

IMPORTANCE OF AGNI AND AGNIPARIKSHA IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is the science of life. It has two basic aims: First, to preserve the health of healthy people, and second to treat illness and disease. As per *Ayurvedic* concept *Agni* is the principal substance responsible for health and disease. In *Ayurveda* the term 'Agni' is used in the perception of digestion of food and metabolic products. During its normalcy it is responsible for longevity, complexion, strength, health, enthusiasm, well built, luster, immunity, temperature, and other vital functions all are dependent on *agni*. According to *Acharya Charak*, One dies if the function of *agni* is stopped, lives long and free from disorders if it is functioning properly, gets ill if it is deranged, hence *Agni* (digestive fire) is the main reason of all. To know the normal and abnormal condition of *Agni*, *Agnipariksha* or *Agnibala pariksha* is important. Ingested food amount and doses of medicine is depends on the condition of *Agni*. It is mainly of 13 types- 1 *Jatharagni*, 5 *Bhutagni*, 7 *Dhatvagni*, by the functions and their sites of actions. Here is a review of *Agni* and its importance in digestion and metabolism, detail description of all types of *Agni* in *Ayurvedic* classics and *Agnipariksha* for its clinical importance.

Keywords *Agni, Agnipariksha, Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Jatharagni.*

INTRODUCTION: Concept of *Agni* is the basic principle in *Ayurveda*. As long as there is life in man, every organ, tissue, cell has to undergo process of constant changes to meet the requirements for survival. This constant process of change either for fuel energy (catabolic) or synthesize the tissue (anabolic), an inherent factor exists, termed as *Agni* in *Ayurveda*, Where the concept of *agni* can be considered as physiological approach while the concept of *Ama* can be dealt with pathological approach. To understand the *pakadi* karmas in *Ayurveda* in a better manner, knowledge of *agni* is essential and inevitable¹.

The term "Agni", in vague means fire, however in the concept of functioning of a

living organism, *Agni* maintains organism's integrity and vitality by converting the food consumed in various ways, into various structural and functional components and also to provide the energy (*urjah*), necessary for proceeding with its innumerable vital activities through the *pakadi* karmas i.e. Biophysical and biochemical processes. Hence the term "Agni" does not mean fire, the term take in various factors which participate and regulate the course of digestion and metabolism or any changes in the tissue of an organism².

AIM-To Study the clinical importance of *Agni* and its types and *Agnipariksha* for the diagnosis of power or condition of *Agni*.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This article is based on a review of Ayurvedic texts. Concept of Agni has been taken from various ancient *samhitas* such as Charak Samhita, Susrut Samhita, Madava Nidana etc., and text books through its thorough reading and understanding.

Agni: Agni is responsible for the ever occurring anabolic and catabolic activities in the body. That is “Agni” gives and ‘takes’. In Ayurveda Agni has been stated as one of the seats of ‘*prana*’ i.e. life³. All these points further emphasize the Vitality of Agni in Ayurveda’s approach of health management.

Two chief places for Agni’s activities are:-

1. *Kostha*- Gastro-Intestinal tract and
2. *Dhatus*- Tissues.

Kostha Agni also known as *Jatharagni* and *pachakagni* is the *Pachaka pitta* in its material form. It digests the food (*paka*) and separates the ‘*sara*’ (nutrient fraction) and *kitta* (waste) from it. The *sara bhaga* known as *Ahara-rasa* gets absorbed (*sosana*) in the *antras* (Intestines) and undergoes further transformation to become *Rasadhatu*. *Jatharagni* also contributes to the *Dhatvagnis* located in various tissues, thereby giving them strength. As such normalcy or abnormality of the *Dhatvagnis* depends upon the status of *Jatharagni*. *Jatharagni* undergoes abnormal changes by unwholesome food and habit and as per the condition of *tridosas*, such abnormal Agnis are said to be three. *Mandagni*, *Tiksnagni*, *Vishmagni*⁴.

Relation of Pitta and Agni: Here, one would naturally be curious to know if *agni* is at all different from *pitta*, or if *pitta* is identical with *agni* (metabolic fire).

