



## Review Article

### CONCEPT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF AGNI IN AYURVEDA

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#### ABSTRACT

*Agni* in Ayurveda has a significant role to maintain body homeostasis, body functioning, metabolism of body and proper functioning of body. *Agni* in Ayurveda is correlated with digestive power of the body. There are many reasons behind the maintenance of *Agni* (digestive power of body) in Ayurveda. The main reason behind its maintenance is that it helps in growth and development of the body. *Agni* is basically divided in three types which have further types and the main three types which maintain body balance are *Jhataragni* (digestive fire), *Bhutagni* and *Dhatuvagni* (metabolism at cellular level). They work together to maintain the balance in the body as *Jhataragni* is maintaining metabolism and *Bhutagni* and *Dhatuagni* is maintaining the cellular metabolism. Imbalance in the physiology of *Agni* is the main cause for the formation of *Ama* which is the main reason for many diseases. So *Agni* is important for every function of body. This article shows the importance of *Agni* and significance of *Agni* in Ayurveda.

**KEYWORDS:** *Agni*, *Jhataragni*, *Bhutagni*, *Dhatuagni*, *Ama*.

#### INTRODUCTION

As it is described in Ayurveda *Agni* is having many derivatives which shows the importance of *Agni* as *Ayu* (longevity) which means it increases the life span of the human if *Agni* is working properly, *Varna* (complexion) it maintains the color complexion of the body, *Balam* (strength) *Agni* maintains the strength of the body, *Swasthyam* (health) it maintain the health i.e., physical, mental status of the human being, *Utsaha* (enthusiasm) it maintain the interest of the human being in the life, *Upachaya* (body metabolism) it maintain the digestive system and metabolism of the body, *Prabha* (luster) it maintain the gentle sheen and soft glow of the body, *Ojas* (tissue essence) it maintains the immunity of the body, *Agnayah* (bio fires) it maintains the digestive fires of the body, *Prana* (life) it maintains the stable life of human being. When *Agni* of the body get extinguished then the body (*Sharir*) is considered as dead. As far as *Agni* inside the body remains in *Sam Avastha* (in proper amount), person live long without any ailment or disease.<sup>[1]</sup> As *Agni* is correlated with *Pitta* and the type of *Pitta* which is basically correlated with *Agni* is *Panchakpitta*. It is explained from the way in which it performs the *Pakadi Karmas* i.e., it digests food, separates *Sara* from *Kitta* of the food, because of this, it is known as *Pachakpitta*.<sup>[2]</sup> *Pachakpitta* has following synonyms *Jatharagni*, *Kosthagni*, directly participates in the digestion of food and at the same time, support to and augments the functions of

remaining *Pittas*, present elsewhere in the body. *Agni* in Ayurveda is reflected in the concept of *Pitta* of the system. The term of *Pitta* is derived from root to heat or to burn. *Agni* is having both *Subha Asubha Karma*. As *Subha Karma* is *Pakati*, *Darshanam*, *Prakriti*, *Varan*, *Moha*, *Harsha* and *Asubha Karma* are *Apakti*, *Adarshnam*, *Bhaya*, *Vikrta Varan* etc.<sup>[3]</sup> The seat of *Agni* is *Grahani*. *Grahani* is named as it receives the food. It is situated in between *Amashya* and *Pakwashaya*.<sup>[4]</sup> That is also the place of *Pitta* there are five types of *Pitta* that also are considered in *Agni Raag* (*Ranjak Pitta*) that has *Rasa Ranjan Karma*, *Pakti* (*Pachak pitta*) that has *Ahaar Paachan karma*, *Tejo* (*Alochak Pitta*) that has *Darshan karma*, *Medho* (*Sadhak pitta*) that has properties to maintain as *Budhi*, *Medh*. *Ushma* (*Bhrajak pitta*) has properties to maintain skin complexion.<sup>[5]</sup> *Agni* is the energy in our body which activates metabolism function in the body which converts the food into the substance which gives strength to the body.

