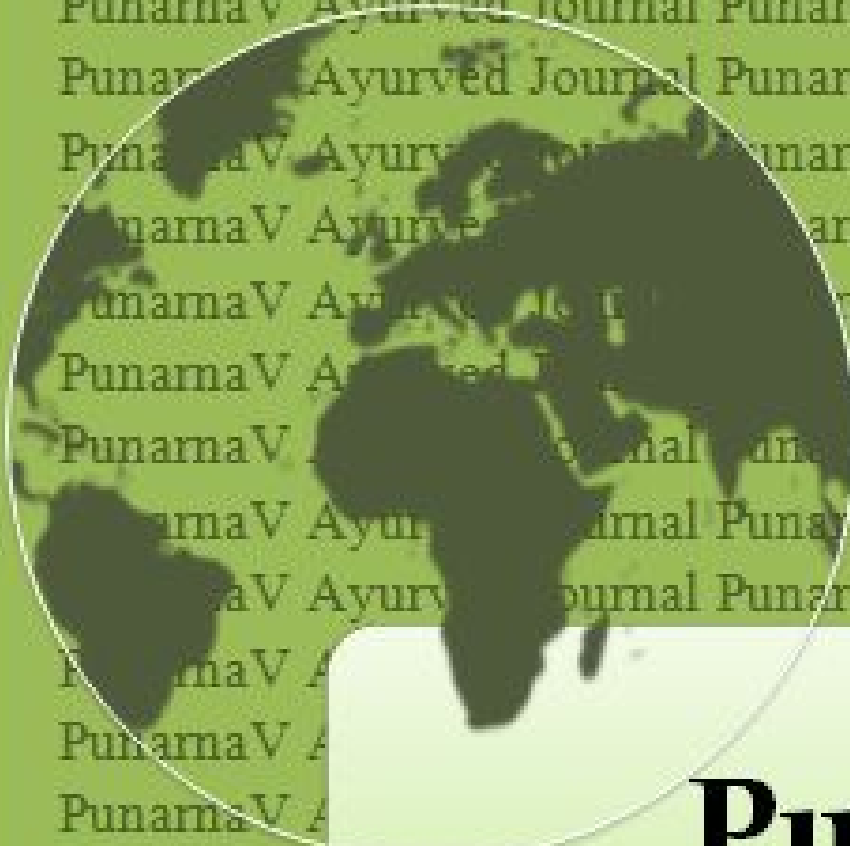


MONTH: MAY: JUNE -2016

VOLUME: 4, ISSUE: 3

ISSN: 2348-1846



Punarna V

TITLE

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**AN INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED AYURVED JOURNAL
ON LINE BI-MONTHLY AYURVED JOURNAL**

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AGNI: CONCEPT AND REVELATION

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ABSTRACT:

Ayurveda has described Agni as an important factor for digestion and metabolism in our body. Agni represents digestive & metabolic fire in the body. It is the substance in the secretions of the body which are directly responsible for digestive and chemical changes in the body. Agni is believed to be the agency for any kind of transformation. It is a known fact that at each and every second multiple procedures of transformations take place in the body. These may be bio chemical or bio physical or any other type of bio transformations. Due to these constant transformation procedures, body grows, develops and lastly destroys too. Jatharagni is chief amongst all types of Agni's because functions of Bhutagni and Dhatvagni depend upon this. Aggravation or diminution of Jatharagni results in aggravation or diminution of Bhutagni and Dhatvagni. Therefore by all means one has to protect the Jatharagni by consuming wholesome diet and behaviour because longevity and strength depend on normal state of Agni.

Medicines also being catalyst or acting on receptors have no big role than being energy stabilizers that either promote or inhibit a chemical reaction for the maintenance of homeostasis. Ayurvediya concept of physiology of pachana, including the biochemistry of digestion and metabolism, is summarized in Jatharagni, Dhatvagni and Bhutagni. Present paper aims to discuss the concept of Agni for carrying out the metabolism of human body as well as for its role in the treatment of various diseases.