The answer is as follows: there cannot be any *agni* (metabolic fire) without *pitta*: as

pitta possesses the properties of fire predominantly and performs the functions of digestion, metabolism, etc., and as these very functions in body are similar to that of the metabolic fire itself, it is regarded as *antaragni* (internal fire). In cases with a deficiency of the properties of (internal) fire, treatment is by the use of substance having similar properties and in case with an excess of (internal metabolic fire) the cold therapy is applied. Hence, we subscribe to the view that there is no other (internal) fire than *pitta*; this view is supported by scriptural authority also⁵.

Importance of Agni: Longevity, appearance, power, health, warmth, corpulence, luster, immunity, energy, heat processes and vital breath- all these depend on body –fire. One dies if this fire is extinguished, lives long free from disorders if it is functioning properly, gets ill if it is deranged hence Agni(digestive fire) is the root cause of all. That food nourishes *dhatus*, *ojas*, strength, complexion etc. can’t be produced from undigested food⁶. One should take food in proper quantity. This quantity of food depends on the power of digestion. When the quantity of taken food gets digested in time without hindering the normal metabolism, then it is considered as the measure of proper quantity. Thus the (*Laghu*) articles of food such as *Sali*, *shashtika* (rice), *mudga* (green gram) etc. even though light by nature depend on quantity. Similarly, those such as preparations of flour, sugar cane, milk and aquatic meats even though heavy (*Guru*) in digestion by nature depend on the quantity itself. By this, it should not be confused that lightness and heaviness in food articles are quite inert. In fact, light articles are predominant in properties of *vayu* and *agni* while others (heavy ones) are the

same in those of *prithivi* and *soma* (*ap*). So, by dint of their properties, these light articles being stimulant of digestion, even taken up to the saturation point, produce little derangement on the contrary the heavy articles because of dissimilarity, are not stimulant of digestion by nature and thus cause considerable derangement if taken up to the saturation point except in case of persons having physical exercise and adequate strength of *agni* (digestion). Hence the quantity of food is related to *agnibala* (power of digestion). It is not so that the article itself has no importance in this respect (in fact) considering the (property of the) article the intake of heavy one is advised as one third or half of the concentration point and not excessive concentration even in case of light articles in order to maintain the proper (strength of) *agni*. Strength, complexion and happy life to the person without disturbing normalcy is achieved by intake of food in proper quantity⁷.

Agnimandyha hetu: *Agni* is deranged by fasting, eating during indigestion, excess eating, uneven eating, intake of unsuitable, heavy, cold, too fuzzy and contaminated food, faulty administration of vomits, defecation and unction, emaciation due to some disease, faulty, adaptation to place, time and seasons and suppression of natural desires. *Agni* thus deranged becomes unable to digest even the light food and the food being undigested gets acidified and toxic⁸.

Even the healthy food also taken in right quantity, does not get digested due to worry, sadness, fear, anger, uncomfortable bed and observance⁹.

Types of Agnis –

It would be seen from the foregoing that the Ayurvedic concept of *agni* includes, not only five kinds of *pittas* but also, the

dhatvagnis and *bhutagnis*. It is clear from the classical Ayurvedic texts that the recitation of the number of *agnis* (which include *pitta*) varies from author to author. According to *Carak Samhita*, the number of *agnis* enumerated are 13 as - *antragni* 1, *bhutagni* 5, *dhatvagni* 7. *Susruta* attributed the function of *agni* to *pitta* and labeled them as *Pacakagni*, *bhrajakagni*, *sadhakagni*, *Ranjakagni*, and *Alocakagni*, looking after digestion, skin color, heart, haemopoiesis, and vision respectively¹⁰. of the more recent authorities *sarngadhara* is seen to have recognized five *pitas* only. On the other hand *Bhava Misra* is seen to have followed *Carak* and *Vaghbata*¹¹.

According to Acharya *Carak* *Agni* has been classified into 13 types according to the function and active sites. These are:

- (a) *Jatharagni*- One *Agni* present in the stomach and duodenum (*Kostha*).
- (b) *Bhutagni*- Five *Agni* from five basic elements (*Mahabhutas*).
- (c) *Dhatwagni*- Seven *Agni* presents one in each of the seven *dhatu*s.