#### Types of *Agni*

##### *Jatharangi*

This *Agni* is considered to be the *Pradhyantam* (principal fire) of all the *Agni*. This *Agni* is situated in *Amashya*, because it contains food in it which stimulates the functions of digestion. The *Kala* in which is situated in the entry of *Pakvashya* is *Pittdhara* which is basically like a way to entrance of the food in the stomach. *Jatharangi* is the energy which maintains the process of *Paka* of *Dhatu*s which

is basically present in the metabolism of tissues. It controls all the functions and balance of the other twelve Agni in the body which are equally important for the body. This Agni is explained by *Chakarpani* that *Jatharagni* treatment is considered as treatment of body. Its main function is digestion of food. This Agni converts *Ahaar* into *Ahaar Rasa*.<sup>[5]</sup> These *Ahara rasa* will form the other *Dhatu*s. In modern *Jatharagni* is related with the digestion of food which is done in stomach and intestines by the chemicals present in the stomach and peristaltic movements in the intestine.

### **Bhutagni**

The *Agni* which acts on cellular level of body. The body is formed by *Panchmahabutas* which are *Akasha* (the vacant spaces of the body), *Vayu* (the air spaces in the tissues) *Agni* (digestive fire), *Jala* (the watery material in the body as- lymph, blood), *Pritivi* (solid material in body organs). *Butagni* is divided into five types of *Agni* which act on these *Panchmahabutas*. They are *Parthivagni*, *Aapyagni*, *Agneyagni*, *Vayavyagni*, *Nabhasagni*. Each body cell and tissues are formed of these *Agni*. They are the basic units for the formation of elements in the body. These *Agni* which are formed of *Panchmahabutas* will work on only the same part of the food element which is consisting of same *Agni* particle. Even after the digestion of these elements in the food it specifically nourishes its own *Bhutas* present in the body.<sup>[6]</sup> In modern it can be correlated with the enzymatic functions which are performed by the liver in the metabolism of food particles as liver has many enzymatic actions on the food digestion as metabolism of carbohydrates, proteins and fats which provide the energy for the biochemical functions of the body.

### **Dhatvagni**

*Dhatvagni* is used for the formation of *Dhatu Utpati Karama* (formation of the *Dhatu*s). It is subdivided into seven types *Rasagni*, *Raktagni*, *Maansagni*, *Medo agni*, *Ashthyagni*, *Majjagni*, *Shukragni* which ultimately form the immunity of the body. These Agni maintains the functions of the organs of the body.<sup>[2]</sup> These all *Agni* has different *Srotas* for their functioning. These *Srotas* will provide a pathway for supplying nutrients for metabolism. Each Agni presents a *Dhatu*. As *Rasagni* represents *Ras Dhatu*, *Rakhtagni* represents *Rakta dhatu*, *Maansagni* represents *Maans Dhatu*, *Medo agni* represents *Medho Dhatu*, *Ashthyagni* represents *Ashtha Dhatu*, *Majja Agni* represents *Majja Dhatu*, *Shukkaragni* represents *Sukhra dhatu*. *Dhalhan* has mentioned that at the end all the *Dhatu*s Sara is *Oja* i.e., immunity in modern. It has given in Ayurveda that *Agni* is having *Oja* as its derivative. These all *Agni*

provide specific nutrients for the formation of the particular *Dhatu* and this action of these *Dhatvagni* is correlated as selective absorption criteria. As they absorb its specific nutrient from the food or nutrient to form its specified *Dhatu* and get there proper and same nutrients.<sup>[7]</sup>

### **Causes of Vitiation of Agni**

Excessive (fast), indigestion, over eating and irregular eating, inappropriate food materials, improper use of *Panchakarma*, Emaciation as a result of diseases, seasonal perversion, suppressions of natural urges. Being thus vitiated does not digest even light food. This undigested food becomes sour in taste and it works like poison and it gives rise to several diseases. These diseases will not be cured if the vitiating or *Dushti* of Agni is cured. There are many herbs, compositions, remedies, *Yoga* in *Ayurveda* to cure these diseases which are caused due to *Agni*.

Due to vitiating of *Agni* it is sub divided into four types as-

#### **Vishamagni**

Here the digestive fire is disturbed by *Vata*. Because of variability in *Vata*, there are episodes of alternating cycles of strong appetite with loss of appetite.

#### **Tikshanagni**

Here the digestive fire is disturbed by *Pitta*. This type of *Agni* can easily digest even high amount of ingested food. Sometimes in the absence of fuel it start consuming body's own tissues (*Dhatu*).

#### **Mandagni**

Here the digestive fire is disturbed by *Kapha*. Because of variability in *Kapha*, there are episodes of poor appetite, sluggish metabolism and tendency to weight gain despite optimal food consumption. Due to sluggish metabolism food becomes *Vidagadh*.

