



REVIEW ARTICLE

Role of Agnivikriti in the Pathogenesis of Diseases

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Abstract

According to the fundamental principles of Ayurveda, Agni holds a vital role in maintaining the physiological functions of the human body. Agni is broadly classified into three types — Jatharagni, Bhutagni, and Dhatvagni. Among these, Jatharagni is considered Paramasukshma (extremely subtle) and serves as the primary force that transforms Aahara (food substances) into assimilable forms that can be absorbed and utilized by the body. When Agni functions optimally, it converts the ingested food into nutrients that provide energy to all body tissues. Thus, every component of the body depends directly or indirectly on the proper functioning of Agni. It also plays a crucial role in maintaining the equilibrium of the three Doshas — Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Classical Ayurvedic texts state that all diseases originate due to impaired Agni (Mandagni) — “Roga Sarvepi Mandagnou.” When Agni becomes disturbed, it leads to improper formation of Rasa Dhatu, which consequently hampers the sequential formation of Uttarottara Dhatus. Once the Srotas (channels) become dysfunctional, they fail to transport nutrients to their target tissues, resulting in vitiation of other Srotas and Dhatus. These alterations are primarily governed by the aggravated Doshas, which arise due to disturbed Agni. Therefore, Agnidushti (impaired function of Agni) causes disequilibrium of Tridosha, leading to the pathogenesis of various diseases. Hence, Agnidushti plays a pivotal role in the origin and progression of pathophysiological disorders.

Keywords: Agni, Agnidushti (improper function of Agni), Tridosha, Rasadhatu

Introduction

In the universe, the distinction between *Achetan* (non-living) and *Chetan* (living) entities lies in the presence of *Agni Tatwa* within the living organisms. According to Ayurveda, it is *Agni* that enables the digestion, absorption, and assimilation of ingested food — processes

indispensable for sustaining life. Ayurveda regards *Dehagni* as the fundamental cause of *Ayu* (life span), *Varna* (complexion), *Bala* (strength), *Swasthya* (health), *Utsaha* (vitality), *Chayapachya* (metabolism and growth), *Prabha* (radiance), *Ojas*, *Tejas* (energy), and *Prana* (vital force).[1] Emphasizing the significance of *Agni*,



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Acharya Charaka states that cessation of its function leads to death, whereas equilibrium of *Agni* (*Sama Agni*) ensures perfect health and longevity. Conversely, when *Agni* becomes vitiated, metabolic balance is disturbed, leading to disease. Hence, *Agni* is described as the *Moola* (vital source) of life.[2] Charaka further explains that the body's structural components, when divided into the minutest *Dhatu Paramanus* (atomic units), become innumerable and imperceptible, and that *Vata* and intrinsic nature govern their *Sanyoga* (union) and *Vibhaga* (disjunction).[3] In modern scientific terms, cellular metabolism, division, and proliferation occur continuously from birth until death, with the cell functioning as the body's fundamental unit. Thus, in the Ayurvedic context, cells can be correlated with *Dhatu Paramanus*. For these continuous cellular processes, biological energy is indispensable for survival — this vital energy, in Ayurvedic philosophy, is represented by *Agni*.

Aims and Objectives

- To conduct a detailed study on the concept of *Agni*.
- To analyze the role of *Agnidushti* in the pathogenesis of diseases.

Materials and Methods

The principal Ayurvedic sources utilized for this study include the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Sangraha*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Madhava Nidana*, along with their respective commentaries. Additionally, reference was made to standard textbooks on *Rognidan evam Vikriti Vigyan* and *Sharir Kriya*, as well as various research articles related to the subject.

Review and Discussion

Types of Agni

The concept of *Agni* varies across different classical Ayurvedic texts, as summarized below:

- **Acharya Charaka** describes a total of **thirteen types of Agni** — *Jatharagni* (1), *Bhutagni* (5), and *Dhatvagni* (7) (Cha. Chi. 15/38).[4]