However classification of *agni* for the purpose of practical utility can be made as follow-

- I. Physiological aspects
- II. Pathological aspects

- I. Physiological aspects –
 1. *Jatharagni* (I)
 2. *Bhutagni* (5) *Prthwi, Ap, Tejo, Vayu, Akas*
 3. *Dhatwagni* (7) *Rasa, Rakta, Mansa, Medo, Asthi, Majja, Sukra*.

II. Pathological aspects-

According to Acharya *Susruta*, on the influence of *dosas*, *agni* has been classified into four varieties. *Sama Agni* is physiological state of *Agni* (Normal *Agni*) and remaining three varieties of *agni* (*Tiksnagni*, *Mandagni*, *Visamagni*) pathological conditions¹².

1. *Tiksnā*- over influence of *pitta dosa* gives rise to *tiksnagni*.
2. *Manda*- over impact of *kapha dosa* gives rise to *mandagni*.
3. *Visama*- over influence of *vatadosa* gives rise to *visamagni*.

I. Physiological aspects:

1. *Jatharagni* :

Jathara + Agni – Jatharagni

Jatharagni denotes the *agni* which is placed in the *Jathara* (abdomen) *amasaya* or *annavahasrotas* i.e. Digestive tract. This *agni* is also called as *udaryagni* and *packagni*¹³. The process of *pacana* (digestion) of *caturvidha annapanā*, *sara* *kittavibhajana* leading to the production of *dosa*, *rasa* (*sara*, *ahara rasa*), *mutra*, *purisa* is induced by *Jatharagni* which is placed in the gastrointestinal tract. Entire digestive process is done by *jatharagni*¹⁴.

Importance of *Jatharagni*

Jatharagni is the master of all *Agni* because increase and decrease of other *Agni* dependent on it. Hence one should maintain it carefully by taking properly the wholesome food and drinks because life-span and strength depends on normal state of *agni*¹⁵.

2. *Bhutagni*

Five *Agni* pertaining each to *Parthivi*, *ap*, *tejas*, *vayu*, and *akash* digest the respective fractions of the food. In body the substances and their properties nourish their counterparts respectively such as the fraction of *parthivi* in food nourishes the respective fractions in the body and so on¹⁶.

3. *Dhatvagni*

In the process of metabolism the *dhatus* supporting the body go through twofold conversion into excretion and essence having been acted upon by the respective one of the seven *agnis*. The formation of *dhatus* takes place in the following order-

Rasa, *Rakta*, *Manasa*, *Medas*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, and *Sukra*, *Sukra* from its pure essence, produces foetus¹⁷.

In view of the above, it appears that *dhatwagni* functions are mainly of two aspects: 1) Synthesis of new protein and 2) to yield energy for the function of tissue.

These *dhatwagnis* are located in its own tissues according to its own *srotas*, either to form new tissue (anabolic) or to deliver its function (catabolic)¹⁸.

The seven verities of *dhatu* supports and sustains the life of the body and these undergo metabolic transformation in two different ways i.e. *kitta* (waste product) and *prasada* (nutrient portion).

The nutrient portion of *rasa* provides nourishment to *rakta*, from *rakta* to *mamsa*, *mamsa* to *medas*, *medas* to *asthi*, *asthi* to *majja* and *majja* to *sukra* and from *sukra* *foetus* is the outcome metabolic transformation from *Rasa* to *sukra* has been explained by *Carak* in a following verse¹⁹.

II. Pathological aspects

Agni pathologically is classified into 3 varieties namely *visamagni*, *tiksnagni* and *mandagni* according to *dusti* of *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* respectively²⁰, due to the operation of different etiological factors on the body. This condition varies from time to time according to vitiation of *dosas* and they become pathogenic²¹. *Jatharagni* undergoes abnormal changes by unwholesome food and habits and as per condition of *Tridosaa*, such abnormal *Agni* are said to be three.

1. *Mandagni* is the state in which digestion process become weak and takes long time to digest the less quantity of food and manifest heaviness in abdomen and head, cough, dyspnoea, excessive salivation, vomiting and weakness of the

body. *Mangagni* state gives rise to evolution of *kaphaja vikara*²².

2. **Tiksnagni** is the state in which hyper functioning of digestion and metabolic activities. In this state digestion become quicker. Excess quantity of taken food also digests very quickly. When that Agni gets excessively increased, it is called 'excessive digestive fire' (*Atyagni*). This latter fire very quickly digests food taken repeatedly and in a profuse quantity. At the end of digestion it produces dryness in the throat, palate, lips and burning sensation and pyrexia. *Tiksnagni* state gives rise to evolution of *pittaja vikara*²³.

