranjakagni*, *Alochakagni*, *Sadhakagni* and *Bhrajakagni*. *Sharangdhara* also recognized *Agni* as five *Pittas*. On the other hand, *Acharya Bhavmishra*, is seen to have followed *Charaka* and *Vagbhata*.

Jatharagni :-

Ayurveda has described *Agni* as an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body. Digestion of ingested food, absorption and assimilation of food is performed by *Agni*¹. *Jatharagni* is the main *Agni* among all the 13 *Agni*². All *Samhita Granthas* have described four states of *Jatharagni* viz, *Sama*, *Vishama*, *Tikshna* and *Manda*. This classification of *Agni* is seen to have two aspect viz . (a) an aspect, which may be described as

different *Prakriti* of an individual and (b) an aspect in which three doshas become involved. Food ingested by an individual first comes to the *Jathara* and is in contact with *Jatharagni*. *Jatharagni* digest the food consisting five basic elements and transform it for utilization by the respective *Dhatu*s.

The state of *Agni* according to *Prakriti* is shown in table no 1.

Table 1 Relation of *Agni* with *Prakriti*

Prakriti or Temperament	State of Agni	Symptoms
<i>Vata Prakriti</i>	<i>Vishamagni</i>	Sometimes digests slowly, sometimes normally and sometimes produce <i>Adhmana</i> , <i>Gaurav</i> .
<i>Pitta Prakriti</i>	<i>Tikshnangi</i>	Digest even large quantities of all, too frequent meals.
<i>Kapha Prakriti</i>	<i>Mandagni</i>	Cannot digest even normal diet properly causing <i>Udargaurav</i> , <i>Sirogaurav</i> .
<i>Sama Prakriti</i>	<i>Samagni</i>	Properly digest the normal diet.

परं तु पच्यमानस्य विदग्धस्याम्लभावतः ।

AtzTrTccrTuqalTxrT

पित्तमच्छमुदीर्यते ॥ च. चि १५/१०

The term *Accha Pitta* is used by *Charak Samhita* while describing process of digestion. When food is being propagated through stomach, while undergoing



digestion, it creates burning sensation due to acquired sour taste. This sour taste of food stimulates secretion of *Accha Pitta*. *Accha Pitta* also denotes that portion of secretion of *Pitta*, which is responsible for digestive stage of food. *Accha Pitta* can be synonym of *Pachakagni*, *Jatharagni*, *Pachak Pitta* or *Pachakagni*. This *Agni* digests food to *Vipaka* stage³. As per *Bala Bheda*, *Agni* is of four types⁴ viz. a) *Teekshanagni* b) *Mandagni* c) *Samagni* d) *Vishamagni*. *Teekshanagni* does the *Atishigra pachan* of the food. The one which does the delayed *pachan* of the food even though taken in very less quantity, is called as *Mandagni*⁵. *Samagni* does the *Samyak pachan* of the food taken by the person. The *Agni* which does the irregular *Pachan* of the food i.e sometimes it does the proper *Pachan* and sometimes improper, is considered as *Vishamagni*⁶.

***Bhutagni* :-**

Human body is *Panchabhautik* made of *Panchamahabhuta*. Each and every cell composed of *Panchamahabhuta*. Each cell consist of *Bhutagni*. There are five functional categories of *Agni*, representing each *Mahabhuta*, namely – *Parthiva agni*, *Apya agni*, *Taijas agni*, *Vayaviya agni* and *Akasiya agni*. All *gunas* in *sharir* gets *pushti* from their respective *Amshas*. *Parthiv Apya gunas* for *Apya gunas*, *Agneya* for *Agneya*, *Vayvey* for *Vayvey* and

similarly *Nabhas* for *Nabhas* respectively. This *Agni* helps to release *Parthiv* and *Apa Mahabhuta* at the level of first *Avasthapaka*. *Madhura rasa* and *Kapha Dosha* are generated due to this event. The same is true for second and third *Avasthapaka*⁷. According to *Acharya Charak*, the five *Bhutagni* digest their own part of element present in the food material⁸.

