

AGNIKARMA IN AYURVEDIC CLASSICS AND SOME SPECIAL SIMILAR PROCEDURES - A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Agnikarma has been explained as one among the *Anushastras* having greater importance in the management of diseases. All Ayurvedic classics have described the *Agnikarma* in curing different disorders. It can be done as *Pradhanakarma* in some disorders and *Paschatkarma* to cure the complications in some other contexts. Its importance lies in its action, because of its ability to cure the diseases, which can't be cured by the *Bheshaja*, *Shastra* and *Ksharakarma*. In *Agnikarma* the recurrence of the diseases will not be there if once they are treated and cured by it. *Agnikarma* is superior to *Kshara* by means of its action. *Agnikarma* is always utilized as the ultimate measure while considering the *Yantra*, *Shastra*, *Anushastra*, *Kshara* etc. *Agnikarma* is the ultimate measure for the haemostasis among the four *Raktastambhana* measures. The similar procedures like 'Tau Dam', Moxibustion and the cautery used by Hippocrates are also there. In this article made an attempt to compile an insight view on *Agnikarma* and mentioning the similar procedures which are practiced and even practicing are presented in a systematic way.

Keywords: Agnikarma, Tau Dam, Moxibustion, Cauterisation

INTRODUCTION

The destruction of tissues with a hot instrument, an electric current or a caustic substance is known as cauterization and the substance used for it, is known as cautery. The main forms of

cauterization used today are electrocautery and chemical cautery. Cautery can also mean the branding of a human, either recreational or forced. Accidental burns can be considered cau-

terization as well. In modern medicine, there is no use of therapeutic burn i.e. *Samyak Dagdha*. But on the other form, uses of *Agnikarma* as for coagulation and tissue destruction are being used. It is one of the parasurgical procedures of branding by fire (Thermal cautery). *Agni* is mentioned as an *Upayantra*. Hot cauters were applied to tissues or arteries to stop them from bleeding. Cauterization was used to stop heavy bleeding, especially during amputations. The procedure is simple: a piece of metal will be heated over fire and applied to the wound. This would cause tissues and blood to heat rapidly to extreme temperatures and in turn leads to coagulation of the blood and thus controlling the bleeding, at the cost of extensive tissue damage. There are some procedures which were used at ancient time having similarities to *Agnikarma*. They were conducted for some particular conditions at that time. Some procedures are nowadays also continuing in practice at different places. Like *Agnikarma* as in Ayurvedic classics it is also very effective in some particular conditions which are hampering the daily routine.

AYURVEDIC CLASSICAL REVIEW

Definition:

The word *Agnikarma* consists of ‘*Agni*’ + ‘*Karma*’ i.e. Heat + Procedure.

Agni:

Vyutpatti: The word *Agni* is a masculine gender (*Pullinga Vachi Shabda*). The word *Agni* has been derived from the *Dhatu* ‘*Agigato*’ and formed as-

“Since it acquires the highest position or most important position in the body compared to other.”

“Which has a direction always towards up.”

‘*Agni*’ obtained by the *Lopa* of word ‘*Agi*’ and ‘*ni*’

The word ‘*Agni*’ has derived from the *Dhatu* ‘*Agativyapnoti*’ which spreads very fast everywhere.

Nirukti: The word *Agni* is having two kinds of *Nirukti* and are depending upon its *Swarupa* and *Swabhava*⁵

- According to *Swarupa*- which spreads to various parts or organs, is called *Agni*.
- According to *Swabhava*- which moves in upward direction, is called *Agni*.

We can club this statements and define it as which spreads by moving upward is called *Agni*. This is a very scientific explanation given by our *Acharyas* in the Ancient period. The same can be supported by the natural phenomenon occur in the atmosphere, which we observe in day to day life, and it is the state of atmospheric air in the presence of moist and heat. The presence of the moist in the air makes the air heavier, so it moves downwards whereas the presence of heat in the air makes the air lighter so it moves upwards. The same natural phenomenon has been mentioned earlier in respect of *Agni*.

