

AGNI: CORE DOCTRINE OF AYURVEDA THERAPEUTIC

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ABSTRACT

Agni principle is basically one amongst the *panchmahabhuta* [five primordial elements] and a vital leader in the whole process of *Paka* viz. digestion, transformation etc. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is expected to maintain the life. The entire process of transformation performed by *Agni* consists of two types of products viz. *Prasad* (essence) and *Kitta* (excrete). The former is taken for nourishment while the latter one is thrown out, which otherwise damages the body if it stays longer. Grossly 13 types of *Agni* are specified in classical *Ayurveda* texts, but in fact they are innumerable because of its presence in each and every *paramanu* [molecule] of the body. *Agni* is one of the vital underline trait for the two fold aim of *Ayurveda* viz. maintenance of health and treatment of diseases. Hence *Agni* principle has given utmost importance in *Ayurveda* therapeutics. Meticulous exploration of the best book of therapeutics “*Charakasamhita*” reveals the truth; that *chikitsa* is nothing but the consideration and manipulation with *Agni* in real sense. The purpose of this endeavor is to reestablish the fact that precisely *kayachikitsa* is the *Agnichikitsa*.

Keywords: *Agni, Kayachikitsa, Basic Principles.*

INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of science everything changes, more polluted air to breathe, more adulterated food is said to be the root cause of all diseases. Alarming increase in obesity, cardiac diseases, diabetes all are outcome of deranged metabolism and comprises the syndrome of metabolic diseases. Now a day there is paradigm shift in the outlook for the management of such diseases from curative to conservative one. The world is threatened not by communicable diseases rather by non-communicable or metabolic diseases. Currently there is much attention centered on “gut health” in the scientific community. In fact, Hippocrates-the father of modern medicine is often quoted as saying, “you are only as healthy as your digestion” and “all diseases begins in the gut”. Now modern medical science also advocates dietary and life style management for the restoration of health.

But more impressive is the ancient wisdom of *Ayurveda* which has stated this same exact concept thousands of years ago.^[1]

According to modern medicine, metabolic processes, division and multiplication are going on in all cells (*dhatu paramanu*) of human body from birth till death. The cell is the functional unit of the body. According to *Charaka* also, the constituent parts of the body, if further divided into the atoms, are sure to become innumerable, as such cells or atoms are exceedingly numerous, very minute and ultra-sensory. And *Vata* is the activating factor for the conjunction and disjunction of cells.^[2] *Shushruta* described the process of formation of “*Avayavas*” [organs] from various *dhatu*.^[3] For these constant processes in all cells, a biological energy is constantly essential, without which the survival of human body will be quite impossible. The same biological energy is provided by *Agni* as per *Ayurveda*. Therefore, the concept of “*Agni*” does not

restrict to *Jathragni* as it commonly means, but with the comprehensive view, *Agni* is a principle, present in each and every cell of the *Panchahuthika* body.^[4] *Agni* literally means fire is an essential tool for bio-transformations in human beings. Digestion, metabolism and assimilation i.e. whole process of biological conversion and utilization of energy can be symbolize by the term *Agni*. *Agni* is a form of energy and a functional unit which causes *paakaadi karmas* i.e. Biophysical and Biochemical process. Hence the term *Agni* does not mean only fire, rather the term comprehended various factors which participate and regulate the course of digestion and metabolism or any transformation in the tissue of an organism.^[5]

In *Ayurveda*, *Agni* is considered as a derivative of *tejas mahabhoota* and designated as God. It performs the function of digestion but not visible due to its subtleness.^[6] It is located in *Pitta dosha* [one among the three basic humors] rather *Agni* and *Pitta dosha* are not two separate entities.^[7] In other words *pitta* and *Agni* are identical functionally and *Agni* is the origin of *pitta*.^[8] Regarding the importance of *Agni*, *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned that after stoppage of the function of *Agni*, the individual dies, and when the *Agni* of an individual is in balanced state [*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 his body would be disturbed, resulting in ill health and disease. Hence, *Agni* is said to be the base (*mool*) of life.^[9] Ultimately *Agni* is the base or root cause for strength of body.^[10]

