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A critical review on importance of *Agni* with special reference to its role in Allergic Rhinitis

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ABSTRACT

According to *Ayurveda*, when *Doshas*, *Dhatu*s, and *Malas* are in *Sama-Awastha* and *Indriya*, *Aatma*, and *Mana* all are working properly then this state is considered as '*Swastha*'. To maintain the state of health, *Agni* should be *Samagni* which means in the normal state. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life, and is performed by *Agni* in *Ayurveda*. *Agni* is the invariable agent consisting digestive and different kinds of hormones, enzymes, and co-enzymes activities which plays important role in the process of digestion and transformation. Therefore, *Agni* is responsible for strength, health, longevity; vital breath and it determines the quantity of food to be consumed. *Agni* plays a huge part to keep up with body homeostasis, body working, digestion of the body, and legitimate working of the body. Major factors that cause diminished power of *Jatharagni* in human body includes the changing lifestyle and unhealthy food habits. *Manda Jatharagni*, if untreated leads to the formation of *Ama Rasa*. Thus, *Ama* formed results in *Srotorodha* which leads to *Avarana* of *Udana Vata* by *Kapha*, *Pitta* and *Prana Vata* further cause *Khavaigunya*. *Rasavaha* and *Raktavaha Srotas* gets vitiated and systemic manifestations are seen. In the process, *Pranavaha Srotas* gets vitiated, manifesting local symptoms of *Pratishyaya* or Allergic Rhinitis. Thus, *Ayurveda* considers that *Agni* is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, *Oja*, *Teja* and *Prana* (life energy).

Key words: *Agni*, *Dhatu*, *Swastha*, *Oja*, *Teja*, Allergic Rhinitis, Digestion, Homeostasis, Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

According to *Darshana*, everything in the universe is the creation of *Pancha-Mahabhutas*. *Agni* is one of among them. *Agni* itself is a very broad term used widely, having different types according to location and body constitution and have various synonyms also.

Mostly, 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. This

Agni is not in the form of flame as the terrestrial fire but is in the form of liquid which is called as "*Pitta*" in *Ayurveda*. There is no *Agni* apart from *Pitta* and *Pitta* itself is "*Agni*" mentioned by *Acharya Charaka*. Ingested food whether in form of eatables, beverages, linctus (licked) and mastic able foods (*chaturvidha ahara pana*) undergoes digestion, absorption and assimilation which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life, and it is performed by *Agni*.^[1] *Agni* is having numerous subsidiaries which show the significance of *Agni* as *Ayu* (life span) and that implies it expands the life expectancy of the human in the event that *Agni* is working appropriately, *Varna* (tone) keeps up with the various composition of the body, *Balam* (strength) *Agni* keeps up with the strength of the body, *Swasthyam* (wellbeing) it keeps up with the wellbeing i.e., physical, mental status of the person, *Utsaha* (energy) it keeps up with the interest of the person in the life, *Upachaya* (body digestion) it keeps up with the stomach related framework and digestion of the body, *Prabha* (gloss) it keeps up with the delicate sheen and delicate gleam of the body, *Ojas* (tissue embodiment) it keeps up with

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the resistance of the body, *Agnayah* (bio fires) it keeps up with the stomach related fires of the body, *Prana* (life) it keeps up with the steady existence of the individual.

Importance of Agni

Bala (strength), *Varna* (colour), *Swasthya* (health), *Utsaha* (enthusiasm), *Upacaya* (development of the body), *Prabha* (complexion), *Ojas* (strength), *Tejas* (valour), *Vaya* (age), and even *Ayu* (life) - all depend on *Agni* and its function (fire-like activity). So long as *Agni* is normal, man can have a healthy and long life, loss of *Agni* leads to loss of life. Foods containing the nutrient materials of the *Dhatus* can be of help to the *Dhatus*, only after they are digested well by the *Agni*.^[2]

Types of Agni

Agni is countless because of its presence in each and every *dhatu Paramanu* (cell) of the body. The following types and numbers of *Agni* are mentioned by different *Acharyas*:

SN	Author	Number	Names	Reference
1.	Acharya Charaka	13	Jatharagni-1, Bhutagni-3, Dhatvagni-1	Ch.Chi.15/38
2.	Acharya Sushruta	5	Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Sadhakagni, Bhrajakagni, Alochakagni	Su.Su.21/10
3.	Acharya Vagbhata	18	Bhutagni-5, Dhatvagni-7, Doshagni-3, Malagni-3	Ash.Hr.Su.12/10-12
4.	Sharangdhara	5	Pachaka, Ranjaka, Sadhaka, Bhrajakagni, Alochaka	Sha.Sa.Pu. Kh.5/32
5.	Bhavmisra	Same as Acharya Charaka and	-	Bh.Pu.Kh. 3/169-180

		Vagbhata		
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According to Darshana Shastra

Nyaya and *Vaisheshika Darshana* described following forms of *Agni*'s

SN	Forms of Agni
1.	Bhaumai
2.	Divya
3.	Audarya
4.	Akaraja

Jathara Agni

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 five basic elements and transforms it for utilization by the respective *Dhatus Paramanus* (tissues).^[3] It is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (*Prasad*) and the waste products (*Kitta*) in our body.

