

AGNI MAHABHUTA IN AYURVEDA: A HISTORICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Page. No. 38-46

Abstract

Introduction

Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta is one amongst such fundamental concept which can be considered as the core of the basic principles of Ayurveda. Amongst the five *mahabhutas*, only *Agni Mahabhuta* possesses the capability/power for transformation of any substance. *Agni mahabhuta* is having its place exactly in the middle of all, showing its significant role in the transformation of *mahabhutas*. Although extensively described in Vedic and Ayurvedic literature, its historical evolution and conceptual development across different eras have not been comprehensively reviewed. Therefore, this study is needed to systematically explore and compile the literary references of *Agni Mahabhuta* from the Vedic period to the contemporary era, thereby providing a clearer understanding of its classical significance and modern relevance.

Aim:

To critically review the philosophical interpretation and therapeutic applications of *Agni Mahabhuta* from the Vedic period to the contemporary era.

Materials & Methods

To elaborate and elucidate the medico-historical review of *Agni Mahabhuta*, the review was initiated from the Vedic literature and subsequently extended to the classical Ayurveda texts, namely the *Brihatrayi* and their commentaries. Contemporary Ayurveda literature related to *Agni Mahabhuta* were also critically analysed to understand its conceptual evolution from the Vedic era to the present time.

Discussion

For historical glimpse of *Agni Mahabhuta* from Vedic period to today's era all had accepted *Agni Mahabhuta*. *Atharvaveda* compare *Agni* as physician and responsible for origin of Drugs. *Agni* is the only *mahabhuta* that having capacity to transform *Amurta* to *Murta*. Drugs having predominance of *Agnimahabhuta* initiate *Dipana* and *Pachana* in body. Modern researchers interpret *Agni* as a

functional principle responsible for maintaining physiological balance and proper conversion of nutrients into energy and body tissues. Disturbance of Agni leads to systemic dysfunction.

Conclusion

Agni Mahabhuta is one of the most fundamental concepts of Ayurveda, having profound significance from the Vedic period to the contemporary era.

Keywords: *Panchamahabhuta, Agni Mahabhuta.*

Introduction

Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta is one amongst such fundamental concept which can be considered as the core of the basic principles of Ayurveda. Each substance of this universe as well as human body consists all the five *mahabhutas* and also the *chikitsa* (management) of any disease on human being can be done by using these universal substances constituted of *Panchamahabhutas*. In other words, all human beings are a living microcosm of the universe and the universe is a living macrocosm of the human beings.

It is *Sarvatantra Siddhanta* (A universal theory) of Ayurveda which is very much important to understand the other principles. The formation of any *dravya* (substance) occurs with different conjugations and configurations of *mahabhutas*. So, conjugation provides a quantitative difference of *mahabhutas* in different *dravyas*. Depending on the predominance of the *mahabhutas*, the substances are classified as *Parthiva, Apya, Agneya, Vayaviya* and *Akashiya*. Here this concept is described as a review from different literatures. Amongst the five *mahabhutas*, only *Agni Mahabhuta* possesses the

capability/power for transformation of any substance.

Agni mahabhuta is having its place exactly in the middle of all, showing its significant role in the transformation of *mahabhutas*. It plays an important role in the breakdown and resynthesis of *mahabhuta*. *Agni* poses ‘*Rupa*’ as its *Samsiddhika guna*.ⁱ (constant eternal property) hence it can be said that it is the first *mahabhuta* which can be seen or with the help of which, other things can be seen.

Agni is present in two forms: *mahabhuta* and *pitta dosha*. *Kayagni* has got the most important because it is the form of *Agni* which is present in the living bodies, with which Ayurveda deals mainly.ⁱⁱ

Agni is expressed by the term *Ushma* many times in Ayurveda.ⁱⁱⁱ This suggests that *ushma* i.e. heat and thus temperature are the forms of *Agni*. The literal meaning of the word *Agni* according to the derivation is that particular substance which ‘goes’ is called *Agni*. (Bhagvana das 1965).

Aim:

To critically review the philosophical interpretation and therapeutic applications of *Agni Mahabhuta* from the Vedic period to the contemporary era.