The *Agni* or bioenergy present in the stomach and duodenum [*Jathara*] is *Jatharagni*.^[11] In the opinion of *Dhanvantari*, it is the *Kala* known as "*Pittadhara*," situated at the entrance of the *Pakvashaya* (intestine) and acting as a

bolt to the door of the pathway/channel of food.^[12] According to *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Jatharagni*, the seat is *Grahani* (duodenum), so called because it withholds the food for a certain time inside the *Amasaya* (stomach) to facilitate digestion. It is responsible for the duration of life, health, valor, *ojas* (essence of the dhatus), strength of all the *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*. Action of *Grahani* and *Agni* are directly proportional to each other. The strength of the *Grahani* depends on status of *Agni*, and the status or strength of *Agni* depends on strength of *grahani*. When the *Agni* undergoes vitiation, *grahani* also gets vitiated and vice versa; this vitiation ultimately produces diseases.^[13] Immunity or strength [*bala*], health, longevity and vital breath are dependent upon the power of digestion including metabolism [*Agni*]. When properly supplied in the form of food and drinks, this power of digestion is sustained, and it declines when deprived of it.^[14] Regular intake of such compatible food and drinks are conducive to the internal power of digestion comprising metabolism. *Charaka* advised to pay due consideration to the quantity and time for the same. In addition, according to him, the food which is the factor that nourishes deal *dathus* and *ojas* and contributes to *bala*, *Varna* etc. itself depends upon *Agni* mainly *jatharagni* for utilization, as *rasadi dhatus* cannot be formed from a food that has not been digested.^[15]

Jatharagni is directly related to *bhautikagni* and *dhatvagni* or bioenergy in the cells and their metabolic processes, with ultimate tissue metabolism or *dhatu-Paka* process. All the *dhatvagni* and *bhautikagni* depend on the normal, healthy state of *Jatharagni*. If the *Jatharagni* is hyperactive (*Tikshna*) or hypoactive (*Manda*), it will cause an excessive or retarded action of the *dhatvagni* and *bhautikagni* also. This disturbed action ultimately leads to various disorders. *Jatharagni* is the main important *Agni* that controls the function of all other 12 *Agnis*.

All the *Agnis* are totally dependent on the status of *Jatharagni*.^[16] When *Agni* is in balanced state, maintains healthy condition of the body; any derangement in the normal function of “*Agni*” in the body will affect the transformations taking place in the body. Thus *Mandagni* will result in the formation of waste/indigested products, which is the intermediate stage of a total change, because here *Agni* is locking in the capacity to transformation of food into the end products.^[17] Here the root cause of all disease is improper digestion. Because incomplete break down food and nutrients accumulates in the body. This leads to the formation of such intermediately undigested, toxic material in the body, may be comprehensively called as *Ama*. This *Ama* clogged all the bodily channels or pipes. Due to that any number of bodily functions may be compromised.^[18] As *Agni* is present in each and every cell of the body, accordingly by inference *Ama* [undigested food] formed by derangement of *Agni* is also present in each and every cell.^[19]

Holistic approach of *Ayurveda* always recommend eradivative measures to the diseases instead of symptomatic handling hence uprooting the cause is the main aim of treatment. The whole internal medicine in *Ayurveda* is based on the treatment of *Agni*. *Ayurveda* accept that *Agni* is present in every *paramanu* or cell of the body and not only in digestion and metabolism but every transformation in the body takes place essentially with *Agni* as the energy required to do so. In general sense, the term *kaya* or body itself has been equated to *Agni*. Word “*Kaya*” being the synonym of *Agni* emphasize the importance of this concept in the management of metabolic diseases.^[20] Hence derangement of *Agni* produces diseases and its complete destruction causes death. *Agni* converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of body. Therefore, *Ayurveda* considers that *kayagni* [digestive fire] is the basic cause

of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, luster, *oja*, *teja* (energy) and *prana* (life energy).^[21] Consequently Principle of *Agni* becomes crucial either in healthy or the diseased state. In healthy condition it is necessary for maintenance of health and *Mandagni* (hypo functioning of *Agni*) is the most probable cause for the manifestation of disease; which leads to improper digestion thereby leading to the formation of *Ama*. Therefore *ama* is the root cause for the manifestation of the most of the metabolic diseases. Thus the treatment is mainly targeted towards the *Agni* thereby correcting the *Ama*. Rightly said by *Vagbhata*, “*Rogah Sarve Api Manda Agnenah*”.^[22]