#### **Samagni (Normal)**

Normal digestive fire is characterised by strong and appealing appetite that is easily satisfied with normal food. Digestive functions are proper; there are no episodes of gas, colic and constipation. *Samagni* is largely responsible for human body nutrition and building strong foundation of seven tissues.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Agni versus Ama<sup>[8]</sup>**

In Ayurveda, the theory of *Agni* or biological fire is of prime importance. *Agni* is among the critical factors in determining optimal health and internal homeostasis. On the contrary, *Ama* is a toxin or pathogen, responsible for aetiology of all diseases. Major cause behind *Ama* production is impairment of

*Agni Ama* can be explained in Ayurveda that it is the unhealthy, indigested food. It is the dry form of the food which is considered to be waste product for the body. This *Ama* is formed by *Mandhagni* which form *Rasaja* and food indigestion which act on sub cellular level and form disease. Due to *Mandhagni* these undigested food particles start get accumulated in the body and form *Aama Dhosha*. It is again explained as the undigested formed which is formed due to the weakness of *Jhatharagni* and *Dhatvagni* is called as *Ama*. These are divided into three *Pakaavastha* as- In first *Avastha* due to weakness of *Jhatharagni* *Ama* get accumulated in *Amashya* (stomach).

In second *Avastha* due to weakness of *Dhatvagni* the *Dhatu* didn't get digested and form *Ama* which is known as *Ama visha*.

In third *Avastha* the mostly undigested food gets accumulated and forms *Ama*.

This *Ama* food, *Ama rasa*, *Ama Dhatu* all are known as *Ama*. This *Ama* gets accumulated and stay in body as an auto antigen which cause many autoimmune disorders which causes allergies in the body. Due to these reactions many antibodies will be formed in the body which ultimately causes many diseases and one of them is *Amavata*. *Acharya Charak* also explained the undigested food as *Amavisha*.<sup>[9]</sup> There are many causative factors for *Amavisha* which are divided into *Aaharaja* and *Viharaja* causes. Overeating, less eating, improper eating, *Guru*, *Sheet*, *Atirukhsha Aahar*, preventing natural urges, day sleeping, lethargy. And these all are the same reasons for the weakness of *Agni* in the body that is *Mandagni*, which is the main reason for the formation of *Ama*. This *Amavisha* will form the symptoms in the body which are stiffness, stasis of faecal matter, fatigue, headache, fainting, vertigo, backache, yawning, malaise, vertigo, fever, thirst, anorexia, tenesmus, indigestion and these symptoms will also be seen in improper functioning of the *Agni*.<sup>[10]</sup> In modern the main contents of food that is carbohydrates, proteins and fats are digested by *Jhatharagni*, *Dhatvagni*, *Bhutagni* and form an end product. Protein is converted into amino acids in the presence of *Jhatharagni* and in the presence of *Dhatvagni* it is converted into urea. Carbohydrates and fat end product is carbon dioxide and energy. If the *Agni* is in a condition of *Madhagni* then there will be no formation of end product and intermediate product will be formed which are lactic acids, uric acids and ketone bodies and they are a form of *Ama*. Due to increased formation of these products they cause many diseases like *Urushthamba*, *Vatarakta* (gout) and diabetes. This *Ama* can be correlated with many forms as the undigested *Ras Dhatu* is form of

*Ama*, accumulation of waste product is *Ama*, *Dhosha Dhusti* is also *Ama*.

*Ama* related diseases which are caused due to *Jhatharagni* are *Alasaka*, *Visuchika*, *Atisara*, *Vilambika*, *Pravahika*, *Amalpitta*, *Basamak Roga*, *IBS*.

*Ama* related diseases which are caused due to *Dhatvagni* are *Raspradhoshaj vikara*, *Rakhta-pradhoshaja vikara*, *Masa pradhoshaj vikara*, *Medha pradhoshaja vikara* etc. *Madhumeha* (diabetes), *Aamavata* (rheumatoid arthritis), fever, *Shawas* (COPD), *Sthaulya* (obesity), inflammation.

*Ama* related diseases which are caused due to *Bhutagni* are liver disorders, metabolic disorders.

These all diseases are caused due to the formation of *Ama* which is formed by the imbalance of the *Agni* in the body.