Materials:

To elaborate and elucidate the medico-historical review of *Agni Mahabhuta*, the review was initiated from the Vedic literature and subsequently extended to the classical Ayurveda texts, namely the *Brihatrayi* and their commentaries. Contemporary Ayurveda literature related to *Agni Mahabhuta* were also critically analysed to understand its conceptual evolution from the Vedic era to the present time.

Methods:

Subject-related data regarding *Agni Mahabhuta* were compiled from various primary and secondary Ayurveda sources. The collected material was systematically arranged in tabular and chronological forms, including references of *Agni* in Vedic literature, Ayurvedic classics and their commentaries. Different aspects such as types of *Agni*, functions, physiological significance, role in health and disease, and contemporary interpretations were compiled and analyzed. The collected data were thoroughly studied, reorganized, and critically evaluated to identify common concepts, variations, and the gradual evolution of the understanding of *Agni Mahabhuta* from the Vedic era to the present time.

Observations:

In history, knowledge was first encountered in the Vedas. Lokamanya Tilaka determined the time of Rigveda's reincarnation between 4000 and 6000 BC.

For historical glimpse of *Agni Mahabhuta* from Vedic period to today's era, the total coverage of historical aspects, it has been divided into 6 sections namely.

- A. *Vedic kala*
- B. *Upanishada kala*
- C. *Darshana kala*
- D. *Samhita kala*
- E. *Sangraha kala*
- F. *The modern period*

A) Vedic Kala:

In the Vedic Samhita, 2500 mantras related to *Agni* were used. In the Vedas, the word *Agni* has different meanings in different contexts, but the word *Agni* is mainly used in the form of God. In the Vedic period, we discovered that the raging fire was inextricably linked with the god of fire.

References from Atharvaveda flushes a beam of light on this fact when it refers that *Agnis* are in waters, in weapons, in human beings, in stones and herbs and plants and in the sacred fire of *yajnas*. (Atharv.16/5/7)

- *Atharvaveda* compares *Agni* to a physician and is responsible for the origin of drugs.
- The first phrase of Rigveda stands for *Agni* and the primary Sukta with 9 *Ruchas* prays *Agni.iv*
- The earliest layers of the Vedic texts of Hinduism, such as section 6.1 of *Kathaka Samhita* and section 1.8.1 of *Maitrayani Samhita* state that the universe began with nothing, neither night nor day existed, what existed was just *Prajapati* (also referred to as *Brahman*). *Agni* originated from the forehead of *Prajapati*, assert these texts.

B) Upanishada Kala:

The Upanishada are taken into consideration because the closing and the superb a part of Vedic literature. Therefore, after the Vedic duration, the records of *Agni* ought to be traced out within side the Upanishada duration. The duration of Upanishada is commonly agreed as to be 1500 B.C. In the

Upanishada the identical idea of Agni is determined widely mentioned as within side the Vedas.

- In the Vedas digestion strength of Agni has been referred to, however, in Chhandogya Upanishada, three levels of digestion had been referred which ends up in three styles of merchandise viz. Sthulasara, Sukshmasara and Kitta.
- In the Kathopanipad it's miles referred to that there may be simplest one Agni within side the universe and it has no shape. But the Agni that's commonplace in a few shape takes the shape of the item where it placed.v
- In Chandogya Upanishadavi Agni placed first and mentioned as,

“Agni hin Karo”

- Fire is the syllable him- because it occupies the first place.
- In Mandukyopaniṣad, seven kinds of flames of Agni have been referred to, Kali, Karali, Manojava, Sulohita, Sudhumravarna, Sphulingini. Visvarupidevi. In Hotropaniṣad, 4 kinds of Agnis are referred to inside the residing body-Suryagni, Darshanagni, Dakshinagni, Kosthagni.
- In Agnipurana, it is mentioned that Agni has qualities like Darshana, Ushma, Pakti, Megha, Varna, Balam, Chhaya and shourya.vii

C) Darshana & Ayurveda Philosophical Period:

Agni is present in two forms. 1) Eternal (*Nitya-* in *paramanu Rupa*)

2) Ephemeral

(*Anitya- Karya Rupa*)

Types of Anitya Agni:

It is of 3 types

- 1) *Tejo Shareera*: Located in the *Adiloka*
- 2) *Tejo Indriya*: Located in the form of *Chakshurindriya*
- 3) *Tejo Vishaya*: It is again sub-divided into 4 parts

• Divyagni:

The lightning of clouds within side the wet season is Divyagni. The glitter of Sun, Moon, X-rays, Gamma rays, and Ultraviolet rays come under Divyagni.