According to *Ashtanga Hridaya*, the location of *Jatharagni* is *Grahani* (duodenum), so called because it withholds the food for a certain time inside the *Amasaya* (stomach) to facilitate digestion. According to *Dhanvantari*, 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. It is responsible for the duration of life, health, *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*.^[4]

Jatharagni is likewise grouped into four classes as indicated by *Bala* of *Agni*

SN	Dosha Predominance	Type of Agni	Koshta
1.	Vata	Vishamagni	Krura

2.	<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Tikshnagni</i>	<i>Mridu</i>
3.	<i>Kapha</i>	<i>Mandagni</i>	<i>Madhya</i>
4.	<i>Sama- doshas</i>	<i>Samagni</i>	<i>Madhya</i>

Bhuta Agni

Each and every cell in our body is composed of the five *Mahabhutas* or five basic elements. *Butagni* is partitioned into five sorts of *Agni* which follow up on these *Panchmahabutas*. They are *Parthivagni*, *Aapyagni*, *Agneyagni*, *Vayavyagni*, *Nabhasagni*. These *Agnis* are liable for the sub-atomic digestion and help in the union and separation of materials at the sub-atomic level. These address the catabolic cycles in our bodies.

These *Bhutagnis* act after the *Jatharagni* present in the stomach and duodenum, acting on the food and causing their disintegration. In the modern physiological perspective, the action of *Jatharagni* can be equated with the digestion in the stomach and duodenum, and the action of the *Bhutagni* can be equated with the conversion of digested materials in the liver.

Dhatva Agni

Acharya Charaka has mentioned the fact that that the seven *Dhatu* that are a support of the body contain their own *Agni*, and by their own *Agni* they digest and transform the materials supplied to them to make the substances alike to them for assimilation and nourishment. *Dhatvagni* is utilized for the arrangement of *Dhatu Utpati Karama* (development of the *Dhatu*). All *Agni* has different *Srotas* for their work. These *Srotas* will give a pathway to providing supplements for digestion. Every *Agni* presents a *Dhatu*.^[5]

These are classified as:

SN	<i>Dhatu</i>	Type of <i>Agni</i> 's
1.	<i>Rasa Dhatu</i>	<i>Rasagni</i>
2.	<i>Rakta Dhatu</i>	<i>Raktagni</i>

3.	<i>Mamsa Dhatu</i>	<i>Mamsagni</i>
4.	<i>Medas Dhatu</i>	<i>Medoagni</i>
5.	<i>Asthi Dhatu</i>	<i>Asthyagni</i>
6.	<i>Majja Dhatu</i>	<i>Majjagni</i>
7.	<i>Shukra Dhatu</i>	<i>Shukragni</i>

Role of Agni in Allergic Rhinitis

The person who is in a state of equilibrium of body's; *Doshas* (humours), *Agni* (digestive fire), *Dhatu* (tissues), *Mala* and whose *Aatma* (soul), *Indriya* (senses) and *Mana* (mind) is happy all are considered as healthy person. Impaired *Doshas*, *Agni*, *Dhatu* and *Mala* caused diseases.

Allergic Rhinitis

Incidence

As per the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI), allergic rhinitis has increased 100 percent in each of the last three decades. According to World Allergy Organisation (WAO), 400 million persons worldwide have Allergic rhinitis. According to one another study, worldwide Allergic Rhinitis affects between 10% and 30 % of population. AR has become the most common allergic/immunologic disorder in the U.S. population, and now affects an estimated one in seven Americans. In India, 26% of population suffers from Allergic rhinitis.

Allergic Rhinitis according to Ayurveda, is mainly due to impaired state of *Agni* which in results formation of *Ama*. This *Ama* which is full of antigen or the molecules which are mimicking the shape and structure of our healthy tissues. Those metabolites they are attack by our immune system to neutralize and same in other tissues. That's how the allergic conditions develop. When *Agni* turns against normal *Dhatu*s, destruction of *Dhatu*s and their *Avayav* takes place, because in normal health there is a coordinated hormonal control over *Agni*. This control is maintained by *Doshas-Dhatu*s-*Malas* and *Ojas*. Due to the destruction, this control is lost.^[5]

Similarities between Allergic Rhinitis and Vataj Pratishyaya^[6]

SN	Allergic Rhinitis	Vataj Pratishyaya
1.	Inhalation of dust, pollen etc.	Rajah Sevana (dust exposure)
2.	Ingestion of certain foods i.e., strawberry, eggs, citrates etc.	Vishmashana, intake of Guru, Shita, Madhur Ahara
3.	Bathing with cold water	Ati Jala Krida
4.	Climate change	Rituvashyama
5.	Humidity	Avashyaya and Anil
6.	Pollution	Dhoom Sevana

Pathophysiology of Allergic Rhinitis viz Pratishyaya

The disease with symptoms similar to those of Allergic rhinitis has been delineated in the name of Vataja Pratishyaya. Instant onset and repeated episodes of these nasal symptoms also indicate the Vata Dosha dominance in its pathogenesis