Nirukti of Agnikarma

The following can be taken as definitions of the terminology ‘*Agnikarma*’.

‘*Agnaukarma Homey Agnihotradau Agnikarma tatah*

Krtve Iti Smruti, Agnikaryadayo Anyatra’

‘*Granthiyadin Rogeshu Dagdha Shalakadibhihi Prayojye Dahakarye*’

‘*Agnina Kritva Yat Karma, Agne Sambandhi Va Yat Karma, Tatagnikarma*’

From the above *Shloka* it can be understood that the term “*Agnikarma*” was used in multivariate meanings in all the conditions in which the use of *Agni* was unexceptional. It also points towards the normal and usual, physical behaviour of *Agni* i.e. burning.

In *Veda* and *Purana* 'Agnikarma' refers to the use of *Agni* in the *Yagas* such as *Agnihotra*, and also other deeds which are accomplished by the use of *Agni*. This explanation can be taken as the general definition for *Agnikarma*.

From the Ayurvedic point of view *Agnikarma* has a more specific meaning. According to *Dalhana* there are two important usages to be stressed upon, "Agnina Krutva Yat Karma" and "Agne Sambandhi Karma". The first usage points to the innate characteristics of *Agni* and its *Karma* thereby. This *Karma* can be considered as of *Agni* in *Jaivasvarupa*, *Agni Mahabhuta* or *Agni* which is external and in its gross form.

Since *Susruta* has already mentioned about *Shareera Antargata Agni* earlier, this explanation probably points towards the *Agni* in its gross form. The second part of the commentary seems to give more importance to the utility and positive aspects of *Agni*. In *Ayurveda* this positive utility is in *Chikitsa*. Therefore it can be considered that, *Agnikarma* refers to the actives of *Agni* due to its innate *Guna* and also to its effective usage in *Chikitsa*.

- For diseases of *Twak Dhatu* (skin): *Pippali*, *Ajashakrit* (Excreta of goat), *Godanta* (Cows teeth), *Shara* (Arrow head), *Shalaka* (Metal rod) - *Loha Shalaka* i.e. made of Iron
- For diseases present in *Mamsa Dhatu* (muscle): *Jambavoushta*: a piece of black stone made like a *Jambuphala* (fruit of *Syzygium cumini*, *Eugenia jambolana* Lam), Rods of other metals like *Tamra*, *Rajata* etc are used.
- For diseases of *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Sandhi* and *Asthi Dhatus* (vessels, ligaments, joints and Bones): *Kshaudra* or *Madhu* (Honey), *Guda* (Jaggery), *Sneha- Ghrita*, *Taila*, *Vasa* and *Majja*

Suitable Time for *Agnikarma* (*Agnikarma Kala*):

Thermal cautery can be done in all season, except *Sharat* (autumn) and *Grishma* (summer).⁵⁸ In *Sharat* there is a *Prakopa* of *Pitta* and *Agnikarma* also aggravates *Pitta* which may lead to be *Pitta Prakopa Avastha*, due to this reason.

As *Agnikarma* is contraindicated in *Sharat* and *Grishma Ritu*, in diseases of emergency, it can be done in all seasons after adopting counter methods. *Dalhanacharya* mentions *Sheetachadana*, *Sheeta Virya Bhojana* and *Pradeha* with *Sheeta Virya Dravya* (covering the body or site of burning with moist cloth, use of cold foods and applying cooling pastes), as the counter methods to mitigate the effect of burning.

Pathya – Apathya

- Since *Agnikarma* is associated with production of wound its proper healing is of utmost importance. All the *Pathya – Apathya* mentioned for *Vrana* in general are to be considered in this case also.
- *Susruta* has dedicated a separate chapter *Vranitopasaniya* for the description of *Pathya* and *Apathya* of *Vranita*. All the descriptions as per the above mentioned *Adhyaya* are important in the case of *Dagdha Vrana*.
- Practically it is found that wetting the burnt surface often causes increase in pain and discharge and exposes the area to super added infections, hence it has to be avoided.