Therefore *Agni* is a decisive entity not only in context of health and diseases but also the chief key factor for many other aspects. *Aharshakti* [power of intake and digestion of food] is one of the factor among the tenfold examination [*Dashavidha Rogi parikshya*] of patient. It indicates the significance of *Agni* in the process of digestion and quantity of food and obviously it is one of the prime norm in the process of diagnosis.^[23]

Agni is an important unseen issue in many other types of treatments, mainly like *Shamana*, *Shodhana* etc. *Charaka Samhita* is a foremost treatise of treatment principles and most of the doctrines of treatment [*chikitsasiddhanta*] in *charakasamhita* directly or indirectly based on the theme of the correction and preservation of *Agni*. In context of *Agryasangraha*, *Agni* is the best *dravya* among all other *dravya* which cures indigestion, stiffness, cold, colic pain and shivering.^[24] Each and every kind of treatment modality like *deepana*, *pachana*, *snehana* etc. is nothing but the enhancement of *Agni* eventually. It can be rationalized by many evidences. *Deepana* and *Pachana* are the procedures aimed in correcting the *Agni*; in which the *Agni* and *Vayu mahabhuta* performs an active role.

^[25]Such correction and manipulation of vitiated *Agni* can be achieved by many ways in different circumstances. Occasionally like in treatment of fever [*Jwarachikitsa*] it is done simply by means of *sheeta* and *ushna* attributes [*guna*] by performing *sheeta* and *ushana chikitsa*.

^[26]In perspective of oleation [*snehana*] and fomentation [*swedana*] also hidden principle acting overdue is the *Agni* only as *sneha* is the best *dravya* for the kindling of *Agni* and in case of *swedana*; *Agni* is directly participated in the process. *Samshamana* is indicated in those condition where the patient is not eligible for the *samshodhana*, in those conditions also alleviation of *dosha* is achieved by correction of *Agni* by giving *Sneha*. As *Sneha* is declared as a best substance [*dravya*] for the enhancement of feeble *Agni*.^[27]

Agni is an unalloyed operational issue in the process of fomentation by direct use of fire [*Agni swedana*] but in instance of fomentation by indirect use of fire [*Niragni swedana*] also it is the prime underline doctrine.^[28]

Hence the twofold main divisions of treatment viz. elimination therapy [*Samshodhana*] and pacification therapy [*samshamana*] are also not beyond the influence of *Agni* principle. *Samshodhana* is the main eradication line of treatment for almost all diseases except *Urustambha*. By the administration of elimination therapy

the vitiated *doshas* are eliminated from the body through the alimentary tract due to which the power of digestion and metabolism is enhanced. Hence along with many other benefits of *Shodhana* enrichment of the power of digestive fire [*Agnibala*] is one of the chief event.^[29]

Therefore the comprehensive attitude about the concept of *Agni* illustrate its practical utility. The treatment line-up of *Ayurveda* is also based on correction of mainly *Jatharagni*, *Pancha Mahabhutagni* and *Saptadhatvagni* to be precise. Excessive or deficit functioning of these *Agni* can make them inefficient to absorb the useful components from the food and nourish the body tissues accordingly. The treatments and food administered in such conditions will be to correct the fire components of these *Agni* and enable them and their strength so as to absorb and utilize the food and drug components. *Sansarjana karma* advised after every *panchkarma* is also aimed at the kindling of *Agni*. Hence the therapeutic procedures, food and medicines will be chosen based on either all or any one among all the 13 varieties of *Agni* are vitiated. The aim will be to bring them to back to the normalcy.^[30]

Many more evidences can be quoted here for validation that how *Agni* is the chief unseen code behind the treatment principles of almost majority of the disease. Few of them as sample are cited in following table-

