

## A REVIEW ON THE CONCEPT OF AGNIKARMA

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### ABSTRACT

*Acharya Sushruta* who is worshipped as the 'Father of surgery' has described various modalities relating to both Surgical and parasurgical procedures. *Agnikarma* or thermal cauterization is one among the *Anushastras* (substitute of surgical instrument) or para-surgical technique mentioned in Ayurveda. It has widely been practiced in the various clinical settings depending on the training and exposures of the physician. With renewed interest in the parasurgical procedures in the recent times *Agnikarma* has gained foremost appraisal to attempt treatment to diseases of various categories. *Agnikarma* though is a parasurgical procedure yet is indicated as a therapy of choice in many diseases. It is indicated in the disease caused by *Vata* and *Kapha* related morbidities because of its *Tikshna* (quick action), *Ushna* (Hotness), *Sookshma* (subtle), *Vyavayi* (Quick spreading), *Vikashi* (works without being metabolised) properties to remove *Srotorodha* (obstruction in channels of body) Moreover, the scope of this therapy is further extended to diseases that are found to be refractory to conventional *Sheeta-Ushana-Snigdha-Rooksha* kind of treatment. The final attribute of *Agnikarma* can be considered on its tremendous prophylactic potential to do away certain diseases and also has developed as a precursor to 'cauterization' of modern era.

**Keywords:** *Agni Karma*, *Acharya Sushruta*, *Dagdha*, Cauterization, Para surgical procedure.

### INTRODUCTION

In the present day of practice there are set of disorders which do not respond to medical treatment. If at all they respond, palliative relief is found and after sometime chance of recurrence does exist. In surgery, a set of minor surgical procedures like *Agnikarma* (Thermal cauterization), *Raktamokshana* (Bloodletting) is prescribed in addition or substitute for major surgical procedures.

As Ayurveda has always emphasized the necessity for the elimination of *doshas* over the conventional treatment to treat numerous diseases, *Acharya Sushruta* has also mentioned prevention of

recurrence of various disorders by advocating the parasurgical procedures like *Agnikarma* which has emerged as an integral part of the Ayurvedic therapeutics.

*Acharya Sushruta* has mentioned different methods of management of diseases such as *Bheshaja karma*, *Shashtra karma*, *Kshara karma* and *Agnikarma*. While he mentioned *Yantra* and its classification *Agni* was considered as an *Upanyantra*.<sup>1</sup>

The word *Agnikarma* is made up of two words i.e.,

*Agni* and *Karma*. **Agni**, the masculine word derived from the root “**Agigatau agyati agnayamna prapyanti**”. i. e. it gives the rebirth, is utilized to cure and prevent the diseases.

*Agnikarma* means procedure done with fire. References about *Agnikarma* are available in almost all Ayurvedic classics. It's preventive, curative and haemostatic properties were unveiled even centuries back. These same principles are adopted in advanced technologies like cauterization, diathermy, radiation therapy, laser therapy, starion device etc . *Agni karma* means the application of *Agni* or heat directly or indirectly to the affected part with the help of different materials to save the patient from a disease or complication. It holds a special place in surgery by *Sushruta* as it is believed that a disease once treated by *Agnikarma* does not reoccur and does not get infected easily.<sup>2</sup>

Even today, the modern science takes *Agnikarma* into practice by advocating cauterization in almost every surgical procedure to ensure sterilization and asepsis. The medical practice or technique of cauterization is the burning of part of a body to remove or close off a part of it in a process called Cautery, which destroys some tissue, in an attempt to mitigate damage, remove an undesired growth, or minimize other potential medical harmful possibilities such as infections.

Mere utilization of *Agnikarma*, which is counted in *Anushastra*, *Upayantra* and *Shashti upakrama*, provides *Shalyatantra* the unique position among the eight branches of Ayurveda. *Agnikarma* can be utilized as preventive measure, as curative measure, as postoperative procedure, and as haemostatic measure.

#### SYNONYMS

- *Agni karma*
- *Agni chikitsa*
- *Damsha kriya*
- *Pachana chikitsa*
- *Dagdha chikitsa*
- *Dagdha karma*
- *Vahnidagdha*

- *Dahana karma*
- *Dahakarma*,

#### **Agnikarma kala**

*Agnikarma* can be done in all seasons except *Sharadh* (autumn) and *Grishma* (summer) due to the increase in *Pitta*, which generated out of the excessive hot climate.