• Bhaumagni:

Various flames are blanketed in Bhaumagni. The Agni that's a gift within side the leaves of trees, in vegetation etc. and used for Paka-kriya within side the kitchen is Bhaumagni.

• Akarajagni:

The Agni which lives below the earth mainly in metals like gold and copper is to be called Akarajagni.

• Audaryagni:

The Agni lives in Jathara (stomach) and digests all sorts of food. This is the Agni which has been given extra significance in Ayurveda for chikitsa.

D) The Samhita Kala:

It is believed that this period began between the 2nd and 4th centuries. The entire Ayurveda literature is divided into many parts. Ayurveda Tantra was created in the form of sutras, but the ancient Acharyas examined its wisdom, and now appears in the form of Samhita.

In the conference organized under the chairmanship of *Bhagavan Atreya*, as reported in

Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 12th Chapter, *Maricha* explained the nature of *Agni* vividly.^{viii} He explained that *Agni* contained in *Pitta* performs various functions in the body. Learned commentator *Cakrapani* added on this issue that *Agni* in a living body is in the form of *Pittoshma* i.e. *Ushma* of *Pitta*.^{ix} To be precise, *Pitta* is the seat of *Agni* as it has a co-existence, always, the *Pitta* is many times attributed for the functions of *Agni*.^x We have observed that *Asrayasah* is one of the synonyms of *Agni*.^{xi} Thus, it needs some seats to manifest. In the living body *Pitta* is this seat.^{xii}

Sushruta Samhita is the main text of Shalya Tantra. In Vranaprashna Adhyaya, the author of Sushrutasamhita is curious whether *Agni* and *Pitta* are synonyms for the same entity or different entities. The same chapter explains that *Agni* cannot exist without *Pitta*.^{xiii} *Agni's* Tikshnosna guna exists in *Pitta's* function.

In Harita Samhita, it is mentioned that *Agni* is present in the living body since the fertilization of ovum.^{xiv} Sperm excreted into yoni at conception is converted into five types of *Agni* and converted into kalala form. Later this form of Kalala changed into Pinda form.

E.) Sangraha Kala:

According to Acharya vagbhata Pacaka *Pitta* is generally termed as *Agni* or *Jatharagni*.^{xv} Hina, Mithya and Atiyoga of *Dhatvagni* is because of *Jatharagni*.^{xvi}

In Ashtangahridaya, Vagbhatta has accompanied Charaka Samhita in particular. In Sutra sthana Adhyaya, it is mentioned that *Agni* wherein that *Pitta* is located said among Pakvashaya and Amasaya. This *Pitta* digests meals and separates them into Sara and Kitta and with the aid of using final there, it nourishes different parts of the body. It is referred to as Pachaka *Pitta* and is also referred to as Pachakagni or Jatharagni.^{xvii}

F) The Modern Period:

The duration after sixteenth century is taken into consideration to be the Modern duration. The foremost texts of this era are Bhavaprakasha, Bhaishajyaratnavali, Yogaratnakara, etc. But in this era, there's no unique contribution of the writers with regards to *Agni*.

Modern researchers interpret *Agni* as a functional principle responsible for maintaining physiological balance and proper conversion of nutrients into energy and body tissues. Disturbance of *Agni* may therefore be understood in relation to metabolic disorders, impaired digestion, reduced immunity, and systemic dysfunction.

In *Charaka Samhita* it is mentioned that *Ahara matra* is directly related to *Agni Bala*, Here *Agni Bala* is nothing but *Ushnata*. That is why *Ushna guna* is considered as *Agni-Bala*.