Indications

- Severe pain caused by *Vata* in the skin, muscles, veins, ligaments, bony joints and bones

- Ulcer with fleshy growths which are elevated, hard and without sensation
- Tumours, haemorrhoids, fistula in ano, glands in neck
- Filariasis, warts on skin, moles, hernia, tearing of the joints and veins, sinus, profuse haemorrhages

Proper instrumentation (Agropaharaniyani)

- The *Roga* and *Rogi Pariksha* should be conducted properly for the correct diagnosis and for identifying the structures involved in the condition (*Sira, Snayu, Sandhi* and *Asthi*).
- The *Agnikarma* room should be well prepared with all required *Agropaharaniyani* described by Acharya Susruta.
- Prepare *Triphala Kashaya* for *Prakshalana* of the local part of patient.
- *Yashtimadhu Churna*, small pieces of *Kumari Patra*, *Plota* (gauze piece), *Pichu* (cotton), and *Agni Srotas*, *Shalakas* etc. are kept ready for use.
- The *Shalaka* is heated up to become red hot on fire.
- To make patient fit for *Agnikarma* (Pre-operative assessment)
- *Agnikarma* is contraindicated in the people who have *Pitta* predominant *Prakriti*.

Procedure of Agnikarma

Poorva karma

- Necessary equipments for *Agnikarma* should be kept ready.
- Patient should be given food which is *Sheeta* and *Picchila*.
- In diseases such as *Mooda Garbha*, *Ash-mari*, *Bhagandara*, *Udara Roga*, *Arshas* and *Mukha Rogas*, *Agnikarma* should be done without taking food.

Pradhana karma

- Careful assessment of the symptoms of the diseases, the vital spots and *Rogi Bala* and *Ritu*.
- By considering the above mentioned things doing the *Agnikarma* by selecting the material heating it and placing over the site for required time.

Paschat karma

- Application of paste of *Ghrita* and *Madhu* to the burnt area
- Application of paste of drugs which are *Snigdha* and *Sheeta Virya*.
- *Pathya*, *Apathya* & Follow Up: In *Agnikarma* procedure, we make *Samyak Dagdha Vrana* (therapeutic burn). It is necessary that it should be healed without any complications. So, all the *Pathya-Apathyas* which have been described by *Acharya Susruta* are advised here. It is utmost advisable to the patient that “Do not allow water to touch the *Samyak Dagdha Vrana* site for one *Ahoratra* (24 hours)”. The complete *Ropana* (healing) of the *Vrana* should be observed.

***Agnikarma Chikitsa* can be repeated after 7 days.**

Signs of proper Agnikarma- Samyak Dagdha Lakshana

- The signs of burning of skin are production of sound, bad odour, constriction of skin.
- Signs of *Mamsa Dagdha* are appearance of colour like that of the pigeon (ashy, dark grey), mild swelling, pain, dryness and constriction of the wound
- *Sira Snayu Dagdha Lakshanas* are ulcer becoming black and elevated, cessation of exudation

- *Dagdha Lakshana* of *Sandhi* and *Asthi* are appearance of dryness and slight red colour, roughness and firmness.

**Patterns of Agnikarma
(Dahana Vishesha)**

➤ Circular (<i>Valaya</i>)	➤ Semi lunar (<i>Arthachandra</i>)
➤ Dotted (<i>Bindhu</i>)	
➤ Straight line (<i>Vilekha</i>)	➤ Four tailed mark (<i>Swastika</i>)
➤ Wide spread (<i>Pra-tisarana</i>)	➤ Eight tailed mark (<i>Ashtapada</i>)

SOME SPECIAL THERAPIES LIKE AGNIKARMA

‘TAU-DAM’

‘Tau-dam’ is a basically traditional Himalayan therapy, practiced by the rural Himalayan people for the disease like liver troubles, stomach troubles, backache etc. This therapy was also practiced by the ancient people and is mentioned in Ayurveda as *Agnikarma*.