- **Acharya Sushruta** identifies **five forms of Agni**: *Pachakagni*, *Ranjakagni*, *Alochakagni*, *Sadhakagni*, and *Bhrajakagni*. Additionally, he makes an indirect reference to the **five Bhutagnis** while explaining the transformation of ingested food (Sh. Su. 21/10).[5]
- **Acharya Vagbhata** mentions several types of *Agni*: *Bhutagnis* (5), *Dhatvagnis* (7), *Doshagnis* (3), and *Malagnis* (3) (A. Hr. Sha. 3/70).[6]
- **Acharya Sharangadhara** recognizes **five forms of Pitta**, namely *Pachaka*, *Bhrajak*, *Ranjaka*, *Alochaka*, and *Sadhaka* (Sha. Sa. Pu. Kh. 5/47–50).[7]
- **Acharya Bhavamishra** follows the descriptions given by **Charaka and Vagbhata** (Bh. Pu. Kh. 3/169, 180).[8]

Agni is considered innumerable due to its presence in every *Dhatu Paramanu* (cell) of the body.[9] Broadly, *Agni* is categorized into thirteen types based on its functional activity and site of action. These include:

1. **Jatharagni** – a single *Agni* located in the *Pakwashaya* (stomach and duodenum).
2. **Bhutagni** – five types corresponding to the *Panchamahabhutas* (five fundamental elements).
3. **Dhatvagni** – seven forms, each residing in one of the *Sapta Dhatus* (seven body tissues).

Jatharagni

Jatharagni is regarded as the foremost among all types of *Agni*, as the functions of both *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni* depend upon its state. Any increase or decrease in *Jatharagni* correspondingly alters the activity of *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*. [10] According to *Acharya Sushruta*, no other *Agni* can exist independently of *Pitta*, since the increased digestive and metabolic activity produced by the *Ushna Guna* (hot quality) of *Pitta* is analogous to the action of *Agni*. [11] *Acharya Marichi* also emphasized that *Agni* situated within *Pitta* produces either beneficial or harmful outcomes depending on its balance or vitiation. *Chakrapani*, in his

commentary on the term “*Pittantargata*,” explains that *Pitta* does not perform combustion itself but serves as the carrier of *Agni*’s heat energy.[12] *Acharya Dalhana* further remarks, “*Teja Patham Jatharanal Margam*,” indicating the presence of the *Agnivaha Srotas* (channel of digestive fire).[13] Thus, *Jatharagni* ensures the proper functioning of both *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*.

Bhutagni

Bhutagni refers to the digestive and transformative fires inherent in each of the *Panchamahabhutas*. There are five types of *Bhutagni* corresponding to the five elements—*Parthiva* (earth), *Apya* (water), *Tejasa* (fire), *Vayavya* (air), and *Nabhasa* (ether). Each cell (*Dhatu Paramanu*) in the human body is composed of these five fundamental elements and, therefore, contains their respective *Bhutagnis* as well.[14] All the nutrients consumed are also constituted of these five elements, each endowed with its own specific *Bhutagni* or biological energy. Hence, the *Bhutagnis* within the body and those inherent in the nutrients are analogous in elemental composition and function, facilitating effective assimilation and nourishment. *Acharya Charaka* states that each *Bhutagni* digests and metabolizes the portion of the corresponding element present in the ingested food. Following this digestion, the nutrient fractions possessing the qualities of each element specifically nourish the analogous *Bhautika* components of the body.[15] These *Bhutagnis* act sequentially after the activity of *Jatharagni*, further disintegrating and refining the food substances.

Dhatvagni

All the *seven Dhatus* (fundamental structural and functional tissues of the body) possess their own specific *Agni*, which metabolizes the nutrient materials delivered to them through their respective *Srotas* (channels).

1. **Rasagni** – present in the *Rasa Dhatu*
2. **Raktagni** – present in the *Rakta Dhatu*

3. **Mamsagni** – present in the *Mamsa Dhatu*
4. **Medagni** – present in the *Meda Dhatu*
5. **Asthyagni** – present in the *Asthi Dhatu*
6. **Majjagni** – present in the *Majja Dhatu*
7. **Shukragni** – present in the *Shukra Dhatu*

Each *Dhatvagni*—the bio-transformative energy inherent within each *Dhatu*—is responsible for synthesizing and converting the essential portion of *Rasa Dhatu* into nutrients specific to that particular tissue. This process occurs from the *Anna Rasa* (essence of digested food) derived through metabolism. Every *Dhatvagni* exhibits a specialized and selective function, transforming the nutrient components into forms compatible with its own tissue. *Acharya Charaka* affirms that the *seven Dhatus*, which serve as the body’s structural foundation, each contain their respective *Agni*. Through their individual *Agni*, they digest, metabolize, and convert the supplied nutritive materials into substances of similar quality, suitable for nourishment and assimilation.[16]

