



## Review Article

### CONCEPT OF AGNI AND AMA IN AYURVEDA - A BRIEF REVIEW

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**KEYWORDS:** *Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Jatharagni, Pitta.*

#### ABSTRACT

In our country since last few decades along with scientific and technological revolution a social revolution has also taken place which ultimately has drastically changed dietary habits of society at large. This change in dietary habit has ultimately resulted in manifestation of many problems related to gastrointestinal tract.

Ayurveda, an ancient system of Indian medicine documented and practiced since 1500 B.C. deals with inter-individual variability for personalized and predictive medicine. In *Ayurveda* the concept of *Agni* is very specific one of its kind among other contemporary sciences. Concept of *Agni* is vividly discussed in *Ayurveda* as it is the most significant entity for maintaining health of an individual. In *Ayurveda*, *Agnimandya* is said to be the root cause of most of the diseases. Hence it is important to understand the basic nature of *Agni* so as to take care of it. In the present study we have reviewed the basic concept of *Agni* its types thoroughly and also discussed efficacy of some well-known approaches to treat *Agnimandya* on the basis of recent clinical studies.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Primary aim of *Ayurveda* is to maintain healthy status of an individual and to cure the disease of diseased one. *Ayurveda* is divided into eight main branches. *Kayachikitsa* is the first and foremost among *Ashta Anga* of *Ayurveda*. *Agni* is of prime importance in *Kayachikitsa*, as *Kayachikitsa* is nothing but the *Chikitsa* of *Agni*.

In *Ayurveda*, the term *Agni* is used in the sense of power which converts ingested substances from one form to another. *Agni* converts food in the form of substances which are acceptable by body. *Ayurveda* considers that *Dehagni* is the fundamental cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, lusture, *Oja*, *Teja* and *Prana* (The very life energy).<sup>1</sup>

*Aacharya Sushruta* explains the qualities of *Swasthapurusha* (healthy person) determining his physical and mental health. A person is considered to be healthy when.

- 1) All three *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*) are in well balanced condition.
- 2) The *Agni* is working normally.

- 3) The *Dhatu*s are normally formed and proportionally well balanced performing their respective functions.

- 4) The *Malas* are properly formed and timely eliminated out of the body.

- 5) The soul, mind and all sense organs working properly with pleasure and happiness. Thus overall well-being depends on the equilibrium of *Dosha*, *Agni*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, soul and mind.<sup>2</sup>

While addressing process of *Vyadhi Nirmiti* (disease formation) as well, *Aacharya* has mentioned that weakened power of *Agni* (*Agnimandya*) is the root cause of most of the disorders.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the concept of *Agni* is associated with health of an individual as well as closely related with formation of diseases. The improper diet or faulty life style causes *Agni Dushti* which causes abnormality of *Dhatu*s and ultimately results in various diseases as discussed by *Acharya Charaka*, *Aacharya Sushruta* and other scholars of *Ayurveda*.

Since last few decades along with scientific and technological revolution a social revolution has also taken place which ultimately has drastically

changed dietary habits of society at large. This change in dietary habit has ultimately resulted in manifestation of many problems related to gastrointestinal tract. So it becomes our prime concern to understand *Agnimandya* thoroughly. This research paper is a sincere effort to understand *Agni* and *Agnimandya* in terms of contemporary dietary habits, which will be beneficial for prevention of disease as well as for treatment purpose.

### Aims and objectives

1. To re-evaluate, discuss, and elaborate the Ayurvedic concept of *Agni* and *Ama*.
2. To understand the importance of correcting *Ama* in the treatment of *Neej Vyadhi* with respect to current research work.

### Material And Methods

This article is based on a review of *Ayurvedic* texts. Materials related to *Agni*, *Agnimandya* and other relevant topics have been collected. The main *Ayurvedic* texts used in this study are *Charaka Samhitha*, *Astanga Sangraha*, *Astanga Hridaya* and available commentaries on these texts. We have also referred to the various websites and scientific journals to collect information regarding current researches on the relevant topics.

### Literature Review

#### Agni

Food that we eat undergoes gradual transformation by the effect of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*. The processed metabolic products circulate inside the *Srotas* continuously by the proper functioning of *Vata Dosha*. This in turn favours the overall development and growth of tissues, strength, complexion and happiness as well.<sup>4</sup>

In the text *Brahmasutra*, presence of *Agni* has been said to be the sign of life in the body. *Acharya Yasaka* has given the etymology of the term *Agni*. The word "A" denotes root "I," meaning "to go"; "G" denotes the root "Anja," meaning "to glitter" or root "Daha" meaning "to burn" and "Ni" means "to carry."