Key words: Agni, Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Jatharagni, Metabolism.

INTRODUCTION

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The entire basic physics and biology of *Ayurveda* is greatly different from the modern basic sciences and for understanding of the structure and function of human body, the pathology and diagnostics are based on its own theories of *Triguna (Sattva-Raja-Tama)*, *Tanmatra*, *Panchamahabhuta*, *Tridosha (Vata-Pitta-Kapha)* and *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 *dhatu*s can be of help to the *dhatu*s, only after they are cooked (digested) well by the *Agni*. With the help

of that particular *Agni*, the body substances can get nourishment and can perform their functions normally. This can be understood in the terms of wear and tear phenomenon of each body cell. It is very clear that any of the body cell cannot do anything without the help of *Agni*; therefore a *Vaidya* should always take care of *Agni*, as the *Prasama* or *Prakopa* of *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala* are dependent on the status of *Agni*. In other words, it can be said that homeostasis of *Dosha* etc., can be maintained through *Agni*ⁱ. *Agni* may be correlated with digestive (*paka*) and different kinds of hormones, enzyme and co-enzymes activities etc. which participate in the digestive & metabolic functions.

Pitta has its maximum active potential in the body in *yuva-avastha*(young stage). *Pitta* being the representative of *Agni* in the body facilitates the *pachanakriya* in the body. Hence the digestive & metabolic rates in this age are higher. Vigor & vitality of human body are also maintained by the balanced functions of *Agni*. Hence it is vital factor for proper growth & development of the body & body functionsⁱⁱ. Due to advancement in age, depletion of *Agni* takes place (in old age) which causes instability in *Agni*, ultimately leading to decay due to defective digestion in metabolismⁱⁱⁱ. When the abnormal *Agni*

(digestive activity) is there, digestion of food will not be proper. In *Mandagni*, the food will be *Apaka* (inadequately digested or not digested at all), in case of *Tikshnagni* it will be *dagdhapaka* (over burnt) and in case of *Vishamagni* it will be *pakwaapakwa* (mixture of digested and undigested) and also different from one period of digestion to the other.^{iv}

TYPES OF AGNI

Agni is countless because of its presence and function manifested in each and every *dhatuparamanu* (cell) of the body. According to Ayurveda there are thirteen types of *Agni* in body namely-

Seven *Dhatwagni*, five *Bhutagni* and one *Jathragni*. Among these, *Jathragni* holds the prime importance as it nourishes other *Agni*.

Jatharagni:

Jatharagni is the main principle substance responsible for disease and health. *Jatharagni* is the *Agni* or bio energy present in the *Jathara* (stomach and duodenum). Its seat is *grahani* (duodenum), so called because it withholds the food for a certain time inside the *Amashaya* (stomach) to facilitate digestion. When the *Agni* undergoes vitiation, *grahani* also gets vitiated and produces diseases.^v There are two types of procedures continuously going on in human body which are *Chaya* and

Apachaya and for that the body has got two synonyms *Deha* and *Sharira*, this wear and tear phenomenon is balanced by *Jatharagni*.^{vi}

Jatharagni is considered to be the most important because each and every nutrient that one ingests first comes to the *Jathara*. *Jatharagni* digests the food materials that consist of the five basic elements and transforms it for utilization by the respective *Dhatuparamanus* (tissues). It is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (*Prasad*) and the waste products (*kitta*) in our body.^{vii}

Bhutagni:

Bhutagni is the one that is present in a basic element (*Bhutas*). Each and every cell in our body is composed of the five *mahabhutas* or five basic elements. Naturally, each cell (*dhatuparamanu*) consists of these five *Bhutagni* also. All the nutrients in this world that we eat also consist of the same five basic elements with their respective *Agni* or bio energy. After the digestion of food by the *Bhutagni*, digested materials containing the elements and qualities similar to each *bhutas* nourish their own specific *bhautika* elements of the body.^{viii}

