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**Dr. Anjana Dixit**  
Principal and Professor,  
department of Kriya Sharir,  
Major SD Singh PG Ayurvedic  
Medical College and Hospital,  
Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh,  
India

## A conceptual study on the role of Jatharāgni in human digestion: An Ayurvedic Perspective

**Anjana Dixit**

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### Abstract

**Background:** In *Āyurveda*, *Agni* is regarded as the foundation of life, governing digestion, metabolism, and overall health. Among the thirteen types of *Agni*, *Jatharāgni* is the principal digestive fire responsible for the transformation of ingested food into absorbable and nourishing forms. It plays a pivotal role in initiating the process of digestion and influences the functioning of *bhūtāgni* and *dhātvaṅni* that follow.

**Aim and Objectives:** To explore and analyze the physiological functions of *Jatharāgni* in digestion as per classical *Āyurvedic* texts and correlate them with modern digestive physiology.

**Materials and Methods:** A conceptual study was conducted using references from *Charaka Samhitā*, *Sushruta Samhitā*, *Ashtāṅga Hṛdaya*, and relevant *tīkā*s (commentaries). Comparative analysis with modern gastrointestinal physiology was carried out to establish a comprehensive understanding.

**Results:** The study reveals that *Jatharāgni* regulates the breakdown, absorption, and transformation of food in a manner similar to the roles of gastric secretions, enzymes, and metabolic hormones in modern science. Imbalance of *Jatharāgni* leads to various digestive disorders like *Ajṛṇa*, *Amlapitta*, and *Grahāṇī roga*.

**Conclusion:** *Jatharāgni* is the cornerstone of digestion and metabolism in *Āyurveda*. It not only governs the physical process of digestion but also maintains systemic balance. Understanding its role is essential for the prevention and management of *Agni*-related disorders.

**Keywords:** *Jatharāgni*, *Agni*, *Digestion*, *Āyurveda*, *Amlapitta*, *Ajṛṇa*

### Introduction

In *Āyurveda*, the concept of *Agni* (digestive and metabolic fire) is central to understanding health, disease, and nutrition. The term *Agni* refers not only to the fire that digests food but also to the transformative processes occurring at every level of bodily function<sup>[1]</sup>. Among the thirteen types of *Agni* described in classical texts, *Jatharāgni* holds the most significant position. It is located in the *Amāśaya* (stomach) and *Grahāṇī* (duodenum/small intestine) and is directly responsible for the digestion of ingested food (*Āhāra*), converting it into *Āhāra Rasa*, which nourishes the *dhātus* and sustains life<sup>[2]</sup>.

The process of digestion in *Āyurveda* is not viewed as a purely mechanical or chemical function but as a bio-energetic phenomenon governed by the strength and quality of *Jatharāgni*. A balanced *Jatharāgni* ensures proper breakdown of food, assimilation of nutrients, and elimination of waste. It determines the efficiency of *bhūtāgni* (elemental transformation) and *dhātvaṅni* (tissue metabolism), which follow the initial stage of digestion. Therefore, any imbalance in *Jatharāgni* affects the entire metabolic pathway, leading to diseases caused by *āma* (toxins due to undigested or improperly digested food)<sup>[3]</sup>.

Classical *Āyurvedic* literature classifies *Jatharāgni* into four types based on its functional state: *Sama Agni* (balanced), *Tikṣṇa Agni* (hyperactive), *Manda Agni* (hypoactive), and *Viṣama Agni* (irregular). These states are influenced by the *doṣas Vāta*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. *Sama Agni* is the ideal state, where digestion occurs efficiently without discomfort or imbalance. *Manda Agni*, associated with *Kapha*, leads to sluggish digestion, while *Tikṣṇa Agni*, dominated by *Pitta*, causes hyperacidity and inflammation. *Viṣama Agni*, related to *Vāta*, leads to unpredictable and erratic digestion<sup>[4]</sup>.

Modern physiology parallels the function of *Jatharāgni* with gastric acid secretion, enzymatic activity, bile function, pancreatic secretions, and peristalsis.

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Dr. Anjana Dixit**  
Principal and Professor,  
department of Kriya Sharir,  
Major SD Singh PG Ayurvedic  
Medical College and Hospital,  
Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh,  
India

However, *Āyurveda* expands this understanding by connecting digestion to overall vitality (*ojas*), mental clarity (*sattva*), immunity, and lifespan. The loss or weakening of *Agni* is said to be the root cause of all diseases (*rogānām āgni-mūlatvam*). Thus, preservation and regulation of *Jaṭharāgni* is emphasized through appropriate *āhāra* (diet), *vihāra* (lifestyle), and therapeutic measures [5].