3. **Visamagni** is an irregular or unpredictable type of *agni* which changes its nature almost every day. The digestion of food in this condition also will not be good and leads to formation of *Ama* (improperly processed materials) which accumulates in the *Rasadhatu* and later on in other *dhatus* as well. A certain number of diseases occur from this erratic status of *Agni* called 'Visamagni'²⁴.

AGNIBALA PARIKSA

Prior to proceeding to the practical study of *agnibala*, it is necessary to examine the existence of a possible correlation among *agnibala*, as understood from *jaranasakti* (digestive capacity), *bala* as evidenced by *vyayama sakti* (Physical activity) and *matra* of *usma* (amount of heat) generated

by the body, all of these depends on *pacakagni* . *Agni* plays a vital role – (1) in the preparation of *indhana* from the food in the *amasaya*, (2) the processing of this *indhana* suitable in *dhatvagni paka* for the utilization by the *sthayi dhatus* and (3) the actual burning of the *indhana* to produce the energy for work by *pacakamsas* present in the *sthayi dhatus*, especially in the *mamsadhatu*²⁵. An outcome of this process is the generation of heat.

Ahara + jatharagni → *upadana rasa (anna rasa)*;

Upadana rasa + Dhatavagni → *Indhana*.

Indhana + Pacakamsas → *dhatukarma* (energy) + *Usma*(heat) + *aap*(water).

That *dehagni* is the basis of *bala* (strength), *arogya*(positive health), *ojas* (longevity),

prana(vital),*varna*(complexion), *utsahopacaya* (increase of cheerfulness), *prabha* (lusture), *ojas* (resistance to disease and decay), *tejas* (energy) and other *agnis* of the body is seen from the observation of *Charaka*. According to *Charak agni* flames being fed with fuel derived from *anna* and *pana*. *Yogaratnakara*, a more recent Ayurvedic text, has stated that *agni* is the *mula* (root) of *bala* in man as *retas* (semen) is the root of life. This work, has therefore, urged on the need to carefully preserve *agni* and *retas*²⁶.

Table 1. Genetic aspects of Agni²⁷

Prakriti	State of agni
<i>Sama prakriti</i>	<i>Sama</i> or normal state
<i>Vata prakriti</i>	<i>Visama</i> or erratic state
<i>Pitta prakriti</i>	<i>Tiksma</i> or acute state
<i>Kapha Prakriti</i>	<i>Manda</i> or dull state

Table 2. State of Agni or Jaransakti season-wise²⁸

Season	State of agni
<i>Grisma</i> (June and July)	<i>Durbala</i>
<i>Varsa</i> (August and September)	<i>Durbala</i> or weak

<i>Sarat</i> (October and November)	
<i>Hemanta</i> (December and January)	<i>Tiksna</i> or hyperactive
<i>Sisira</i> (February and March)	<i>Tliksna</i> or hyperactive
<i>Vasanta</i> (April and May)	<i>Manda</i> or weak

Table 3.State of Agni or jaranasakti Age-wise²⁹

Age	State of Agni
<i>Vrddha</i> (Old age)	<i>Manda</i> or dull
<i>Yuva</i> (Youthful)	<i>Tiksna</i> or strong
<i>Bala</i> (Child)	<i>Manda</i> or dull

Table 4. Normal and abnormal diagnostic events in different parts of kostha and corresponding symptomatology³⁰