Dhatvagni:

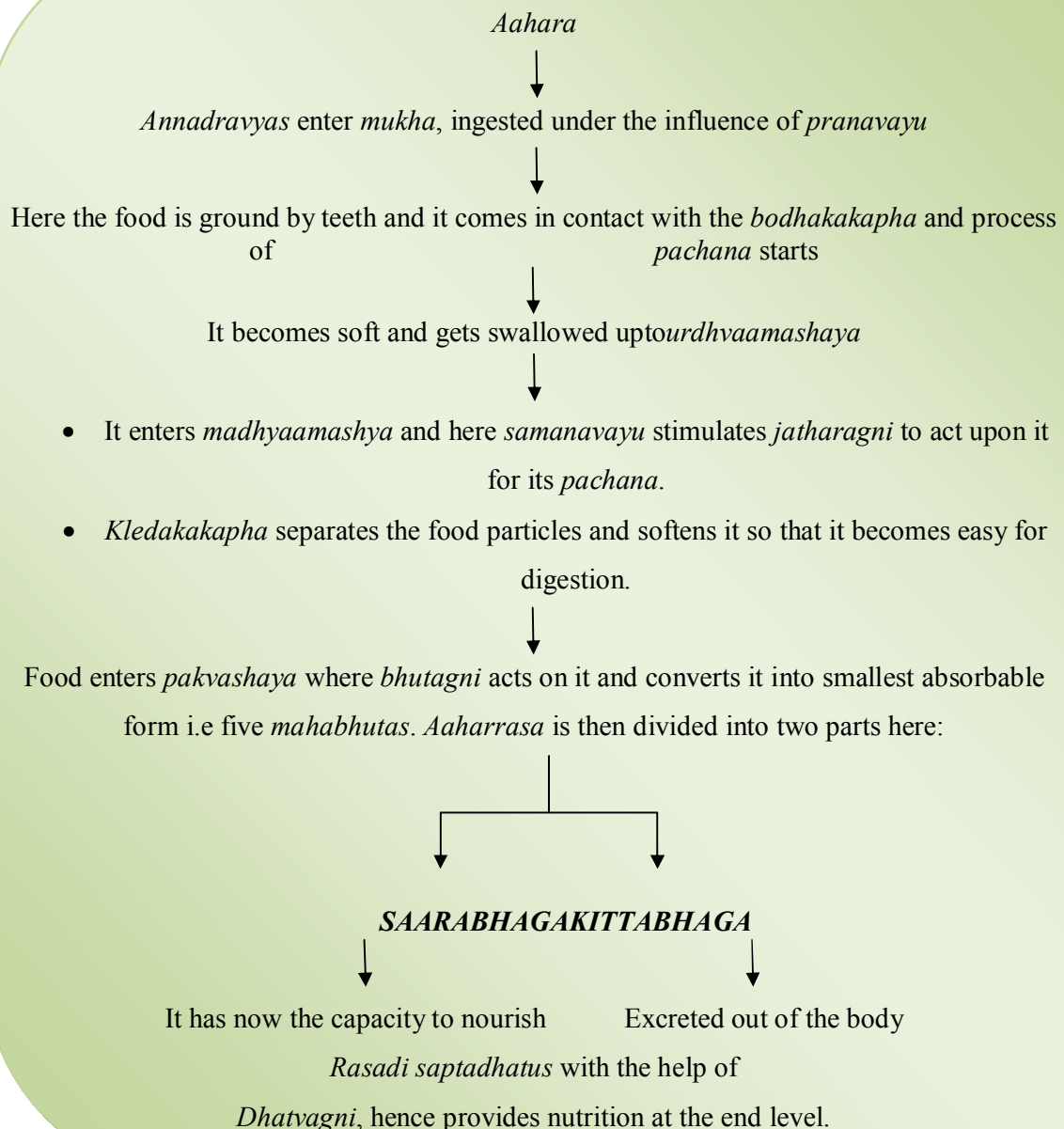
All the seven *Dhatu*s (seven element tissues of the body) contain their own *Agni* to metabolize the nutrient