It means *Agni* carries everything in it. It moves everywhere and metamorphoses substances, burns, assimilates, glitters and grows.<sup>5</sup>

#### Types of Agni

*Agni* is innumerable because of its presence in each and every *Parmanu* of the body. According to the functions and site of action, *Agni* has been divided into 13 types, i.e. one *Jatharagni*, five *Bhutagni* and seven *Dhatvagni*.

#### 1. Jatharagni

*Jatharagni* is the most important one, which digests four types of food and transforms it into *Rasa* and *Mala*. *Jatharagni Mandya* (i.e., hypo functioning *Agni*) causes production of *Ama*<sup>6</sup>. *Saamataa* is a condition manifesting due to the amalgamation of *Ama* with *Dosha* and *Dushya* (*Dhatu* and *Mala*) resulting into the manifestation of various disorders<sup>7</sup>. Any sort of pathology of *Jatharagni* will ultimately affect the normal functioning of *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni* ultimately causing manifestation of various diseases. Therefore by all means one has to protect *Jatharagni* by means of proper diet according to own *Agni*. One who consumes unwholesome diet due to greed and does not follow rules of diet as mentioned by *Stalwart Acharyas*, give way to diseases caused by the vitiation of *Grahani*<sup>8</sup>.

#### 2. Bhutagni

*Bhutagni* is the one that is present in a basic element (*Bhutas*). There are five *Agnis* in each of the five basic elements, namely – *Parthiva* (earth), *Apya* (water), *Tejas* (*Agni*), *Vayavya* (*Vayu*) and *Nabhasa* (*Aakash*). Each cell (*Dhatuparamanu*) consists of these five *Bhutagnis* as each and every cell in our body is composed of the five basic elements. All the nutrients in this world that we eat also consist of the same five basic elements with their respective *Agni*. *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned that the five *Bhutagni* digest their own part of the element present in the food materials. After the digestion of food by the *Bhutagni*, digested materials containing the elements and qualities similar to each *Bhutas* nourish their own *Bhautika* elements of the body<sup>9</sup>. However, there is an indirect reference of five *Bhutagnis* underlying in the brief description made to the transformation of food stuff.<sup>10</sup>

#### 3. Dhatwagni

Each of the seven type of *Dhatu* viz. *Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja* and *Shukra* have their own *Agni* known as *Dhatwagni*. Each *Dhatvagni* present in each *Dhatu* synthesizes and transforms the essential *Dhatu* nutrients required for that particular *Dhatu* from the basic nutrients present in the *Anna Rasa*.<sup>11</sup>

According to *Vagbhata* the *Dhatwagni* is *Sukshmaansh* of *Jatharagni* which is situated in *Dhatu*. It's *Sada* (diminished power) and *Dipti* (increased power) causes *Dhatuvruddhi* and *Dhatukshaya* respectively.<sup>12</sup>

#### Other Types

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, five types of *Agnis* are illustrated, viz. *Pachakagni*, *Ranjakagni*, *Alochakagni*, *Sadhakagni* and *Bhrajakagni*.<sup>13</sup>

*Vagbhata* has described different types of *Agnis*, viz.- *Audaryagni*, *Bhutagnis*<sup>14</sup>. *Sharangadhara* has described five *Pittas*. (*Pachak*, *Bhrajak*, *Ranjak*, *Alochaka* and *Sadhak*)<sup>15</sup>.

*Agnis* in the body are divided into four types with respect to their '*Bala*'<sup>16-17</sup>

- A. *Teekshnagni*- *Teekshna Agni* is the one having tolerance for all types of *Apachara* in *Aahar* is called *Teekshnagni*. Due to predominance of *Pitta Dosh* in *Agni Adhithana*, *Agni* becomes *Teekshna*.
- B. *Manda Agni* - *Manda Agni* is the one having no tolerance of even a little bit of *Apachara*. Due to predominance of *Kapha Dosh* in *Agni Adhithana*, *Agni* becomes *Teekshna*.
- C. *Samagni* - *Agni* at its normality is a *Samagni*. *Sama Agni* is the one which gets *Vikrita* due to *Apachara*. *Samagni* exists in persons having balanced of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha Dosh*.
- D. *Vishamagni* - Due to predominance of *VataDosh* in *Agni Adhithana*, *Agni* becomes *Visham*.