Guna of Agneya Dravyas:

Table no.1: Guna of Agneya Dravyas mentioned by different Acharyas:

<i>Guna</i>	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Ashtanga Samgraha</i>	<i>Ashtanga Hridaya</i>
<i>Ushna</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Tikshna</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Sukshma</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Ruksha</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Laghu</i>	+	+	+	-
<i>Vishada</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Khara</i>	-	+	-	-

(Note: '+' suggest present, '-' suggest absent)

Karma of Agneya Dravyas:

Table No. 2: Showing Karma of Agni Mahabhuta

<i>Karma</i>	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Ashtanga Samgraha</i>	<i>Ashtanga Hridaya</i>
<i>Dahana</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Pachana</i>	+	+	+	-
<i>Darana</i>	-	+	-	-
<i>Tapana</i>	-	+	-	-
<i>Prakasha</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>prabha</i>	+	+	+	-
<i>varna</i>	+	+	+	+

(Note: '+' suggest present, '-' suggest absent)

Discussion

For historical glimpse of *Agni Mahabhuta* from Vedic period to today's era all had accepted *Agni Mahabhuta*. *Atharvaveda* compare *Agni* as physician and responsible for origin of Drugs. *Agni* is the only *mahabhuta* that having capacity to transform *Amurta* to *Murta*.

Agni is responsible for the external appearance of any substance. The form, shapes and phenomenon of colour depend upon the impact of *Agni*. In *Charakasamhita*, *sutrasthana vatakalakaliya Adhyayaxviii* it was concluded that *Agni* is contained in *Pitta* and performs compatible and incompatible functions when it is *Kupita* and *Akupita* respectively. But the *Pitta* itself is not *Agni*. The *Agneya* portion of *Pitta* is *Agni*.^{xix}

Acharya Vagbhata stated that *Pachaka Pitta* is generally termed as *Agni* or *Jatharagni*.^{xx} *Hina*, *Mithya* and *Atiyoga* of *Dhatvagni* is because of *Jatharagni*.^{xxi} Careful study of *Ashtangasamgraha* reveals that it has mostly followed *Charaka Samhita*, while describing *Agni*. In *Ashtangahridaya*, *Vagbhata* has accompanied *Charaka Samhita* in particular.

In *Vranaprashna Adhyaya*, the author of *Sushrutasamhita* has explained that *Agni* cannot exist without *Pitta*.^{xxii} *Agni's Tikshnosna guna* exists in *Pitta's* function.

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Acharya Charaka & Vagbhata have mentioned the properties of *Panchabhautika Dravyas* by their *Guna* and *Karma*, out of them *Dravyas* are having Six *Guna*, *Ushna*, *Tikshna*, *Sukshma*, *Ruksha*, *Laghu* and *Vishada*. While *Acharya Sushruta* added *Khara guna*. So, total Seven *gunas* are described by *Sushruta*.

Agni is the only *mahabhuta* that having capacity to transform *Amurta* to *Murta*. Drugs having predominance of *Agnimahabhuta* initiate *Dipana* and *Pachana* in body. Modern researchers interpret *Agni* as a functional principle responsible for maintaining physiological balance and proper conversion of nutrients into energy and body tissues. Disturbance of *Agni* may therefore be understood in relation to metabolic disorders, impaired digestion, reduced immunity, and systemic dysfunction.

Conclusion

Drugs having predominance of *Agnimahabhuta* initiate *Dipana* and *Pachana* in body. In *Sushrutasamhita pachana karma* is described for *Vrana* etc. *Tapana*- Balance the body temperature is one of the actions of *Agni mahabhuta*. *Agni Mahabhuta* is one of the most fundamental concepts of *Ayurveda*, having profound significance from the Vedic period to the contemporary era.

Chaukhambha Surabhi Prakashan: 2016, Page no-289.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Acharya YT, editor. Charaka Samhita of Agnivesha, sharira Sthana 28/3, Reprint edition, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Surabhi Prakashan: 2016, Page no-258.

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