*Dalhana* opines, in an emergency, even in any season it can be done. But precautions like covering the site with moist clothes, having cold foods and smearing cold pastes over the body has to be adopted, so that the *Pitta* vitiation can be countered by the cold applications

#### **Dahanopakrana<sup>3</sup> - Materials Used for Agnikarma**

- *Pippali* (pipper longum)
- *Ajasakrut* (goats excreta)
- *Godantha* (cow's tooth)
- *Shara* (arrow)
- *Shalaka* (metal Rods)
- *Kshoudra* (honey)
- *Guda* (jaggery)
- *Sneha* (oil/fat) etc. The use of these materials has been told according to the site of application.
- *Dahana* of *Twaka* (skin) in superficial disorders - *Pippali*, *Ajashakrida*, *Godanta*, *Shara*, *Shalaka*.are used
- *Mamsa dagdha* or in muscle related disorders - *Jambavoshtha* and other *dhatu* are used.
- In *Sira* (veins), *Sanayu* (ligaments), *Sandhi* (joints) and *Asthi* (bones) - *Kshoudra*, *Guda* and *Sneha padartha* are used.<sup>4</sup>

#### **DAHANA PRADESHA - Disease specific sites for Agnikarma ( Thermal cauterization )**

- *Arshas* (haemorrhoids) *vata and kapha* -Site of *Arshas*
- *Antra vrudhi* (inguinal hernia) - Inguinal region
- *Nadi Antra vrudhi* (inguinal hernia) - Inguinal region
- *Dushta vana* (chronic non-healing ulcers) - *Agniikarma* can be done by filling the wound
- *Shiroroga*(head diseases) *Adhimantha* (glaucoma) *Anga shaidhilya* - *Bhru*, *lalaata*,*shankha* (eyebrow, forehead or temple)

- *Gridhrasi* ( sciatica) -*Anthara kandara gulpha madhya*(. Achilles tendon )
- *Varthma rogaeshu* (diseases of eyelid) - *Varthma-roma-koopa*

#### TYPES

- Based on the *Akriti* (shapes) 5
  1. *Valaya* (encircling the root of the diseased portion)
  2. *Bindu* (dots made with the tip of salaka)
  3. *Vilekha* (straight curved or horizontal lines drawn with salaka)
  4. *Pratisarana* (rubbing with the side of salaka)
    - *Acharya Vagbhata in Ashtanga sangraha*, mentions that it can also be of :
      1. *Ardhchandra* (semilunar)
      2. *Swastika* (swastik sign shaped)
      3. *Ashtapada* (directed in eight directions).
        - *Sthanika*- It can be done at the site of disease e.g.; *Kadara*
        - *Sthanantariya*- at a different site e.g.; *Gridhrasi*
    - Due precautions should also be taken when the burn extends beyond skin, hence it is classified clinically on the basis of involvement of tissue as 6 :
      1. *Twak dagdha* (Skin burn)
      2. *Mamsa dagdha* (muscle burn)
      3. *Sira-snyayu dagdha* (burn of tendon and vessels)
      4. *Asthi-sandhi dagdha* (burn of bone and Joints).
    - On the basis of *Dahanopkarana* :
      1. *Snigdha*: performed with *Madhu, Ghrita, Taila* on *Sira , Sanayu, Asthi* and *Sandhi*.
      2. *Rooksha*: performed with *Godanta, Shara, Shalaka, Ajashakrida, Pippali* on *Twaka* and *mamsa* 7

#### Indications

- Disorders involving *Twaka, Mamsa, Sira, Sanayu, Asthi* and *Sandhi*
- Due to *Vata* causing severe pain in the areas especially in *utchhrita, kathin* and *supta mamsa* (where muscles are functioning adequately).
- Diseases like *Granthi, Arsha, Bhagandara, Arbuda, Apachi, Shlipada, Charamkila,*

*Tilkalaka, Antra vridhi, Nadi vrana* etc

- In emergency conditions where *Sira* (veins) are cut, discharging sinuses and acute or chronic hemorrhage ( *rakta strava* ) 8
- It can be carried out in all kinds of pain like *Gridhrasi* (Sciatica) due to *Vata*, after excision of cysts, mass, warts, tumor, fistula, and also *Shiroroga*.9

#### Contraindications

- *Nishedha Kala* (unfavorable time) - refers to the period or environmental condition during which *Agnikarma* cannot be performed on any patient except in a case of an emergency. *Aacharayyas* have referred to *Sharad ritu* and *Grishma ritu* unfavorable for carrying out the procedure.10
- *Rogi Nishedha* (unfavorable patient) - refers to the patients who stand rejected for the procedure due to their vulnerability of the increase in the intensity of disorder based on their *prakriti* or body constitution like
  - *Pitta prakriti* people
  - *Raktapitta*
  - *Atisari* (diarrhoea)
  - *Durbala* (weak)
  - *Bala* (child)
  - *Bhiru* (one who is afraid to get the procedure done)
  - *Vrani* (one who is inflicted with many wounds).11
  - Person who are unfit for *Swedana* therapy.
  - Medical Contraindication includes:
    - Sensitive skin,
    - Acute trauma,
    - Venous obstruction
    - Arterial insufficiency.

#### PROCEDURE

After careful analysis of the disorder and patient *Agnikarma* is carried out till the symptoms indicating favorable and desired *Dagdha* appears.

#### 1. Poorva karma ( pre-operative)

- Patient should be checked for he is fit for

procedure

- Necessary equipments have to be kept ready
- it has been mentioned that *pichilla anna* (lubricated food) be given to the patient prior to *Agnikarma* procedure since it is *jivaniya, balya, sandhana and guru*. 12 (This means that such a food provides adequate strength to the patient to undergo the procedure)
- The conditions where *Agnikarma* has to be carried out empty stomach are *Arsha, Ashmari, Bhagandara, Mukha-roga, Mudh-garbha and Udar-roga*.13

## 2. Pradhana karma (operative)

The extent of the disorder at the site should be grossly evaluated and *Agnikarma* to be performed depending on the tissue that has to be cauterised, *Upakarana* has to be selected and according to the strength of the patient and the site at which it is being performed, the climatic condition and the necessity<sup>14</sup>. then the *Upakarana* (material) is heated to red hot and placed over the site for a specific period of time .