The *Bala* of *Agni* is more or higher in *Teekshnagni* while it is lesser in *Mandagni*. In *Vishamagni* the *Bala* of *Agni* is variable, it can be more at one time or it may become less at another time.

### Importance of Agni

Types of various *Agni* have been discussed above in which *Jatharagni* is the chief because function of *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni* depends on it. While describing importance of *Agni*, *Acharya Charaka* says when *Agni* stops its normal functioning, the individual dies. When *Agni* of an individual is in *Samyavastha* (balanced), then person remains healthy and would lead a long, happy and healthy life. *Agni* of a person when vitiated, the whole metabolism will be disturbed, resulting in ill health and various diseases. Hence, *Agni* is said to be the base of life<sup>18</sup>.

### Ama

*Jatharagni Mandya* will cause *Ama* formation which results in *Strotorodha* and vitiation of all *Doshas*. *Agni Dushti* is an important factor in the pathogenesis of most of the diseases. *Agni Dushti* occurs at two levels i.e., *Jatharagni Mandya* and *Dhatwagni Mandya*. *Atimatrashana* (excessive intake of diet), *Viruddhashana* (intake of food having opposite properties) and *Adhyashana* (eating before the digestion of previously consumed diet) are the factors which cause *Jatharagni Mandya*. *Strotorodha* (obstruction in micro circulatory channels), *Bala Bhransha* (loss of body strength), *Gaurava* (heaviness), *Anil Mudhata* (abnormal movement of *Vata Dosh*), *Aalasya* (laziness), *Apakti* (indigestion), *Nisthiva* (excessive

dribbling of saliva), *Mala Sanga* (obstruction to *Mala* eg. *Purisha*, etc.), *Aruchi* (anorexia), *Klama* (lethargy) these are the signs of presence of *Ama* in body.<sup>19</sup>

### Classic principles of treating Ama Dosha

The line of treatment of *AmaDosh* starts with *Pachana* (digestion of *Ama*) then *Deepana* (increasing digestive power) and lastly *Shodhana* after *Snehan* and *Swedan*. *Shodhana* without *Ama Pachana* results in further complication as *Ama Dosh* is amalgamated within body tissues. Hence *Shodhana Karma* is not recommended as first line of treatment. The overall treatment approach primarily focuses on *Pachana* (digestion of *Ama*), *Deepana* (increasing digestive power), *Anulomana* (purge) and *Shamana* (medicine) to avoid further formation of *Ama*<sup>20</sup>.

### Current studies on effect of various measures to treat Ama

In a recent clinical study entitled, "Clinical study to evaluate the effect of *Ushnodak* in *Mandagni*" the researcher has clinically evaluated the efficacy of lukewarm water on people suffering from *Agnimandya*. For carrying clinical study, 30 subjects were considered. Based on the treatment recommended and its continuous follow up for 40 days, 97 % effectiveness was observed in which 30% subjects were found to be benefitted with improved results. These were evaluated on the basis of various parameters such as *Abhyavaharan Shakti*, *Jarana Shakti*, and *Ruchi*. In this study researcher concluded that, developing habit of consuming *Ushnodak* every day in the morning and late night helps in improving function of *Agni*. For better result in *Agnimandya* or diseases caused by *Agnimandya*, *Ushnodak* is effective as *Anupan* (drink taken with or after medicine) along with *Deepana Pachana* medicine<sup>21</sup>.

In another research study entitled, "Adaptation of *Ashta Ahar Vidhi Visheha Ayatana* in today's life style' author has concluded that the intake of *Ahara* in the appropriate quantity is not enough to bestow good effects on the person's health. To take total benefits of the *Ahara*, it is also necessary to have the knowledge about "*Ashta Ahar Vidhivishesh Aayatana*" i.e., dietary guidelines and to follow the same. It is the time to adopt these *Ayatanas* in our routine life so as to remain healthy. It is wisely said that "It is better to cultivate health instead of treating diseases."<sup>22</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Ayurveda is one of the oldest systems of medicine which has elaborated the effect of diet and lifestyle on health of an individual. *Chikitsa* of *Agni*

is the fundamental line of treatment in Ayurveda. Hence we hereby conclude that one should understand the concept of *Agni* and care should be taken for proper functioning *Agni* as it is the one which responsible for healthy body and healthy life.

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#### Cite this article as:

Shekhar G. Uike, Mayurkumar M. Parate. Concept of Agni and Ama in Ayurveda - A Brief Review. AYUSHDHARA, 2017;4(5):1355-1358.

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

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