### ***Agni and Pitta***

*Pitta* is originated by two words in Ayurveda is metabolism and maintain the haemostasis (maintained heat in the body). By metabolism it will provide energy to the body by metabolizing the food and by maintain the heat of the body it will provide shine and enthusiasm to the body.<sup>[11]</sup> It is explained by some Ayurvedic texts that there is no existence of separate *Agni* in the body. The basic *Agni* that provides heat and has metabolic functions in the body is *Pitta* in the body. This *Pitta* has many *Gunas* but its main *Guna* that is *Ushana Guna* represents *Agni* and its function in the body.<sup>[12]</sup> As the *Pitta* situation in the body is formed of *Panchmahabutas*. So the *Agni* and *Pitta* has the same composition. But there are many examples which are given in *Samhitas* that *Grit* is *Pitashamaka* but it aggravates *Agni*. Even in *Sushrut* it is maintained that *Samdhoshas Samagni Samdhatu Mala Kriya* indicates that *Agni* and *Pitta* are different.<sup>[13]</sup>

### **Physiological significance of *Agni***<sup>[14]</sup>

Majority of the diseases are outcome of malfunctioning of the *Agni* which rightly has been called as central root to health.<sup>[15]</sup> *Agni* not only plays vital role in absorption of macro as well as micronutrients, but is destructive to pathogens also. The food that is not properly digested is referred as "*Ama*" in Ayurveda and it is nothing but a toxin or pathogen responsible for diseases. Proper functioning of digestive fire is evident from normal tone of the digestive-system, circulatory-system, strong immunity or resistance against diseases, proper tissue growth and body complexion. It is also the source of intelligence, nutrition and awareness in the body. It coordinates many physiological processes of the body from the digestion, reabsorption, sensations and formation of energy. This affects both body and mind of the human being.

It makes coordination between the both of them which leads to a healthy lifestyle.

### Pathological significance of *Agni*<sup>14]</sup>

If digestive fire is not functioning properly, one has poor digestion, improper blood-circulation, poor complexion, low energy levels, flatulence and poor immunity against diseases. Thus promoting proper functioning of the digestive fire is treating the root cause of the diseases, according to Ayurvedic principles. Thus a vicious cycle of impaired *Agni* and the production of *Ama* is established. Understanding basic relationship between *Ama* and *Agni* is of prime importance in treating the diseases. Maintaining good appetite, use of digestive stimulants and ensuring regular bowel movements are of prime importance in enkindling the digestive fire and preventing the production of root cause of all diseases, *Ama*.

This shows *Agni* has the most important role in *Dosha Dhatu* balance in the body and it will produce diseases as it get imbalance in the body. In *Ayurveda* it has been said that with decrease in functions of these thirteen types of *Agni* there will be production of disease.

### Importance of *Agni*

As it is explained in many *Samhitas* that *Agni* plays an important role in maintain health. As *Agni* is the main cause of many diseases. *Agni* in *Vedas* is said to be fire for light, heat, ability to cook food. But in *Ayurveda* *Agni* is taken on another level that is it constitutes of *Panchmahabutas* which form the elements of the body, these elements are the basic of the cellular and tissue level formation of the body. If this is not working properly the imbalance will cause many diseases.

### Conclusion

In this article after a brief discussion on *Agni*, *Ama*, *Pitta* and there correlations it shows that *Agni* is important for digestion and metabolism on cellular level, it also signify the importance of *Agni* on physiological and pathological levels. *Agni* is of 13 types which maintain the balance of metabolism in the body, *Agni* which is *Samagni* (normal) maintains the health of a human being. *Agni* is having many digestive enzymes which help to maintain the digestive and metabolic functions of the body. By the indigestion due to imbalance of *Agni* they produce *Ama*, which produce diseases. This *Ama* can be formed at any level of *Pakavastha* of the food. So the management of *Agni Dhusti* can lead to a healthy life. In this article this is concluded that if there is imbalance in *Agni* there will be production of diseases. So according to *Ayurveda* *Agni* is important for human body and its proper functioning.

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**Cite this article as:**

Ankita Thakur, Brij Kishor, Akhilesh.K. Srivastva, Rajesh Manglesh. Concept and Significance of Agni in Ayurveda. International Journal of Ayurveda and Pharma Research. 2018;6(9):76-80.

**Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared**

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