***Dhatvagni*:-**

All seven *Dhatu* contain their own *Agni* as *Rasagni*, *Raktagni*, *Mamsagni*, *Medagni*, *Asthyagni*, *Majjagni* and *Shukragni*. This *Agni* metabolize the nutrients materials supplied to them to make the substances alike to them for assimilation and nourishment⁹.

AGNIBALA PARIKSHA:

Acharya Charaka states in Vi. (8/89) that assessment of *Agni* depends upon the three components viz. *Abhyavaharana Sakti*, *Jarana Sakti* & *Ruchi*.

1) *Abhyavaharana sakti*

Assessment for *Abhyavaharana sakti* depends upon the quantity and quality of food taken, which varies from person to person. Following points can be noted :

- i. Taking food in normal quantity
- ii. Taking food in moderate quantity
- iii. Taking food in less quantity
- iv. Taking excessive food
- v. Not taking food



2) Assessment of *Jarana sakti* :

Evaluation of *Jarana sakti* decides on *Jeerna Ahar Lakshana* which are seen at the end of digestion. They are *Utsaha*, *Laghuta*, *Udgara Suddhi*, *Kshudha*-

Trishna and *Yathochita* Malotsarga.

Evaluation for *Ruchi* factor is according to the *Avara*, *Madhyama* and *Pravara* type of evaluation of *Jarana Sakti*.

Table 2 *Lakshanas* (Signs and Symptoms) of normal state of digestion

Signs		Symptoms	
<i>Sarira</i>	<i>Manasa</i>	<i>Sarira</i>	<i>Manasa</i>
<i>Udgarshudhi</i>	<i>Utsaha</i> (Cheerfulness)	Eructation of sweet taste at the beginning of digestion, sour taste in the middle and saline taste at the end	<i>Vishuddha</i> (a sense of cleanliness) <i>Visada</i> (cleanliness of mind).
<i>Vegotsarga</i>		Absence of daha or burning sensation in the stomach or chest	<i>Sukha</i> (pleasure). <i>Kshudha</i> (desire of food).
<i>Yathochitotsarga</i> (passing motion depending upon the nature of the diet)		Lightness of the body. Aptitude for work. Appetising for work.	<i>Pipasa</i> (sensation of thirst).
<i>Swasthavrittanuvritti</i> (continuity of health)		<i>Sthirata</i> .	

3) Examination of *Purisha*

Ayurveda considers *Dosha*, *Dhatu* & *Mala* as foundation of the body. *Malas* are the metabolic end products those are to be excreted. *Malas* are divided into two major parts that is *Sharirika Mala* and *Dhatu Mala*. *Sharirika Mala* is further classified into three parts that is *Mutra*, *Purisha* and *Sweda* and *Dhatu Malas* are further classified into seven types. *Purisha* comes under *Sharirika Mala*¹⁰. Both *Purisha* and *Mutra* are formed from the food. After digestion, the *Sarabhaga* gets absorbed and the remaining undigested part becomes solid and that is called as

Purisha. In *Ayurvedic* texts, examination of stool is limited mainly up to the examination of physical characteristics such as color, quantity, odor, froth, and consistency.

Purish Pariksha can be done with reference to following points :

- 1) Time, number and quantity of motions.
- 2) *Akriti* or appearance of the stool.
- 3) *Samhatatva* or consistency of the stool.
- 4) *Varna* or colour of the stool.
- 5) *Gandha* or smell of the stool.
- 6) *Jalapariksha* or examination by water.