All these processes—beginning from food digestion to nutrient transformation by *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*—are governed primarily by *Jatharagni*. Any impairment of *Jatharagni* consequently disturbs the functioning of other *Agnis*. The *Aahara Parinata Sukshma Rasa* (refined nutritive essence of food) is distributed throughout the body via *Vyana Vata*. However, if *Jatharagni* functions inadequately, the *Aahara Rasa* remains *Apakva* (improperly digested), leading to the formation of *Ama Dosh*a (metabolic toxins).[17]

Ama

Impairment in the function of *Agni* leads to the formation of *Ama*. As described by the *Acharyas*, dysfunction of any type of *Agni*—whether *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, or *Dhatvagni*—can result in *Ama* accumulation within the body.[18] The presence of *Ama* manifests through multiple pathological symptoms that eventually give rise to various diseases. According to *Acharya Vagbhata*, these manifestations include

Srotorodha (obstruction of bodily channels), *Balabhramsha* (loss of physical strength and immunity), *Gaurava* (sensation of heaviness), *Anilmudhta* (diminished activity of *Vata Dosha*), *Alasya* (lethargy), *Apakti* (impaired digestion), *Nisthivata* (excessive salivation or frequent spitting), *Malasanga* (incomplete elimination of waste), *Aruchi* (loss of appetite), and *Klama* (fatigue without exertion).[19] These clinical features represent the systemic impact of *Ama* formation due to disturbed *Agni* function.

Role of Agni in Pathogenesis of Diseases

From the above review, it is evident that the health and disease states of the body are fundamentally dependent upon the status of *Agni*. According to *Acharya Vagbhata*, impairment or diminution of *Agni* (*Mandagni*) is the root cause of all diseases.[20] In the *Sarvangasundara* commentary, *Arundatta* explains that the term *Sarvaroga* refers to disorders such as *Jwara*, *Atisara*, and others, which primarily arise from *Rasa Dhatu Dushti*. [21]

Agni acts upon *Aahara* (food) to extract the nutritional essence, forming *Aahara Rasa Dhatu*, which is continuously circulated throughout the body by the action of *Vyana Vata*. As discussed earlier, *Rasa Dhatu* serves as the foundation for the sequential formation of subsequent *Dhatu*s. If any obstruction (*Srotorodha*) or abnormality occurs in the *Srotas* (body channels), it leads to vitiation of other *Srotas*, thereby initiating disease formation. Once the *Srotas* become impaired, normal *Dhatu* formation and transportation are hindered, resulting in further tissue vitiation. Thus, *Srotas* can affect other *Srotas*, and *Dhatu*s can influence other *Dhatu*s through a chain of pathological interactions, all of which ultimately stem from the derangement of *Doshas*. These *Doshas* are aggravated as a consequence of the impaired functioning of *Agni*. Various terminologies used in Ayurvedic literature to describe pathological conditions related to *Agni* include *Dushyatagni*, *Agnisada*, *Mandagni*, *Nastagni*, *Durbalagni*, *Atyagni*, *Upahatagni*, *Hatwagni*, *Agninasha*, *Sheetagni*,

Teekshnagni, *Vishamagni*, and *Alpagni*. [24] The repeated mention of these conditions across texts highlights the central role of *Agni* in disease progression.

All *Acharyas* have emphasized *Agni Pariksha* (assessment of digestive and metabolic fire) as a crucial step in both diagnostic evaluation and therapeutic management, underscoring the pivotal role of *Agnidushti* in the pathogenesis of diseases.

Conclusion

Swasthya (the state of health) and *Rogavastha* (the state of disease) are entirely dependent upon the proper functioning of *Agni*. The ingested *Aahara* (food) undergoes a series of metabolic transformations through the coordinated action of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*. When any of these forms of *Agni* become vitiated, they subsequently disturb the functioning of other *Agnis*, ultimately leading to the vitiation of *Doshas*. Hence, it can be concluded that *Agnidushti* plays a pivotal role in the origin and progression of diseases. Therefore, maintaining the balance of *Agni* through proper *Aahara* (diet) and *Vihara* (lifestyle) is essential for achieving a healthy, disease-free, and blissful life.

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