## 3. Paschat karma (post-operative)

The *Dagdha pradesha* has to be protected from moisture and is smeared with *Ghrita and Madhu*<sup>15</sup> to reduce the burning sensation and promote healing .

## Samyak dagdha lakshanas-Assessment of Agnikarma

Assessed according to the site where *Dagdha karma* was performed.<sup>16</sup> It includes:

### Twaka dagdha lakshana:

- *Shabda pradurbhava* - Skin crackle like sound originate
- *Twaka sankocha* - Retraction of skin
- *Dourgandhya* - Foul odor at the site.

### Mamsa dagdha lakshana:

- *Kapot varnta* - Pigeon like color
- *Alpa shavyathu* - Less inflammation
- *Alpa vedna* - Less pain
- *Shushka* - Dry
- *Sankuchita* - Wrinkled mamsa.

### Sira sanayu dagdha lakshana:

- *Krishna unnat* - Ulcer is black and elevated
- *Srava sannirodha* - Discharging sites are arrested.

### Sandhi asthi dagdha lakshana:

- *Rooksha*- dry
- *Arunta*- slight red
- *Karkasha*-rough
- *Sthira vranta*-stable wound.

## DISCUSSION

Pain is an entity caused mainly due to abnormal Vata Dosha. Agnikarma acts directly on Vata Kapha Dosha mitigating the causative factor of pain. Thus, pain is reduced significantly with lowest recurrence rates. Agnikarma is performed by a special pointed metallic instrument known as *Shalaka*. This is heated and applied on the most tender points marked with a marker. As per research on Agnikarma, there is a transfer of heat energy (Proton-neutron-electron theory).

### Probable mode of action of Agnikarma

*Agni* possesses *Ushna, Tikshna, Sukshma* and *Aashu kari Gunas*. Physical heat from red hot *Shalaka* is transferred as therapeutic heat to *Twakdhatu* by producing *Samyak Dagdha Vrana*. From *Twakdhatu* following are the different postulates on this therapeutic heat which may act in subsiding the diseases.

- First, due to *Ushna, Tikshna, Sukshma, Ashukari Guna* it may removes the *Srotavarodha*, pacifies the vitiated *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha* and maintains their equilibrium.
- Secondly, the heat may increases the *Rasa Rakta Samvahana* (blood circulation) to affected site. The excess blood circulation to the affected part flushes away the pain producing substances and patient gets relief from symptoms.
- Third, therapeutic heat may increase the *Dhatwagni*, so metabolism of *Dhatu* becomes proper and digests the *Amadosha* from the affected site and promotes proper nutrition from *Purva Dhatu*.

- Further it can be endorsed that the therapeutic heat goes to the deeper tissue like *Mamsa Dhatu* and neutralizes the *Sheeta Guna* of *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha* and in this way vitiated *Doshas* come to the phase of equilibrium and patients may get relief from the symptoms.

#### Probable mode of action of thermal heat

It has been found that mild degree of heating (180 °C) is effective in relieving pain, possibly as a result of the sedative effect on the sensory nerves. However, strong superficial heating (350 °C) procedure has been observed to have potential to relieve pain due to counter irritation effect. Our hypothesis here is that the released heat could have caused irritation on the superficial sensory nerve endings thereby relieving pain from the concept of 'counter irritation'. It has been suggested that pain may be possibly caused as a result of the accumulation of metabolic waste products in the tissues, and an increased flow of blood in the region is the possible mechanism that is responsible to remove these substances and relieve pain. Another possibility is that the pain releasing mechanism is associated with muscle relaxation. Pain due to acute inflammation or recent injury is relieved most efficiently by mild heat.

#### CONCLUSION

*Agnikarma* is a potent and minimally invasive parasurgical procedure which has wide application in chronic conditions as well as in emergency management. It has been explained as one among the *Anushastras*. Almost all, Ayurvedic classics have described the use of *Agnikarma* for curing different disorders as *Pradhanakarma* and in some disorders as *Paschathkarma* to cure the complications. Its importance lies in its action, because of its ability to cure those diseases which can't be cured by the *Bheshaja*, *Shashtra* and *Ksharakarma*. *Agnikarma* acts directly on *Vata Kapha Dosha* mitigating the causative factor of pain. It has been suggested that pain may be possibly caused as a result of the

accumulation of metabolic waste products in the tissues, and an increased flow of blood in the region is the possible mechanism that is responsible to remove these substances and relieve pain. Another possibility is that the pain releasing mechanism is associated with muscle relaxation. Pain due to acute inflammation or recent injury is relieved most efficiently by mild heat. In this paper an insightful review on *Agnikarma* has been compiled and presented systematically.

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