‘Tau’ therapy is generally practiced by the older people of village and is compulsory for 6 month to 1-year old children. The ‘Tau’ is made up of a 45-60 cm. long iron rod is called the Tau, which is sharply curved at one end and has one or two holes depending upon the nature of diseases. In this therapy, ‘Tau’ device is placed directly on burning fire till it becomes red-hot and a older people of that area touches this red-hot ‘Tau’ on the affected skin site of the patient for only a fraction of a second and after burning it, the massage of the affected area with the mustard or olive oil is done.

In the ‘Dam’ technique, fresh seeds of *Terminalia chebula* or *Anaphalis araneosa* are heated on fire up to red hot and touched on the affected part of the body for only fraction of a second. After this, like ‘Tau’, the affected area is massaged with the mustard or olive oil.

CAUTERY BY HIPPOCRATUS

Cautery is described in the Hippocratic Corpus. The cautery was employed for almost every possible purpose in ancient times: as a ‘counter-irritant’, as a haemostatic, as a bloodless knife, as a means of destroying tumors etc. Later, special medical instruments called cauters were used to cauterize arteries. These were first described by Abu al-Qasim al-Zahrawi (Abulcasis) in his *Kitab al-Tasrif*. Abu al-Qasim al-Zahrawi also introduced the technique of ligature of the arteries as an alternative to cauterization. This method was later improved and used more effectively by Ambroise Paré.

‘MOXIBUSTION’

Moxibustion is an important procedure in ancient Chinese Medicine which involves the burning of specific sites on the body surface with the aim to alleviate pain and cure other diseases. As this therapeutic procedure parallels *Agnikarma* in approach a brief discussion on the subject is presented here.

The dry powder of the leaf of *Artemisia vulgaris* is known as ‘moxa’ and when used for Acupuncture therapy, the method is termed Moxibustion. Moxibustion was introduced in the field of Acupuncture during 1102 to 1106 AD. It serves a purpose similar to acupuncture. That the application of heat over painful area in the body is capable of relieving pain is a well known fact and the results are much better when the centre of the painful area is selected for heating. The same principle forms the basis for Moxibustion. It is known to increase the number of red blood cells and the percentage of haemoglobin in blood.

The leaves of *Artemisia vulgaris* are dried in sunlight and powdered to get wool like texture. This material is known as moxa wool and is

most commonly used in this procedure. Now it is translated literally as “acupuncture-Moxibustion”.

Different methods of Moxibustion

Moxibustion therapy on the basis of treatment is divided into two categories;

1. Direct Moxibustion
2. Indirect Moxibustion
 1. Direct Moxibustion – In this method the moxa wool is kept over a selected point on the body and burnt. Direct Moxibustion is of two types:
 - a. Scarring Moxibustion: Moxa wool is kept directly over the desired point and ignited until the skin is burnt. As the term scarring indicates, the burning leads to the scarring of the skin and the scar persists.
 - b. Non – scarring Moxibustion: In this method the moxa wool is kept on the body surface and ignited.

But, the burning of the skin is prevented by removing the moxa wool when skin becomes very hot.

Direct Moxibustion is capable of producing many other beneficial effects, particularly of the histotoxins which are the humoral substances produced by the burning skin. It activates the functions of the reticulo-endothelial system, which in turn increases the resistance. It is known to possess anti allergic properties also.

2. Indirect Moxibustion – In this procedure ‘moxa’ wool is never brought in direct contact with the skin. A barrier is kept between the ‘moxa’ and skin which may be ginger, garlic or salt.

Precautions to be taken in Moxibustion

Patient should be maintained in position to avoid burning due to change of posture. In indirect Moxibustion care should be taken so that

blisters are not formed. If at all blisters are formed it should be treated as in burns. Moxibustion is contra indicated near sense organs or on mucous membrane and also in febrile diseases.

CONCLUSION

As we know *Agnikarma* in classical Ayurveda is a generalized therapeutic procedure, which can be useful in various disorders and also at an emergency. Although there are other procedures having similarities with *Agnikarma*, they can be considered as the same as *Agnikarma*, which are done for some particular conditions. In the conventional systems also it is practiced for the same like arrest bleeding and save life. So it is an emergency as well as life saving procedure which is explained by our *Acharyas* by giving it most importance.

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