	Therapeutic action	Reference	Details of therapeutic action
1	<i>Shodhana</i> prior to Rasayana	Ch.chi .1/24,25,29	Use of Haritkyadi churna for the purpose of cleansing and deepana –pachana.
2	<i>Shodhana</i> prior to Vajeekarana	Ch.chi.2/1-50,51	Use of elimination therapy before the vajeekaran kindle the Jatharagni.
3	In Sannipata Jwara	Ch chi 3/109	Completely diminution of <i>Agni</i> is one of the important sign of incurability of Sannipata jwara.
4	In pathogenesis of Jwara	Ch.chi. 3/129,30,31	Aggravated dosha spread through the rasadhatu and dislodge the jatharagni from its own place.

5	In treatment of Jwara	Ch chi 3/139,140	In the first stage of jwara langhana is prescribed, it alleviates the aggravated doshas and stimulates Agni .
6	Jwara	Ch chi 3/139	Purpose of Langhana ,swedana , kala ,yavagu, tikta rasa and pachana are for correction of Agni
7	Jwara	Ch chi 142,145,194	Purpose of giving shadangapaniya and hot water to be given to drink is also for lighting of Agni.
8	In prognosis of Raktapitta	Ch chi 4/13,14	Rakta pitta becomes incurable if patient is having mandagni
9	Raktapitta	Chakrapani on Ch chi 4/52	If Agni is not strong –water should not be given till satisfaction
10	Raktapitta	Ch chi 4/106-109	Sheeta chikitsa is mentioned for the alleviation of pitta.
11	In Gulma	Ch chi5/21-26,33,113	Administration of sneha for gulma which ultimately improve and correct the Agni
12	In Gulma	Ch chi5/33	In pittaja gulma ghrutapana is indicated for the correction of Agni
13	In Gulma	Ch ch 5/48,54	In Kaphaja gulma if the Agni and metabolism is weak and not suitable for vamana, fasting therapy is indicated. By fasting, emetic and fomentation therapy Agni get stimulated.
14	In Gulma	Ch chi5/55,61,62	Agni is the underline principle in Kshara ,Arishta and Agni therapy
15	In Gulma	Ch.chi .5/112,136	Taking food excess and not taking food at all both are bad to the suppression of Agni. Alleviation and aggravation of dosha are dependent upon Agni .Hence it is very necessary to maintain Agni and to avoid factors responsible for the vitiation of Agni.

DISCUSSION

In *Ayurveda* literature particularly in *charaakasamhita*, a detailed explanation of *Agni* is available but its practical application in the management of disease is concealed. *Ayurveda* consider that no disease ever be develop without the derangement of *Agni*. Therefore in every disease *Agni* management gets the prime focus. Whole of the treatment methodology in *Ayurveda* revolves around the preservation or maintenance and management of *Agni*. Right from the execution of preventive aspect up to the curative aspects of treatment *Ayurveda* physician has to keep his one eye on *Agni* factor without fail. *Agni* principle is not

only prime in general treatment methodologies but also chief in the unique modalities like *Rasayana* and *Vajeekarana*. Principle of *Agni* have significant value even in today's modern era.

CONCLUSION

Consideration of *Agni* principle for the treatment of metabolic disorder is need of hour. At the same time it is the strength of *Ayurveda*. Such basic principles of *Ayurveda* are time-tested and eternal. Observance of accurate *Ahara*, *Vihara* and *Aushadhi* along with the knowledge of one's constitution as well as the stage [*Avastha*] of disease as per the classical guidelines is the planned solution to

uphold the *Agni*. *Charaka* has fully revolutionary approach towards the concept of *Agni*. The whole province of *Ayurveda* especially *charakasamhita* is based on the notion of *Agni*. Among therapeutic procedures of majority diseases; *Agni* is the main connotation throughout; openly or ultimately. *Kayachikitsa* (internal medicine) being the

synonym of *Agnichikitsa*, emphasize the importance of this principle in the management of diseases. Hence it is obvious that *Ayurveda* management of metabolic diseases is nothing but the tackling of *Agni* actually; in the name of treatment. Hence the concept of *Agni* validate its core value in *Ayurveda* therapeutic.

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