

AGNIKARMA IN AYURVEDA: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY OF ITS PRINCIPLES, PROCEDURE, AND THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Agnikarma, an ancient therapeutic technique, has evolved significantly from a sacred practice to a widely recognised medical procedure. *Agnikarma* is distinguished in *Ayurvedic* surgery, as highlighted by *Acharya Sushruta*, due to its unparalleled efficacy in treating many conditions. It is remarkably esteemed for its ability to prevent the recurrence of diseases, a feature not commonly guaranteed by other forms of treatment. The therapeutic superiority of *Agni* in *Agnikarma* lies in its ability to address conditions that may be resistant to conventional methods, including medicines, surgical interventions, and alkali applications (*Ksharakarma*). By employing the controlled application of heat, *Agnikarma* facilitates deep, localised healing and stimulates the body's natural repair mechanisms, making it an indispensable tool in chronic and otherwise untreatable cases. This unique capability to cure ailments without relapses underscores the significance of fire therapy in *Ayurveda*, cementing its role as a vital and transformative para-surgical technique. Applying heat to specific body points using tools such as metal rods, needles, or cow dung cakes help stimulate blood circulation and supports the body's natural healing mechanisms. Over time, however, its focus shifted towards its medical benefits, particularly for musculoskeletal pain, skin disorders, and other health conditions.

Keywords: *Agnikarma*, *Dagdha*, Cauterization

INTRODUCTION

The *Sushruta Samhita*, considered the most authentic and comprehensive text on *Shalya Tantra* in *Ayurveda*, dedicates an entire chapter titled "*Agnikarma-vidhimadhyaya*" to the practice of *Agnikarma*.^[1] This chapter underscores the critical role of thermal stimulation and cauterization in para-surgical techniques, reflecting the importance of heat-based treatments in ancient medical practices. *Agnikarma* is a precise and effective method for addressing various conditions that may not respond to conventional surgical or medicinal therapies.

The term *Agnikarma* is derived from combining two Sanskrit words, *Agni* (fire) and *Karma* (action or procedure). Together, they signify "an action performed using fire." In therapeutic applications, *Agnikarma* refers to using heat directly or indirectly to address a patient's illness or discomfort.

Dalhana, a renowned commentator on the *Sushruta Samhita*, has elaborated on the two primary forms of *Agnikarma*^[2]:

1. **Agni Krita Karma:** This denotes the direct application of *Agni* (heat) to the body. The heat is applied at specific points to treat conditions effectively.

2. **Agni Sambandhi Karma:** This refers to actions or treatments associated with *Agni* through indirect applications, such as using heated instruments or materials to transfer heat to the affected area.

These classifications highlight the versatility of *Agnikarma* in addressing various ailments through different methodologies.

Shalya Tantra, one of the prominent branches of *Ayurveda*, focuses on surgical and para-surgical procedures. It is grounded in six major therapeutic methods of management, namely:

1. **Bheshaja Karma** (medicinal treatment)
2. **Kshara Karma** (use of alkalis)
3. **Agnikarma** (application of heat)
4. **Raktamokshana** (bloodletting)

Agnikarma is regarded as the most significant among these due to its unique efficacy. It is particularly beneficial for conditions caused by *Vata* and *Kapha* doshas (*Vataj* and *Kaphaj Vyadhi*), as it provides immediate relief and prevents the recurrence of the diseases treated. This makes *Agnikarma* a highly valued technique in *Ayurvedic* practice, offering a practical solution for chronic and challenging ailments.^[3]

Material and Methods:

Table 1 CLASSIFICATION OF AGNIKARMA

Based on the Type of <i>Akruti</i> ^[4]	Based on <i>Sthana</i> ^[5]	Based on <i>Dravya</i> used ^[6]	Based on the disease site
<i>Valaya</i>	<i>Twak dagdha</i>	<i>Snigdha Agni Karma</i>	<i>Sthanik</i> (in condition like <i>kadar</i>)
<i>Bindu</i>	<i>Mamsa Dagdha</i>	<i>Ruksha Agni Karma</i>	<i>Sthanantariya</i> (in condition like <i>Plihodara</i>)
<i>Vilekha</i>	<i>Sira Snayu Dagdha</i>		
<i>Pratisarana</i>	<i>Sandhi Asthi Dagdha</i>		

The features of proper *Agnikarma* are categorised based on the tissue type being treated, ensuring precise application and optimal therapeutic outcomes. These features serve as indicators of a correctly performed procedure^[7]:

1. **Twak Dagdha (Skin Burn)**
 - Production of a crackling sound.
 - Presence of a characteristic bad odour.
 - Contraction of the skin.
2. **Mamsa Dagdha (Muscle Burn):**

- Appearance of a pigeon-like coloration (ashy or dark grey).
 - Mild swelling and mild pain at the site.
 - Dry and contracted wound.
 - 3. **Sira Snayu Dagdha (Vessels and Ligament Burn):**
 - Black discolouration of the treated area.
 - Elevation of the site.
 - Cessation of discharge from the area.
 - 4. **Sandhi Asthi Dagdha (Joints and Bone Burn):**
 - Dryness of the treated site.
 - Dark red coloration.
 - Rough texture and increased stability of the part.
- These signs ensure that *Agnikarma* has been performed effectively and that the therapeutic objective is achieved without complications.

Agni Karma Kala (Timing for Agni Karma)

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, Agni Karma can be performed in all seasons except during *Sharad Ritu* (autumn) and *Grishma Ritu* (summer). The rationale

behind these exceptions is based on the potential aggravation of *Pitta* dosha:

1. Sharad Ritu (Autumn):

- During this season, *Pitta dosha* is naturally aggravated (*Prakopa*).
- Since Agni Karma also increases *Pitta*, performing the procedure in this season can exacerbate *Pitta* imbalance, leading to disorders associated with vitiated *Pitta*.

2. Grishma Ritu (Summer):

- The hot nature of summer further aggravates *Pitta*, making it unsuitable for Agni Karma.
- Performing Agni Karma during this season could intensify heat-related imbalances and discomfort.

Exception:

In emergencies, Agni Karma can be performed regardless of the season, provided precautions are taken to mitigate *Pitta* aggravation. This flexibility ensures that patients in need can still benefit from the procedure when necessary.

Table 2 Indication and contraindication of Agnikarma

Indications of Agnikarma	Contraindications of Agnikarma
Cystic lesion, Tumor, Sinus lymphadenopathy, fistula, haemorrhoids, filarial, hernia, skin tag, joint disorder.	Agnikarma can be done in all seasons of the year except in Sharad(Autumn) & Grishma(Summer) ^[9]
Agnikarma indicated to stop bleeding from cut vessels.	All types of Pittaja and Raktaja disorders, patients with concealed bleeding, retained foreign body, Intestinal perforation, children, weak persons, old age persons, and patients with multiple wounds who are not fit for Swedana Karma are rendered unfit for this procedure ^[10]
In chronic wounds having some hard, elevated tissue ^[8]	Should not be done in Vrana of Snayu, Marma, Netra, Kushta, and Vrana with Visha and Shalya ^[11]

Procedure of Agnikarma

The Agnikarma procedure is methodically divided into three stages: **Purva Karma (preparatory measures)**, **Pradhana Karma (main procedure)**, and **Paschat Karma (post-procedure care)**.

1. Purva Karma (Preparatory Measures)

Preparations:

Before starting the primary procedure, careful preparation is required, including analysing the site of the disease, examining the patient's strength, identifying *Marma* (vital points), and considering the season.^[12]

Dietary Guidelines:

The patient should be fed a Picchila (unctuous) diet for most conditions before undergoing Agnikarma.

