



AGNI AS PITTA IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

The ayurvedic concept of fire or agni is critically important to our overall health. Agni is the invariable cause in the process of Paka (digestion, transformation). Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is inevitable for the maintenance of life, and is executed by the Agni. Different examples are available in our classics to indicate that Pitta is the same as Agni. Agni is countless because of its presence in each and every paramanu of the body. But, the list of the number of Agni varies in various classical Ayurvedic texts. According to the functions and site of action, Agni has been divided into 13 types, i.e. one Jatharagni, five Bhutagni and seven Dhatvagni. Jatharagni is the most important one, which digests four types of food and converts it into Rasa and Mala. The five Bhutagnis act on the respective bhutika part of the food and thereby nurture the Bhutas in the body. The seven Dhatvagni act on the respective dhatus by which each Dhātu is broken into three parts. In this way, the entire process of transformation consists of two types of products - Prasad (essence) and Kitta (excrete). The former is taken for nourishment while the latter one is thrown out, which otherwise defiles the body if it stays longer. This resource is meant to help you understand why agni is so important, to learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of both healthy and impaired agni, and to direct you to some practical tools for tending to your own agni.

KEYWORDS: Agni, ahara paka, panchabhautika sharira, Digestion, Metabolism, pitta.

INTRODUCTION

Agni has been described as the one who carries everything, moves everywhere, which can transform substances, which can bring transformation in substances, assimilates, which gives and takes, which has the capacity to enter into minute channels, which burns, which glows etc. All these definitions of Agni clearly define that Agni is the important key factor for transformation. Agni is key factor in transformation of consumed ahara viharadi dravyas of vijatiya origin to sajatiya nature. Agni is derivative of tejas (fire) mahabhuta, it carries metabolic transformations in which the inherent feature is change. Agni is having 13 categories. Jatharagni (1 type) looks after the functions of food digestion and absorption. Bhutagni (5 types) turns all the vijatiya panchabhautika dravyas consumed to sajatiya panchabhautika dravyas, i.e. conversion of heterogenous to homogenous. Dhatvagni (7 types) performs Synthesis and breakdown of tissues. Metabolic transformations occur after consumption of food. That leads to formation of two parts, Prasada (essence) and kitta (excretory waste). The Doshas and Dhatus, etc., get nourished by Prasada part (nutrients). Kitta part (metabolic waste) is to be excreted from the body in different forms. In Ayurveda the concept of agni and

ahara paka (Metabolic transformation) provides an extensive field of research in the present day.

Agni as Pitta

Introduction: 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. Therefore, Ayurveda considers that Dehagni is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, lusture, oja, teja (energy) and prana (life energy). (Cha. Chi. 15/3.) 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. (Cha. Chi. 15/4.).

Agni as Pitta

The source of Pitta is from "Tapa," which means:

(1) combustion/digestion – to give nourishment to the body by digestion of ingested food, (2) to maintain heat – by means of heat, it maintains the color, lusture, etc. of the body (Su.Su.-21/5). Now, there is a question as to whether Pitta and Agni are both the same or are different? Does any area exist of Agni without Pitta, or is it that Pitta is Agni? This should be clearly understood. Different opinions have been suggested regarding Pitta and Agni by different Acharyas. Some Acharyas consider Pitta to be Agni while others speak differently.

According to Acharya Sushruta, there is no existence of any other Agni in the body without Pitta, because when there is increased digestion and combustion in the body due to Ushna guna of Pitta, the treatment is like Agni (Su. Su. 21/09). Acharya Marichi has also emphasized that the Agni present in the Pitta gives good or bad results when it is normal or vitiated (Cha. Su. 12/11).

Chakrapani has commented on "Pittantargatta," that the function of Pitta inside the body is not combustion but its work is to provide heat of Agni. Besides this, Acharya Shusrut has described five types of Agnis as the variety of Pitta. Acharya Bhoj also considered Pitta as Agni, digestive fire is included within Agni, which is specially meant for different enzymatic activities of the body, i.e. pachana, deepan, bhedana, etc. (Chakrapani Tika on Cha.Su.-12/11).

Types of Agnis

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

- Charaka has mentioned about 13 Agnis. Jatharagni – 1, Bhutagni – 5, Dhatvagni – 7 (Ch.Chi.15/38).
- According to Acharya Sushruta, five types of Agnis are illustrated, viz. Pachakagni, Ranjakagni, Alochakagni, Sadhakagni and Bhrajakagni. However, there is an indirect reference of five Bhutagnis underlying in the brief description made to the transformation of food stuff. (Sh.Su.21/10.).
- Vagbhata has described different types Agni, viz. – Bhutagnis – 5, – Dhatvagnis – 7, Dhoshagni – 3 and Malagni – 3.
- Sharangadhara has recognized five pittas only (Pachak, Bhrajak, Ranjak, Alochaka and Sadhak) (Sha.Sa.Pu.Kh.-5/32).
- Bhavamishra has followed Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata (Bh.Pu.Kh.-3/169, 180).

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

1. Jatharagni – one Agni present in the stomach and duodenum.
2. Bhutagni – five Agni from five basic elements.
3. Dhatvagni – seven Agni present, one in each of the seven dhatus.

Accordingly, they are classified into three groups, namely Jatharagni, Bhutagni and Dhatvagni.

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 "Pittadhara," 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 (As.Hr.Sha.3/50-54).

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 Dhatus paramanus (tissues).

Jatharagni is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (Prasad) and the waste products (kitta) in our body (As.Hr.Su-12/8). Jatharagni is directly related to Dhatvagni or bioenergy 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 (Cha. Chi. 15/39-40).

Jatharagni is also classified into four categories according to its performance of digestion in the human being (Cha. Chi. 15/51), namely Vishamagni, Tikshanagni, Mandagni and Samagni. 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.

a) Samagni: 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: This type of Agni changes between digesting food quickly and slowly. When this Agni is affected by the Vata Dosha, it creates different types of udargata raga.

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 Shushruta 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.

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.

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 (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 bioenergies. Thus, they are completely similar with respect to the five basic elements with their Bhutagni in our body cells as well in all the 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 (Cha. Chi. 15/13, 14). 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.

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.

1. Rasagni present in the Rasa Dhatu.
2. Raktagni present in the Rakta Dhatu.
3. Mamsagni present in the Mamsa Dhatu.
4. Medagni present in the Meda Dhatu.
5. Asthyagni present in the Asthi Dhatu.
6. Majjagni present in the Majja Dhatu.
7. 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 AnnaRasa 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 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.

The Functions of Agni

- Transformation
- Digestion, absorption, assimilation
- The creation of digestive enzymes
- All metabolic activities
- Strength and vitality
- Tissue nutrition
- The production of ojas, tejas, and prana.
- Skin color, complexion, glow, and luster
- The maintenance of body temperature
- Mental clarity
- Intelligence
- Sensory perception (especially visual perception)
- Flow of cellular communication
- Alertness, affection, and enthusiasm for life
- Courage and confidence
- Joy, laughter, and contentment
- Discrimination, reason, and logic
- Patience, stability, and longevity

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 dietic 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.

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