



Review Article

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THERAPEUTIC EXTENT 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' is one amongst these parasurgical procedures. 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, formally being indicated in vata and kapha related morbidities. Moreover, the scope of this therapy is further extended to diseases that are found to be refractory to conventional sheeta-ushana-sngdha-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, Dagdha, Cauterization, Para surgical procedure, Vata and Kapha

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 chemical cauterization, bloodletting is prescribed in addition or substitute for major surgical procedures. As Ayurveda has always emphasized the necessity for the elimination of doshas (humors) over the conventional treatment to treat numerous disorders, 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 bshhaja karma, shastra karma, kshara karma and agnikarma. While he mentioned yantra and its classification agni was considered as an upyantra.¹ 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. Agnikarma holds a special place in surgery by sushruta as it is believed that a disease once treated by agnikarma does not recur and does not get infected easily.² 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, when antibiotics are not available. Actual cautery is a term referring to the metal device, generally heated to a dull red glow applied to produce blisters, to stop bleeding of a blood vessel, and other similar purposes. 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. Agni is the important one among the pancha mahabhutas. The Agni, in the form of bhootagni, jatharagni and dhatwagni is the life for the creatures. On the basis of the loka – purusha sadharmya, the Agni that exists in the body, possesses the same properties as that of Agni in the world. So any procedure that involves the Agni directly or indirectly is considered under agnikarma. The agnikarma is also known by different names like dahanakarma, dahakarma, dagdhakarma, jananakarma and pachanakarma, finds its role in the vataja and kaphaja vyadhi involving the dhatu that are predominant with pruthvi and ap mahabhutha. Mere utilization of agnikarma, which is counted in anushastra, upayantra and shashti upakrama, provides Shalyatantra the unique position among the eight faculties of Ayurveda. Agnikarma can be utilized – As preventive measure, as curative measure, as postoperative procedure, and as haemostatic measure.

History of Agnikarma

Vedic Period

In Rig Veda application of agni has been mentioned in context of obstetric and gynecological disorders. The verses indicate application of agnikarma in order to get rid of microorganisms in vagina and uterus of the women

to save the fetus from getting infected. Athrava Veda identified and worshipped Agni as a God and the disinfectant purpose of agni is clear from the verses itself. It has also been mentioned as Rakshoha. Yajur Veda has symbolized agni and its purpose in sheeta and sheeta related disorders. Sam Veda enumerated agni in a separate adhyaya as Agneya Kanda where an elaborate description to agni is cited.

Samhita Period

Charaka mentioned it as shastra pranidhan chikitsa for various diseases like granthi, visarpa, arsh, bhagandra etc. Sushruta referred it to as a parasurgical procedure and an upyantra for the management of arsh, bhagandra, granthi, apachi etc.

Samgraha Kala

Vrudhha Vagbhatta and Vagbhatta have mentioned agnikarma for pain management and have also indicated its importance in surgical procedures.

In Mughal Era

Italian author Nicalia Manuci in his book 'Mughal India' has mentioned himself as the physician of Shah Alam and Aurangzeb and has advised cauterization of heels in a patient suffering with cholera.

In Modern Era

Cauterization has been described in 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. The technique of ligation of the arteries as an alternative to cauterization was later improved and used more effectively by Ambrose Pare. Agnikarma is also practiced by the modern physicians in some or other forms like cauterization (to check bleeding as well as a treatment for gynaecological disorders), laser, prostatectomy, skin diseases etc.

Synonyms to Agnikarma

Agni chikitsa, Damsha kriya, Pachana chikitsa, Dagdha chikitsa, Dagdha karma, Agni karma, Vahnidagdha, Dahana karma

Materials Used for Agnikarma

Such materials are termed as 'Dahanupkarana'³, these are the ones which are used to produce therapeutic burns during agnikarma and comprise various accessories like drugs, articles and substances. Pippali, Godant, Ajashakrida, Shara, Shalaka, Jambavoshtha, Lauh or Dhatu, Kshoudra, Guda, Sneha. Other Aacharyas have considered the following as dahanupkarana:

Upkarana of plant origin: Pippali (*Piper longum*), Yashtimadhu (*Glycerrhiza glabra*), Haridra (*Curcuma longa*), Guda (Jaggery), Sneha (Oil).