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materials supplied to them through their own *Srotas*. Each *Dhatvagni* or the bio energy present in each *Dhatu* synthesizes and transforms the essential *Rasa Dhatu* required for that particular *Dhatu* or cell from the basic nutrients present in the *Anna Rasa* or essence of the diet that we consume. *Jatharagni* is directly related to *Dhatvagni* or bio-energy in the cells and

their metabolic processes, with ultimate tissue metabolism or *Dhatu-Paka* process. All the *Dhatvagni* 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*.^{ix}

PROCESS OF PACHANA



DRUGS USED COMMONLY FOR AGNI DEEPANA KARMA

(1) *Agnimantha* (*Clerodendrum phlomidis* Linn. f.)

The drug *Agnimantha* is having *katu-tiktarasa*, *rukshaguna*, *ushnavirya* and *katuvipaka*. Based on its *rasa panchaka*, it is potent *Agnidipaka*. As the liver is responsible for the metabolism of the body, so is the action of *agni* in the body.

The drug also proved to be hepatoprotective, thereby paving the way for its action on *agni*. Antihepatotoxic activity of the chloroform, petroleum ether, methanol fractions of *Clerodendrum phlomidis* whole plant were assessed by performing biochemical parameters and histopathological studies against toxicity caused by the carbon tetrachloride. The histopathological studies of the liver showed swelling and necrosis in hepatocytes in CCl₄ treated rats, treatment with different fractions had reduced significantly the necrosis and swelling of the hepatocytes. The biochemical parameters also showed the significant antihepatotoxic activity.^x

(2) *Ajmoda* (*Carum roxburghianum* (DC) Craib.)

The drug *Ajmoda* is having *katu-tikta rasa*, *laghu-ruksha-tikshnaguna*, *ushnavirya*, and *katuvipaka*. Based on its *Katurasa*, it improves the digestion and helps to make

the first *dhatu* in proper form, so will act on the *rasadhatu*. It shows *dipana*, *pachana* property which improves the function of *agni*. It will stop the further *ama* production.

(3) *Trikatu*

Trikatu is a poly herbal preparation, it consists of three crude drugs namely *Maricha* (*Piper nigrum* Linn.), *Pippali* (*Piper longum* Linn.) and *Shunthi* (*Zingiber officinalis* Rosc.) in the ratio of (1:1:1). The drug *Shunthi* is having *katu rasa*, *laghu-snigdha-guna*, *ushnavirya* and *katuvipaka*. The drug *Maricha* is having *katu rasa*, *laghu-tikshnaguna*, *ushnavirya* and *katuvipaka*. The drug *Pippali* is having *katu rasa*, *laghu-snigdha-tikshnaguna*, *anushna-sheetavirya* and *madhuravipaka*. *Trikatuchurna* is considered as one of the best drugs to treat the condition of *Ama* (improperly digested absorbed and improperly metabolized food particles including free radicals). *Trikatu* is regarded as the drug of choice in cases of *Agnimandya* (poor digestion due to faulty digestive process). Its *Dipana*, *Pachana* effect (Carminative and digestive) can also be understood as, it stimulates liver to produce enzymes. *Piper longum* and *Piper nigrum* are rich sources of piperine, which is a strong bioavailability enhancer^{xi}.