Table 3 Qualities of Nature of *Purisha* according to different *Dosha*

<i>Dosha</i>	Balanced	<i>Vata</i>	<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Kapha</i>
Quantity	Moderate	Scanty	Moderate	Copious
Qualities	Slightly oily, soft	Dry, hard	Oily, liquid, hot	Oily, sticky, slow
Consistency	Similar to a ripe banana in shape & consistency	Bullet-like	Loose, semi-solid, frequently fall apart in the water	Well-formed (but often sticky, or with mucus)
Buoyancy	Floats	Sinks	can float or sink	Sinks (may float with mucus)
Color	Light brownish-yellow	Dark brown	Yellow-green or red	Pale yellow
Odor	Mild, non-offensive	Slightly astringent, mild	Sour, pungent, acidic, very strong	Mild, may smell sweet
Regularity	1-2 times per day, once upon waking	Irregular, tends toward constipation	Frequent (2-3 times per day), tends toward diarrhoea	1-2 times per day, may not feel complete, & may occasionally skip a day

4) Assessment Of *Agni* can be done by administering *Sneha* to patient before *Snehapana* (Internal oleation) and by assessing *Samyak Snigdha Lakshanas* such as *Vatanulomana*, *Agnidipti*, *Twak Snigdhatata*, *Purish Snigdhatata*, *Snehodveg*, *Klama/Glani*, *Angalaghavata*. As *Hrasiyasi Matra* is the quantity of *Sneha* which digests within one *Yama*, and this can be used as trial dose when the *Agni* and *Koshta* are unknown¹¹.

PHYSIOLOGICAL FACTORS AFFECTING AGNI

▪ *Prakriti* - Predominance of *Dosha* forms *Prakriti*. As different *Prakriti* has different predominance of *Dosha* and due to this *Dosha*, *Agni* affects. According to *Ashraya Ashryee Bhava*, there is relation between *Pitta Dosha* and *Agni*. Therefore *Tikshnagni* is quoted in individual having *Pitta Prakriti*.

▪ *Ritu* – *Agni* changes in *Visarga* and *Aadan Kala*. *Agnibala* is maximum in *Hemant & Shishir Ritu* while minimum in *Varsha*, *Vasant* and *Pravrit Ritu*. According to *Ayurveda*, there is a “stimulus-response” relation between the *Agni* within us and the outside *Agni*—namely the sun. When the *Agni* outside is strong (i.e. in summer). the *Agni* inside us (our digestion) is weak and vice versa.

▪ *Aahar* – *Aahar* taken by an individual changes *Agni*. *Visham Aahar Vihar* turns *Agni* into *Vridhi* or *Kshyaya*. *Aaharmatra* (quantity of food), *Aaharswarup* (quality of food) has an impact on *Agni*.

▪ Physical activity – Exercise elevates *Agni* while sedentary lifestyle, excessive sleep decreases *Agni*.

▪ Diurnal Variation –As there is *Pitta* predominance in second *Prahara* of the



day, *Agni* is *Prabala* in second *Prahara* (before noon) and first *Prahara* of night (late evening). So food should be taken in these timings only.

- Age – *Agnibala* varies with age as shown below in table no 4.

Table 4 Relation of *Agni* and Age

Age	State of agni
<i>Vridhdha</i> (old age)	<i>Manda</i> or dull
<i>Yuva</i> (Youthful)	<i>Tikshna</i> or acute
<i>Bala</i> (Child)	<i>Manda</i> or dull

DISCUSSION

Agni literally means fire and in human being it denotes the power of digestion, metabolism and assimilation. It is responsible for strength, health, longevity in life. Four states of *Jatharagni* i.e. *Vishmagni*, *Tikshnagni*, *Mandagni* and *Samagni* affects due to some physiological factors such as age, season, *Aaharvihar*, physical activity etc. Assessment of *Agni* done by *Prakriti* but also age, *Dosha*, *Aaharvihar*, *Desha*, *Kala* etc.

CONCLUSION

Jatharagni is a reason of life. Balanced state of *Agni* provides strong immunity and long, healthy life. Certain physiological factors have an impact on *Agni*. *Ayurveda* says, every disease has a root in *Agni*. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the concept of *Agni* to maintain healthy life.



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