Upkarana of animal origin: Godant, Ajashakrida

Upkarana of metallic origin: Shara and Shalakas made up of Suvarn (Gold), Tamra (Copper), Rajat (Silver), Loha (Iron) and Panchdhatu (amalgam of five metals).⁴

The use of these materials has been told according to the site of application. For dahan of twaka or skin in superficial disorders materials like pippali, ajashakrida, godanta, shara, shalaka are used. To carry out mamsa dagdha or in muscle related disorders jambavoshtha and other dhatu are used. For agnikarma related to sira or vein, sanayu or ligaments, sandhi or joints and asthi or bones upkarana such as kshoudra, guda and sneha padartha are used.⁵

Indications

Agnikarma has been mentioned in 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). It has been mentioned for numerous diseases like granthi, arsha, bhagandara, arbuda, apachi, shlipada, charamkila, tilkalak, antra vridhi, nadi vrana etc and in emergency conditions where sira or veins are cut, discharging sinuses and acute or chronic hemorrhage or rakta strava.⁶ It can be carried out in all kinds of pain like sciatica or gridhrasi due to vata, after excision of cysts, mass, warts, tumor, fistula, and also shiroroga.⁷

Contraindications

This has been mentioned under two sub-headings; Nishedha Kala or unfavorable time and Rogi Nishedha or unfavorable patient. Nishedha Kala refers to the period or environmental condition during which agnikarma cannot be performed on any patient except in a case of an emergency where it can be accomplished by providing favorable temperatures artificially and counters measures. Aacharyas have referred to sharad ritu or autumn season and grishma ritu or summer season unfavorable for carrying out the procedure.⁸ Dalhana mentioned the counter measures to mitigate the effect of agnikarma by covering the part with moist cloth, application of cool paste or kalka and use of cool food and drinks.⁹ Rogi Nishedha 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 or epistaxis rogi, atisari or diarrhea, durbala or weak, bal or child, bhiru or one who is afraid to get the procedure done and vrani (one who is inflicted with many wounds).¹⁰ Medical Contraindication includes: in sensitive skin, acute trauma, venous obstruction and arterial insufficiency.

Classification

On the basis of dahanupkarana it may be

- Snigdha: performed with madhu, ghrita, taila on sira, sanayu, asthi and sandhi
- Rooksha: performed with godanta, shara, shalaka, ajashakrida, pippali on twaka and mamsa¹¹

On the basis of aakriti or shape¹²

- Valaya or round
- Bindu or dot-like
- Vilekha or in linear pattern
- Pratararana or without any pattern due to rubbing at the site

On the basis of site¹³

- Twaka dagdha
- Mamsa dagdha
- Sira sanayu dagdha
- Sandhi asthi dagdha

Agnikarma Kala

Refers to the period where agnikarma can be performed without assisted complications. Acharya have mentioned sarva ritu (all seasons) ideal for agnikarma except grishma (summer) and sharad (autumn) ritu due to natural pitta prakopa during this period.¹⁴

Method

After careful analysis of the disorder and patient agnikarma is carried out till the symptoms indicating favorable and desired dagdha appears. For pre-operative 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Then the extent of the disorder at the site should be grossly evaluated and agnikarma be performed with the desired upkarana according to the strength of the patient, the site at which it is being performed, the climatic condition and the necessity.¹⁷ For post-operative the dagdha is smeared with ghrita and madhu¹⁸ and is evaluated for its favorable signs.

Assessment of Agnikarma

This is known as samyaka dagdha lakshana assessed according to the site where dagdha karma was performed.¹⁹ It includes:

- Twaka dagdha lakshana: seen as shabd pradurbhava (skin crackle like sound originates), twaka sankocha (retraction of skin), dourgandhya (foul odor) at the site.
- Mamsa dagdha lakshana: seen as kapot varnta (pigeon like color), alpa shavyathu (less inflammation), alpa vedna (less pain), shushka (dry), sankuchita (wrinkled) mamsa.
- Sira sanayu dagdha lakshana: seen as Krishna (black), unnat (elevated) vranta, strava sannirodhsch (bleeders and discharging sites are arrested).
- Sandhi asthi dagdha lakshana: seen as rooksha (dry), arunta (slight red), karkash (rough) sthir vranta (stable wound).

CONCLUSION

Agnikarma has been explained as one among the anushastras. Almost all, Ayurvedic classics have described the use of agnikarma in curing different disorders as pradhanakarma and in some disorders as paschatkarma 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 bhashaja, shastra and ksharakarma. In this paper an insightful review on agnikarma has been compiled and presented systematically. Agni karma therapy is result oriented for

sthanika involvement of Vata in Vatakapaja disorders. It is an ambulatory treatment modality and affordable to the common man.

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