Agni weakens due to Prakupita Kapha in Pratishyaya. Due to hypofunctioning of Jatharagni, improper Adhya Rasa Dhatu known as Ama, forms in Amashaya. Characteristic properties of Ama is that, it remains undigested, disintegrated, foul smelling, slimy and causes stiffness in the whole body. Amarasa on reaching systemic circulation, does not get digested by both Dhatwagni and Bhootagni Paka. The Apakwa nature of Ama, makes it a Vijateeya Dravya which acts as an antigen against which antibodies are produced.^[7] Furthermore, it vitiates the Doshas in the body to cause different disorders, depending on location and chronicity of Ama. Being a macromolecule, Ama causes obstruction in the microchannels. Initially, Ama manifests in gastrointestinal tract, later reaches systemic circulation with the help of Vata. In case of Pratishyaya, Ama reaches Pranavaha Srotas and certain reactions take place leading to inflammatory process in the Srotas causing different types of discharge from nose.

Need for correction of Agni

Acharya Sushruta mentions the stages of Pratishyaya includes:

1. Sama avastha
2. Pakwa Avastha

According to Acharya Dalhana, Pakwa Pratishyaya is Ghana Avalambamana whereas Ama Pratishyaya is Tanu Anavalambamana. Acharya Vrudha Sushruta opines that Ama Pratishyaya presents with Aruchi, Vaktra Virasata, Nasasrava, Ruja and Arati. On the contrary, Pakwa Pratishyaya presents with Tanutva in Ama Lakshana, Ghana Peeta Kapha and Laghutva in Shiras, Nasa and Aasya.^[8]

Trikatu being Agnideepaka would help to kindle Agni and thereby pacify Ama, which may be the reason for its mention. For Paka of Pratishyaya, intake of Ahima, Ushna Bhojana, Ardraka Rasa Peya aims at kindling Mandagni. In Pakwa Pratishyaya, Nasya, Virechana, Asthapana, Ghratapana, Kavalagraha is the line of treatment for Dosha Nirharana, which indirectly prevents further vitiation of Agni.^[9] Samsarjana Krama after the Shodhana Karma helps in kindling the Agni thus, bringing back the Agni to Prakruta Avastha.

DISCUSSION

The whole basis of Ayurveda is the concept of Agni. It also emphasizes the importance of this concept in the management of diseases. Basically, whole of the treatment methodology in Ayurveda revolves around the modulation and management of Agni. Agni literally means fire and in human being it denotes the power of digestion, metabolism and assimilation. Derangement of Agni produces diseases and its destruction causes death. Derangement of Agni leads to production of Ama. Ama is said to be the root cause of all diseases. Uprooting the cause is the main aim of treatment. As Agni is present in each and every cell of the body, accordingly Ama formed by derangement of Agni is also present in each and every cell. It will also be of several types. In most of the disease some types of Agnimandya are often found. Therefore, understanding the concept of Agni and its practical

applicability is very essential for proper treatment of disease.

Allergic Rhinitis imposes a significant financial burden and affects the quality of life of an individual. Treatment modalities for AR include avoidance of allergens, treatment with drugs and if drugs fail to control the disease immunotherapy is the choice of treatment. Drugs for treating Allergic Rhinitis include Antihistaminic, Sympathomimetic drugs, oral and topical corticosteroids, and leukotriene receptor antagonists. But all these drugs give only symptomatic relief and none of these are free from adverse effects.^{[9],[10]}

In too, modern science, it assumes that Allergic Rhinitis is a condition which can't be treated. Probable *Samprapti* explained on the basis of *Agni Dushti* resulting in *Pratishyaya* aids in *Samprapti Vighatana* line of treatment. Extensive clinical study is necessary for verification and establishment on the theory of *Ama* acting as an antigen. Significance of specific measures described for the rectification of *Agni Dushti* in accordance to the specific stage of *Pratishyaya* also opens up scope for large scale analytical and clinical studies in the field.

CONCLUSION

In clinical practice *Agni Pariksha* of the patient is very important, because on the basis of this *Pariksha* future treatment plan can be decided. Healthy state of the body and disease condition depends absolutely on *Agni*. *Vata (Prana, Udana, Samana, and Apana)* stimulates the digestive fire. *Jatharagni* is important because it facilitates secretion of various digestive juices, enzymes etc. leading to proper digestion of food. Further *Dhatvagni* and *Bhutagni* help for the digestion absorption and assimilation of food substances into the body.

Pratishyaya, a commonly occurring disease involves *Dushti* of *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha* along with *Agni Dushti*. It occurs due to *Prajnaparadha* of humans. Intake of indigestible, junk food leads to *Agni Dushti*. Part of *Ama* thus formed reaches systemic circulation. Macromolecules of *Ama* clogs minute *Srotas* leading to

Srotosanga in addition to acting as an antigen in manifesting *Pratishyaya*. The *Ama Pachana* and *Agni Deepana* drugs and formulations mentioned in Ayurveda classics for *Ama Pratishyaya* have anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, digestive and carminative action. Thus, by simple measures of correcting *Agni* would be sufficient to manage recurrence of such a common condition.

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