Understanding the physiological role of *Jaṭharāgni* is essential not only for the prevention and treatment of digestive disorders like *Ajīrna*, *Amlapitta*, and *Grahānī roga*, but also for maintaining systemic balance and longevity. In the present age, where dietary irregularities, sedentary habits, and stress are common, the principles related to *Jaṭharāgni* serve as timeless guidelines for healthy living. A detailed study of this concept offers valuable insight into a holistic approach to digestive health that bridges ancient wisdom with modern science [6].

## Aim and Objectives

### Aim

To study the physiological role of *Jaṭharāgni* in digestion and its significance in maintaining health.

### Objectives

1. To understand the concept of *Jaṭharāgni* from classical *Āyurvedic* texts.
2. To explore the types and functions of *Jaṭharāgni*.
3. To assess the impact of *Jaṭharāgni* on digestion and metabolism.
4. To correlate *Jaṭharāgni* with modern digestive physiology.
5. To highlight the importance of balanced *Agni* in disease prevention.

## Material and Methods

### Materials

#### 1. Primary Classical Sources

1. *Charaka Samhitā*
2. *Sushruta Samhitā*
3. *Ashtāṅga Hṛdaya*
4. *Bhāvaprakāśa Nighaṇṭu*
5. *Madhava Nidāna*

#### 2. Commentaries Used

1. *Āyurveda Dīpikā* by Chakrapāni
2. *Nibandha Saṅgraha* by Dalhaṇa
3. *Sārvāṅgasundarā* by Arunadatta

#### 3. Modern Scientific Sources

1. Standard textbooks of human physiology
2. Peer-reviewed articles on digestive enzymes, gastric function, and gut health

### Methods

- A textual analysis approach was used to extract references on *Jaṭharāgni* and its role in digestion from classical literature.
- A comparative study was conducted between *Āyurvedic* descriptions and modern digestive physiology to identify conceptual parallels.
- Data was categorized based on origin, function, types of *Agni*, and pathological consequences of its imbalance.

## Conceptual Study

In *Āyurveda*, *Jaṭharāgni* is the primary digestive fire located in the *Amāsaya* and *Grahānī* regions corresponding to the stomach and small intestine in modern anatomy. It plays a central role in the breakdown, digestion, and assimilation of food. *Jaṭharāgni* is considered the master regulator of all metabolic fires in the body, including *bhūtāgni* (elemental metabolism) and *dhātvaṅni* (tissue-level metabolism). The efficiency of these subsidiary *agnis* depends entirely on the functional integrity of *Jaṭharāgni* [7].

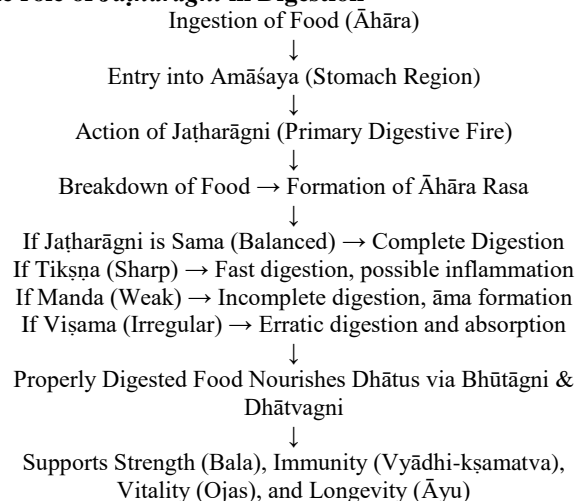
After food is consumed, it is acted upon by *Jaṭharāgni* to transform it into *Āhāra Rasa*, the nutritive essence, which serves as the precursor for the formation of all *dhātus*. This process is not merely mechanical; it reflects a deep energetic transformation. If *Jaṭharāgni* is in a balanced state (*sama*), digestion is complete, efficient, and produces no toxins (*āma*). However, if it is weak (*manda*), excessive (*tikṣṇa*), or erratic (*viṣama*), the result is incomplete digestion, leading to the formation of *āma*, which is the root cause of many diseases [8].

The four types of *Jaṭharāgni* *Sama Agni*, *Tikṣṇa Agni*, *Manda Agni*, and *Viṣama Agni* are determined by the dominance and imbalance of *doṣas*. *Sama Agni* reflects ideal digestion and equilibrium of *Vāta*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. *Tikṣṇa Agni* (seen in *Pitta*-dominant individuals) results in rapid digestion but may lead to inflammation. *Manda Agni* (seen in *Kapha* prakṛti) causes sluggish digestion, bloating, and heaviness, while *Viṣama Agni* (associated with *Vāta*) causes irregular and unpredictable digestion [9].

Modern physiology attributes digestion to a coordinated function of gastric secretions, hydrochloric acid, pepsin, bile, pancreatic enzymes, and peristalsis. However, *Āyurveda* views these biochemical functions as manifestations of *Agni*. While modern science focuses on the structural and chemical aspects of digestion, *Āyurveda* integrates physical, mental, and energetic dimensions. It links *Jaṭharāgni* to mental clarity (*medhā*), strength (*bala*), vitality (*ojas*), and immunity (*vyādhi-kṣamatva*) [10].

