1. Introduction

The ancient classical knowledge-base of Ayurveda is available today in the form of a robust ancient classical literature, the main books are the Brihattrayi (Caraka Samhita, Susruta Samhita and Astanga Sangraha) and Laghuttrayi (Madhav Nidana, Sharangdhara Samhita and Bhavaprakash Samhita) texts which are considered the most respected and authentic source books. Ayurveda is the ancient Indian system of life sciences and Medicine, its historicity going back to the Vedas. Its classical knowledge and practice is based on its own physics and biology, its unique pronature holistic health and disease concepts and diagnostics as well as its own material medica. Ayurveda has described an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body as Agni. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life, and is performed by Agni in Ayurveda, the term “Agni” is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of our body. About the importance of Agni, Acharya charak has mentioned that after stoppage of the function of Agni, the individual dies, and when the Agni of an individual is sama, then that person would be absolutely healthy and would lead a long, happy, healthy life. But, if the Agni of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed, resulting in ill health and disease. Hence, Agni is said to be the base (mool) of life.
Sangrah, Astang Hridaya, Bhavprakash, Yogaratnakar, Parameswarappa’s Ayurvediya Vikriti Vigyan and Roga Vigyan, commentaries of Samhita’s and current articles.

2.1 Concept of Agni

Ayurveda has described an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body as Agni. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life, and is performed by Agni in Ayurveda, the term “Agni” is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of our body.

About the importance of Agni, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that after stoppage of the function of Agni, the individual dies, and when the Agni of an individual is sama (normal), then that person would be absolutely healthy and would lead a long, happy and healthy life. But, if the Agni of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed, resulting in ill health and disease. Hence, Agni is said to be the pedestal (mool) of life[1].

In Brahmastra, Agni has been meant to be a sign of life in the body. Agni moves everywhere and metamorphoses substances, burns, assimilates, glitters and grows. Agni is a pivot around which the remaining factors responsible for the maintenance of health and causation of disease as well as decay revolve.

In Shabdakalpa druma, 61 synonyms of Agni have been compiled. These synonyms help in explaining the nature and functions of the Agni e.g. Vaishvanara, Sarva Paka, Tannoopata, Amivachatana, Vishwambhar, Rudra[2] etc.

2.2 Pitta-Vis-a-vis-Agni

The term pitta is derived from the root ‘tap’ which means[1] combustion/digestion-to give nourishment to the body by digestion of ingested food[1], to maintain heat- by means of heat; it maintains the colour, lusture etc. of the body[3].

There is an ambiguity exist that regarding pitta and agni. Is there a separate agni (fire) apart from pitta or is pitta itself the agni? Different views have been suggested regarding Pitta and Agni by different Acharyas. Some Acharyas consider Pitta to be Agni while other speaks differently. According to Acharya Marichi, Pitta is of five divisions, which are located between the pakovshaya and amashaya, although it is composed of panchabhutas. Because of an increase of (predominance qualities of) tejas bhuta, it is devoid of liquidity (although it is a liquid). Also, because it does not possess snigdha (viscidity), sita (coldness) and such other properties of apa bhuta, it is called by the term “Agni” because of its function of paka. It cooks the food, dividing it into essence and waste separately. Being localized there, it bestows grace (help) to the other Pitta present there and also the other dhatvagni present in the dhatus by giving them strength (power of functioning), which is known as “Pachaka Pitta”[5].

Different examples are available in our classics to indicate the Pitta is the same as Agni. But, some doubts arise behind the concept of whether Pitta is Agni e.g.

- Why indulgence of aggravating factors like katu, vidahi, etc. reduces the strength of Agni instead of enhancing it.
- Appropriate example to highlight the above concept that ghee alleviates Pitta but enhances Agni.
- The quotation of Acharya Sushruta, Samadosham samagnishcha has clearly indicated that Pitta and Agni are not the same.

2.3 Types of Agnis

Agni is innumerable because of its presence in each and every dhatu paramana (cell) of the body. But, enumeration of the number of Agnis varies in various classical Ayurvedic texts, as shown below

- According to Sushruta, five types of Agnis are illustrated, viz. Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Alochakagni, Sadhakagni and Bhrajakagni[7]. However, there is an indirect reference of five Bhutagnis underlying in the brief description made to the transformation of food stuff[8].
- Sharangadhara has recognized five pittas only (Pachak, Bhrajak, Ranjak, Alochaka and Sadhak)[11].
- Bhavamishra has followed Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata[12].

Agni has been divided into 13 types according to the function and site of action. These are:

(a). Jatharagni – One Agni present in the stomach and duodenum.
(b). Bhutagni – Five Agni from five basic elements.
(c). Dhatvagni – Seven Agni present, one in each of the seven dhatus.
Accordingly, they are classified into three groups, namely Jatharagni, Bhutagni and Dhatvagni.

(a). Jatharagni

Jatharagni is the Agni or bioenergy present in the Jathara (stomach and duodenum). According to Ashtanga Hridaya, Jatharagni, the seat is grahani (duodenum), so called because it withholds the food for a certain time inside the Amasaya (stomach) to facilitate digestion. In the opinion of Dhanvantari, it is the Kala known as “Pittadharar,” situated at the entrance of the Pakvashaya (intestine) and acting as a bolt to the door of the pathway/channel of food. It is responsible for the duration of life, health, valour, ojas (essence of the dhatus), strength of all the bhutagni and dhatvagni. The strength of the grahani is from Agni itself, and the strength of Agni is from grahani. When the Agni undergoes vitiation, grahani also gets vitiated and produces diseases[13].