Exceptions: For conditions like *Asmari* (renal stones), *Mudhagarbha* (malpresentation of the fetus), *Arsa* (haemorrhoids), *Bhagandara* (fistula in ano), *Udara* (ascites), and *Mukha Roga* (oral diseases), the patient should undergo Agnikarma on an empty stomach^[13].

2. Pradhana Karma (Main Procedure)

Initiation:

Agnikarma begins with reciting *Swastivachana* (auspicious chants) for the patient's well-being. The patient is positioned appropriately, with the head directed toward the east, and assistants ensure immobility during the procedure.

Procedure:

The surgeon uses heated *Shalaka* (metal rods) in a smokeless fire fueled by wood like *Khadira* or *Badara*. Various shapes (*Valaya* - circular, *Ardhachandra* - crescent, *Swastika* - cross-like, etc.) are created on the affected area per the disease's requirement. The surgeon monitors *Samyak Dagdha Lakshana* (signs of proper cautery) during the procedure.

Signs of Proper Cautery (Samyak Dagdha Lakshana)^[14]:

Anavagadhavranata: The wound should not be too deep.

Talaphalavarnata: The colour should resemble the fruit of the *Tala* tree (reddish yellow).

Susamsitavrana: The wound should be smooth, without any elevation or depression.

3. Paschat Karma (Post-Procedure Care)

Apply *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrita* (ghee) immediately after the procedure. Mix a paste of *Tugakshiri*, *Plaksha*, *Chandana*, *Amrita*, and *Gairika* with *Ghrita*. If initial treatments fail, follow the line of management for *Pitta Vidradhi* (suppurative inflammation)^[15].

Use of *Madhuchishta Ghrita* prepared by processing wax in *Ghrita* along with ingredients like *Yash-timadhu*, *Lodhra*, *Raal*, *Sarjarasa*, *Manjistha*, *Rakta chandana*, and *Murva*^[16].

This systematic approach ensures the efficacy of Agnikarma while minimizing complications and promoting effective healing.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Agnikarma is a cornerstone of Ayurveda's para-surgical methodologies, offering a unique blend of simplicity and efficacy. Experts view it as vital for managing various conditions, particularly chronic pain and localised tissue disorders. Its ability to provide instant relief while preventing disease recurrence positions it as a valuable alternative or complement to modern techniques like cauterization, laser therapy, and thermal ablation.

1. Therapeutic Precision:

Experts emphasise the precision of Agnikarma in targeting specific tissues or points, ensuring minimal invasiveness and rapid therapeutic outcomes. The signs of proper cauterization (*Samyak Dagdha Lakshana*) are well-defined, providing a framework for effective application.

2. Chronic and Emergency Use:

Agnikarma's versatility is noteworthy. It is highly effective for chronic conditions like joint pain, skin disorders, and musculoskeletal issues. Additionally, its use in emergencies, where conventional methods may not suffice, underscores its practical value.

3. Integration with Modern Practices:

Many practitioners see parallels between Agnikarma and modern tools like lasers and thermal cauterization, suggesting it could bridge traditional and contemporary medical systems. This integration can enhance patient outcomes and expand its clinical applications.

4. Need for Evidence-Based Validation:

While traditional texts provide a robust foundation, experts advocate for rigorous, evidence-based research to validate the claims of Agnikarma. Randomised controlled trials, histopathological studies, and advanced imaging techniques could provide insights into its mechanisms and expand its acceptance in global medical communities.

5. Sustainability and Accessibility:

Given its minimal resource requirements, Agnikarma is seen as a sustainable and cost-effective

option, particularly in resource-limited settings. Its simplicity makes it accessible to many practitioners, ensuring broader reach to underserved populations.

In conclusion, Agnikarma exemplifies the harmony of tradition and innovation. Experts agree that it holds immense potential, provided efforts are made to align its practice with modern scientific standards while preserving its Ayurvedic essence.

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