Thus, *Jaṭharāgni* is more than a digestive mechanism it is a sustaining force of life. It serves as the bridge between food intake and bodily nourishment. Preservation of *Agni* is a cornerstone of *Āyurvedic* preventive and curative strategies. Through proper diet (*āhāra*), lifestyle (*vihāra*), and seasonal practices (*rtucharyā*), the strength of *Jaṭharāgni* can be maintained, ensuring optimal digestion, assimilation, and health [11].

## The role of *Jaṭharāgni* in Digestion [12]



## Results and Findings

- *Jaṭharāgni* is identified as the central digestive fire located in the *Amāśaya* and *Grahaṇī*, initiating the breakdown of food (*Āhāra*) into *Āhāra Rasa*.
- It governs the first and most essential stage of digestion, influencing all subsequent stages of metabolism through *bhūtāgni* and *dhātvagni*.
- The functional status of *Jaṭharāgni* whether *Sama*, *Manda*, *Tikṣṇa*, or *Viṣama* directly determines the quality of digestion and overall health.
- A balanced (*Sama*) *Agni* ensures complete digestion, proper assimilation, and nourishment of all *dhātus*, while impaired *Agni* leads to incomplete digestion, formation of *āma* (toxins), and systemic disorders.
- The concept of *Jaṭharāgni* correlates closely with modern digestive physiology, including gastric secretions, enzymatic activity, and gut motility, but *Āyurveda* expands this understanding to include mental clarity, immunity, and vitality.
- Maintenance of *Jaṭharāgni* is essential not only for digestion but also for preventing diseases and preserving homeostasis, strength (*bala*), and longevity (*āyu*).

## Discussion

*Jaṭharāgni*, the principal digestive fire in *Āyurveda*, is regarded as the cornerstone of all metabolic activity and health. It is responsible for converting *Āhāra* (food) into *Āhāra Rasa*, which then nourishes all seven *dhātus*. The strength and balance of *Jaṭharāgni* are considered indicators of an individual's overall well-being, and its dysfunction is believed to be the root cause of nearly all diseases. This idea aligns with the ancient *Āyurvedic* dictum: "*Rogānām āgni-mūlatvam*" (all diseases arise from impaired digestion/metabolism) [13].

Classical texts describe four functional states of *Jaṭharāgni* *Sama* (balanced), *Manda* (weak), *Tikṣṇa* (sharp), and *Viṣama* (irregular) each governed by the dominance or imbalance of the *doṣas*. A balanced *Agni* (*Sama Agni*) leads to proper digestion, while imbalanced *Agni* causes either under-digestion (*Manda*), over-digestion (*Tikṣṇa*), or erratic digestion (*Viṣama*), resulting in formation of *āma*, the toxic substance responsible for various systemic diseases. Hence, assessing and regulating *Jaṭharāgni* is crucial in both preventive and curative aspects of *Āyurveda* [14].

From a modern physiological perspective, *Jaṭharāgni* can be conceptually correlated with several digestive mechanisms, including the secretion of hydrochloric acid, pepsin, bile, pancreatic enzymes, and peristaltic movements. However, *Āyurveda* goes beyond the biochemical model and considers *Agni* as a biological energy responsible not only for digestion but also for immunity (*vyādhi-kṣamatva*), strength (*bala*), vitality (*ojas*), and mental clarity (*medhā*). This integrative outlook presents a more holistic understanding of digestion, linking physical, psychological, and energetic dimensions [15].

Thus, the study of *Jaṭharāgni* provides profound insight into how the body maintains harmony through efficient digestion and metabolism. It underscores the importance of daily dietary habits, lifestyle, and seasonal adjustments to maintain optimal *Agni*. The recognition of *Agni* as the driver of health highlights the preventive strength of *Āyurveda*, offering not only symptomatic relief but also a root-cause approach to disease management. In today's context of

lifestyle disorders and digestive ailments, understanding and applying the principles of *Jaṭharāgni* can lead to more sustainable and personalized healthcare solutions [16].

## Conclusion

*Jaṭharāgni* is the fundamental force of digestion and metabolism in *Āyurveda*, playing a vital role in the transformation of food into nourishing elements required for the sustenance of all *dhātus*. Its balanced state (*Sama Agni*) ensures proper digestion, absorption, and overall systemic equilibrium, while any disturbance leads to the formation of *āma* and disease. This concept not only explains the physiological process of digestion but also integrates immunity, vitality, and mental clarity into one cohesive framework. Understanding the role of *Jaṭharāgni* offers a holistic approach to digestive health and reinforces its importance in both preventive and therapeutic aspects of *Āyurvedic* medicine.

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