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Indexed
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, Dhatus, 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 life. 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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Acharya Charaka</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Jatharagni-1, Bhutagni-3, Dhatvagni-1</td>
<td>Ch.Chi.15/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Acharya Sushruta</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Sadhakagni, Bhrajakagni, Alochakagni</td>
<td>Su.Su.21/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bhavmisra</td>
<td>Same as Acharya Charaka and</td>
<td>Bh.Pu.Kh.3/169-180</td>
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According to Darshana Shastra

Nyaya and Vaisheshika Darshana described following forms of Agni's

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Forms of Agni</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bhaumai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Divya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Audarya</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Akaraja</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Dosa Predominance</th>
<th>Type of Agni</th>
<th>Koshta</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Vata</td>
<td>Vishamagni</td>
<td>Krura</td>
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</table>
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, Aapagyagni, 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 Dhatus). 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Dhatu</th>
<th>Type of Agni’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rasa Dhatu</td>
<td>Rasagni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rakta Dhatu</td>
<td>Raktagni</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Role of Agni in Allergic Rhinitis

The person who is in a state of equilibrium of body’s; Doshas (humours), Agni (digestive fire), Dhatus (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 Dhatus, destruction of Dhatus and their Avayav takes place, because in normal health there is a coordinated hormonal control over Agni. This control is maintained by Doshas-Dhatus-Malas and Ojas. Due to the destruction, this control is lost. [5]
A critical review on importance of Agni w.s.r. to its role in Allergic Rhinitis

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Similarities between Allergic Rhinitis and Vataj Pratishyaya[6]

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Allergic Rhinitis</th>
<th>Vataj Pratishyaya</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Inhalation of dust, pollen etc.</td>
<td>Rajah Sevana (dust exposure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ingestion of certain foods i.e., strawberry, eggs, citrates etc.</td>
<td>Vishmeshana, intake of Guru, Shito, Madhur Ahara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bathing with cold water</td>
<td>Aji Jala Krida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>Rituvaishamya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Humidity</td>
<td>Avashyaya and Anil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>Dhoom Sevana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Sushrutha 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 Laghutwa 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, Ardaka Rasa Peya aims at kindling Mandagni. In Pakwa Pratishyaya, Nasya, Virechana, Asthapana, Ghritapana, Kavalagragha 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 Prajnapprodha 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.

REFERENCES


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