Jatharagni is considered to be the most important because each and every nutrient that one ingests first comes to the Jathara and is subjected to the action of Jatharagni. Jatharagni digests the food materials that consist of the five basic elements and transforms it for utilization by the respective Dhatu paramanus (tissues). It is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (Prasad) and the waste products (kitta) in our body[14].

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. This disturbed action ultimately leads to various disorders. Jatharagni is the main important Agni that controls the function of all other 12 Agnis. All the Agnis are totally dependent on the status of Jatharagni[15].

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being namely Vishamagni, Tikshanagni, Mandagni and Samagni[16].

According to Hareet Samhita, Samagni depends on whether the Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) are in normal stage. When the Pitta is higher than normal, the condition is known as Tikshnagni. When Vata and Kapha are higher than normal, the condition is known as Mandagni.

(b). 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 – Parshiva (earth), Apya (water), Tejas (Agni), Vayavva (vayu) and Nabhasa (akash).

Each and every cell in our body is composed of the five mahabhutas or five basic elements. Naturally, each cell (dhatu paramanu) 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 bioenergy. Thus, they are completely similar with respect to the five basic elements with their Bhutagni in our body cells as well in the entire outside nutrient that we ingest for the nutrition of our body. Acharya Charak 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 specific bhautika elements of the body[17]. These Bhutagnis act after the Jatharagni present in the stomach and duodenum, acting on the food and causing their disintegration. In the modern physiological perspective, the action of Jatharagni can be equated with the digestion in the stomach and duodenum, and the action of the Bhutagni can be equated with the conversion of digested materials in the liver.

(c). Dhatvagni

All the seven Dhatus (seven element tissues of the body) contain their own Agni to metabolize the nutrient materials supplied to them through their own Srotas.

(a). Rasagni present in the Rasa Dhatu.
(b). Raktagni present in the Rakta Dhatu.
(c). Mamsagni present in the Mamsa Dhatu.
(d). Medagni present in the Meda Dhatu.
(e). Asthyagni present in the Asthi Dhatu.
(f). Majjagni present in the Majja Dhatu.
(g). Shukragni present in the Shukra Dhatu.

Each Dhatvagni or the bioenergy 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. Each Dhatvagni has got a speciality to synthesize and transform the constituents suitable to its particular Dhatu. This action is a sort of selective action. Acharya Charaka has mentioned the fact that that the seven dhatus that are a support of the body contain their own Agni, and by their own Agni they digest and transform the materials supplied to them to make the substances alike to them for assimilation and nourishment[18].

2.4. Importance of Jatharagni

Functions of various agni elaborately discussed above in which jatharagni is the chief among all types of agnis because function of bhutagni and dhatvagni depends on this. Aggravation or diminuation of jatharagni results in aggravation or diminuation of bhutagni and dhatvagni. Therefore by all means one has to protect jatharagni by consuming suitable wholesome dietetics and behaviour because longevity and strength depends on normal state of agni. On the contrary one, who consumes unwholesome diet due to greed, succumbs to disease caused by the vitiation of grahani[19].

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2.5 Physiological and Pathological State of Agni[20-23]

(a). Samagni

First variety is not associated with dosa and it is called samagni state and it is the physiological state of agni. The Samagni digests and assimilates food properly at the proper time. This thus increases the quality of the Dhatus (supportive tissues of the body). Persons having Samagni are always hale and healthy.

(b). Vishamagni

Visamagni is the state in which improper digestion and metabolism takes place i.e. sometimes performs normal functions followed by abnormal one and manifest flatulence, abdominal pain, upward movement of vata inside the kostha, functions followed by abnormal one and manifest flatulence, Visamagni is the state in which improper digestion and

(c). Tikshnagni

Tikshnagni means very quick/very sharp/very fast. Tikshnagni is a state of very quick digestion of food, regardless of the type of food. Acharya Shushrut states that when the power of digestion is increased from normal to above normal, food digests very quickly and produces hunger or the desire for food. When food is digested, the throat, the mouth cavity and the lips become dry with a burning sensation. This condition is known as “Bhasmak Roga” according to Ayurveda. Tiksnagni state gives rise to manifestation of vatavyadhi.

(d). Mandagni

“Mand” means slow. The meaning of the Mandagni is slow digestive power or digestive capacity. Those who are having Mandagni eat very little and are unable to digest the smallest amount of food. Dhanvantri says that Agni digests the least amount of food in the greatest amount of time and manifest heaviness in abdomen and head, cough, dyspnea, excessive salivation, vomiting and weakness of the body. Mandagni state gives rise to manifestation of kaphaja vikara.

3. Conclusion

After a detailed discussion on Pitta and Agni, it is concluded that all theories in their regard have their own importance, and it is very difficult to conclude which theory is more appropriate. But, one conclusion that can be drawn after going through the details is that in regard of treatment, Pitta and Agni are the same, whereas in accordance to their, build they differ from each other. Explaining briefly the digestive and metabolic functions of Agni, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that various types of dietetic materials are digested by their own Agni (Bhutagni), encouraged and enhanced by Antaragni (Jatharagni), which is further digested and metabolized by Dhatvagni to associate the body with the nutritional strength, complexion and happy life along with providing energy to the seven dhatus.

References


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