Organ	Normal function	Abnormal function	Symptoms in abnormal function
<i>Urdhva-amasaya</i>	<i>Madhura avastha paka</i> <i>Amla avastha paka</i> <i>Bhinnasamghata</i> <i>Anna mardava karana</i>	<i>Suktapaka</i> (Fermentation) <i>Apakvanna</i> (non digestion of food)	<i>Guruta</i> or Heaviness <i>Utkleda</i> <i>Ganda & aksikuta sotha</i> <i>Udgara</i> <i>Avidagdha-pravartana(urdhvamarge)</i>
<i>Adho-amasaya</i>	<i>Amla avastha paka</i> <i>Rasasosana</i> <i>Sarakitta-vibhajana</i>	<i>Apakvanna</i> (non digestion of food) <i>Ama</i> formation <i>Bahupicchila</i> (Extreme sliminess)	<i>Bhrama</i> <i>Murcha</i> <i>Osa</i> <i>Chos</i> <i>Daha</i>
<i>Pakvasaya</i>	<i>Drava-sosana</i> <i>Mala-mutra vibhajana</i> <i>Vayu-upadana dravyotpatti</i> <i>Malarupa vayu pravartana</i>	<i>Daurgandhya</i> (foul smell) <i>Atidrava-sosana</i> <i>Alpadrava-sosana</i> Impaired <i>vibhajana</i> Improper <i>pindikarana</i> Formation of more <i>vayu</i> (<i>malarupa</i>) Less formation of <i>upadana dhaturupa vayu</i> .	<i>Sula</i> <i>Adhmana</i> Toda, <i>Bheda</i> etc. <i>Mala apravrtti</i> <i>Vata apravrtti</i> <i>Stambha</i> <i>Moha</i> <i>Angapidana</i> <i>Drava mala pravartana</i> .

An important criterion of normal digestion is Pure belching (without bad smell or taste), enthusiasm, elimination, of feces, flatus and urine properly, lightness of the body, appearance of hunger and desire for

water are the symptoms of proper digestion of food.³¹

agnibala pariksa is not only concerned with determination of the functional state of agni but also its capacity to metabolize the digested food and produce energy. It is

also important that making of energy measured in terms of heat is directly correspond to the quality and quantity of nutrition made available and physical and mental work performed. Age and climatic conditions have also a bearing on the functional states of agni. In other words, *agnibala pariksa*, studied together with *mamsabala pariksa* and capacity to produce *usma* is really the study of the metabolic state of the subject³².

Pacakagni is of four kinds based on the involvement of *dosa*. First is *Samagni* state and it is physiological state of *agni*. Remaining three varieties of *agni* *Visamagni*, *tiksnagni*, *mandagni*, are the pathological conditions develop due to abnormality in *dosa*. *Samagni* state of *agni* is the condition in which *dosas* are in equilibrium state and performs normal digestion and metabolism. *Visamagni* is the condition in which irregular digestion and metabolism takes place i.e. sometimes represents normal functions go after abnormal one and manifest flatulence, pain in abdomen, In *kostha* up word movement of *Vata*, diarrhea, heaviness in abdomen, intestinal gurgling and straining exercise for evacuation of stools. *Tiksnagni* is the state in which hyper functioning of digestion & metabolic activities observed. In this particular state digestion become quicker. More quantity of consumed food also is digested very quickly. The same *agni* if increases greatly is called *atyagni*, in this state person become capable of digesting large amount of food very quickly if consumed oftenly. At the end of digestion it produces dryness of the throat, palate and lips, burning sensation and enhances warmthness in body. *Manadagni* is the state in which digestion process become weak and takes long time to digest even less quantity of food and manifest

heaviness in abdomen and head, cough, dyspnoea, excessive salivation, vomiting and weakness of the body. *Visamagni* state gives rise to manifestation of *vatavyadhi*. *Tiksnagni* state gives rise to manifestation of *pittavyadhi*. *Mandagni* state gives rise to evolution of *kaphaja vikara*³³.

CONCLUSION: Condition or power of *agni* determines the quantity of food to be consumed. It stimulates the digestive fire. Natural condition of *agni* is responsible for power, health, vitality, and life breath. That's why it should be protected by proper intake of food and drinks because these act as a fuel, if person is deprived of food and drinks, *agni* become weak. The function of *agnis* relating to *bhutas*, *dhatus* and food are same. The *agni* which digests food is *jatharagni* or *pacakagni*, regarded as the master of all *agnis* because increase and decrease of other *agnis* depend on the digestive fire (*jatharagni*). So it is important to maintain it carefully by taking properly the healthy foods and drinks because on its maintenance depends the maintenance of longevity and strength. To know the normal condition of *agni* which perform normal digestion and metabolic functions, *agnibala pariksa* is important. It is necessary to know the sign and symptoms of the normal and abnormal states of *antaragni*, having regard to inherited tendencies, season and age as described in the *samhitas*.

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