(4) *Kutaki* (*Picrorhiza kurroa* Royle ex Benth)

The drug *Kutki* is having *tikta rasa*, *ruksha-laghuguna*, *sheetavirya* and *katuvipaka*. The root or rhizome of *Picrorhizakurroa*, is the source of the active ingredient which improves gallbladder secretions, thus aiding in the digestion and metabolism of fats. It is very effective in regulating fat metabolism in the liver. In a study of hyperlipaemic mice on a high-fat diet, daily doses of water extract of *Picrorhiza kurroa* significantly reduced total cholesterols, triglycerides, and LDL levels after 12 weeks.^{xii}

(5) *Mustaka (Cyperusrotundus Linn.)*

It improves digestive functions due to its *tikta-katu-kashaya rasa*, *laghu-rukshaguna*, *sheetavirya* and *katuvipaka*. It is believed that altered regulation of the digestive system results in indigestion and obstruction of the channels through which energy is controlled in the body.

Cyperusrotundus helps clear the blocked channels. In rat studies, *Cyperusrotundus* stopped weight gain, and *in vitro*, stimulated lipolysis in 3T3-F442 adipocytes, suggesting that purple nutsedge can activate beta-adrenoreceptors.^{xiii}

(6) *Jeeraka (Cuminumcuminum Linn.)*

The drug *Jeeraka* is having *katurasa*, *laghu-rukshaguna*, *ushnavirya* and *katuvipaka*. *Katurasa* and *Katuvipaka* aid the *Agni* for proper digestion of food. *Ushnaguna* due to the principle of *samanya*^{xiv} automatically boosts *agni*.

(7) *Chitraka (Plumbagozeylanica Linn.)*

The drug *Chitraka* is having *katu rasa*, *laghu-ruksha-tikshnaguna*, *ushnavirya* and *katuvipaka*. Whole of the *rasapanchaka* of this plant is having the properties of aiding *agni*.

DISCUSSION

Dravyas act on different types of *agni*, most of which have *katu*, *tikta rasa*, *laghu,rukshaguna*, *ushnaveerya*, *katuvipaka* and *kaphavataghna* Property. *Acharya Charaka* said that *katu* rasa is responsible for *agnideepana*^{xv}. *Katu* rasa due to its *bhautikatvai*. *evayu* and *agnimahabhuta* present in it. So by the theory of *Samanaya*^{xvi} it aids the process of digestion. *Tiktarasa* has been described by *Acharaya Charaka* as *deepana*^{xvii}, and *tiktarasa* also stimulates *agni* due to its

vayu mahabhuta dominating property; which stimulates *samana vayu* and absorbs *kledaka kapha*, which are in turn responsible for *mandagni*. Also *tikta rasa* has *stroto shodhana* property, and due to the *sukshmaguna* of *aakash mahabhuta* present in it, it acts on minute channels thereby clearing the *sangastroodushti*. For example, *Indrayava*, *Kutki* act on *Rasa Dhatvagni* and *Sariva*, *Mustaka*, *Kutki* act on *Rakta Dhatvagni*; *Haritaki*, *Aamalaki*, *Mustaka*, *Kutaja* act on *Mansa Dhatvagni*

and *Guduchi*, *Aamalaki*, *Mustaka* act on *Asthi-Majja Dhatvagni*. Drug *Nimbuka* is

specially mentioned for the treatment of *Tridoshaja Agnimandhaya*.^{xviii}

CONCLUSION

Various types of dietetic materials are digested in the body by the *Jatharagni*, which is further digested and metabolized by *Bhutagni*, and then is assimilated to the *saptadhatus* by *Dhatvagni* to associate the body with the nutritional strength, complexion and happy life. The whole internal medicine in *Ayurveda* is based on the treatment of *Agni*. These concepts reveal that *Agni* is present in every *paramanu* or cell of the body and not only the processes of digestion and metabolism but every transformation in the body takes place essentially with *Agni* as the energy required to do so. Therefore, *Agni* in the

body is not restricted only to *Jathragni* as it commonly means, but as a comprehensive view, *Agni* is a principle, present in each and every cell of the *Panchahuthika* body. When *Agni* is in balanced state, body maintains healthy condition and any derangement in the normal function of “*Agni*” in the body affects the transformations taking place in the body.

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