

AGNIKARMA – A THERAPEUTIC MEASURE

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Abstract

The art of healing of the ailments has been known from the time immemorial. Many indigenous ways and methods have been followed for the relief of suffering of mankind since Vedas. *Agnikarma* is one among the *Anushastras* (substitute of surgical instrument) or para-surgical technique mentioned in *Ayurvedic literature*. *Acharya Sushruta, Charaka* and *Vagbhata* describe the role of *Agnikarma* in debilitating disorders mainly indicated in *Ruja Pradhan, Vata and Kaphaj vyadhis*⁽¹⁾. *Acharya Sushruta* has advised *agnikarma* in conditions such as presence of severe pain in skin, muscle, vein, ligament, joint and bone, caused by aggravated *vata*, wound with raised, hard and numbed granulation, in *granthi* (cyst), piles, tumors, fistula in ano, *apachi, shleepada* (elephantiasis), *charmakeela* (wart), *tilakalaka* (mole), *antravruddhi* (hernia), and disease of *snayu* (ligaments and tendons), *asthi* (bone), *sandhi* (joints), cutting of blood vessel etc. and also in *nadi* (sinus) and excessive haemorrhage⁽²⁾ etc. *Acharya Vagbhata* even termed it as the best amongst all kind of therapeutic procedures in Ayurvedic armory because of non-recurrence⁽³⁾. It is explained to provide complete relief in certain chronic diseases which are not cured by herbal medicine, surgical interventions and alkaline cauterization. Despite many new tools and techniques dealing with chronic wounds and different kind of diseases is still a major clinical challenge to the medical fraternity. *Acharya Sushruta* advises sixty procedures for the management of wound healing, *agnikarma* is one of them. *Acharya Charaka* specially advocated the role of *agnikarma* in the management of chronic wounds. It was found that *agnikarma* has many advantages and safest method. It seems to be more effective by providing timely relief.

Keywords: *Agnikarma, Ayurvedic, Dhatu, Tilkalak, Shleepada, Apache, Charmakeel, Antravruddhi.*

Introduction:

The procedure performed by using the *Agni* to cure the various disorders is known as *Agnikarma*. *Acharya Sushruta* has preached, practiced and documented the details of the therapeutic use of *Agnikarma* which is followed by many renowned authorities till date. *Shalya Tantra* is one of the eminent branch of *Ayurveda*, which consists of major therapies like *Bheshaja karma, Kshara Karma, Agni karma, Shastra karma* and *Raktamokshana*. *Agni karma* is superior among all of them and has proved to be a boon where local involvement of *Vata* and *Kapha doshas* are observed in the disease⁽⁴⁾. *Agnikarma* mean, application of *Agni* or heat directly or indirectly to the effected part with the help of different materials to cure a disease. Based on the specific heat retention and transmission capacity of different materials the ancient Indian surgeons had prescribed different materials like *pippali* (piper longum), *ajasakrut* (goats excreta), *godantha* (cow's tooth), *shara* (arrow), *shalaka* (metal Rods), *kshoudra* (honey), *guda* (jaggery), *sneha* (oil/fat) etc.⁽⁵⁾ for cauterizing specific body parts like skin, muscle, blood vessels, ligaments etc. *Agni karma* is also done by *Shalakas*, made up of different *dhatu*s like gold, silver, copper, iron, etc. for different stages of the diseased conditions. According to the logic of the surgeon appropriate material should be selected for specific disease conditions. The mechanism of action of *agnikarma* is still obscure. *Agnikarma* act on a multi-factorial level in the body. Mainly it is indicated in the disease caused by *vata* and *kapha* 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). In this article an attempt is being made to unveil the

principles of *Agnikarma*. *Agnikarma* is an important therapeutic measure in *Ayurvedic* system of medicine, which has got worldwide popularity because of its simple administration and efficacy in variety of disorders.

Material and methods:

This is conceptual type of study. Textual material are used for the study from which various references have been collected. Main Ayurvedic texts used in this study are *Charak Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtang Sangraha*.commentaries are also included in it. Various online journals, Research papers magazines.

Indication:

1. Painful conditions of musculoskeletal disorders.
2. Hard, elevated and desensitized *vranas*/ulcer.
3. *Granthi*, *Arsas*, *Bhagandara*, *Arbuda*, *Shleepada*, *Charmakeela* and *Antravidhi* and Severe bleeding condition⁽⁷⁾

Contraindication:

1. *Pitta Prakruti*
2. *Antah shonita* (Internal bleeding)
3. *Bhinna koshta* (Ruptured viscera)
4. *Nuddhrita shalya* (in presence of foreign body)
5. *Durbala* (emaciated), *Bala* (children), *Vridha* (old aged), *Bheeru* (coward), *Aneka vranapeedita* (with multiple wounds).⁽⁸⁾

Material required:

1. *Shalaka*
2. Permanent Marker
3. Gas stove, lighter
4. Surgical spirit, Gloves
5. Cotton gauze
6. *Madhu* , *sarpi* or *haridra churna* (turmeric), *aloe vera pulp*

Season/Time:

All seasons except *Greeshma* & *Sharad Ritu*. In the case of emergency, it can be done in any season with special precaution

Preoperative:

1. Educate the patient.
2. Obtain informed consent.
3. Ask the patient to satisfy natural urges.
4. Check vitals.

5. *Pichila anna*

lubricated food) be given to the patient prior to *agnikarma* procedure since it is *jivaniya, balya, sandhana* and *guru*. Acharya Dalhana has explained that *pichila anna* has *Sita, Mridu*, and *pichila virya* and hence has *pittaghna* quality.⁽⁹⁾

Procedure of agnikarma:

After taking written informed consent, *Agnikarma* was done. The patient should be allowed to be in a comfortable position, exposing the site of the problem. Wear surgical gloves. Clean the site with the surgical spirit. Mark the tenderest points with a marker. The affected part was applied with *Triphala Kasaya* and wiped up with sterilized gauze piece. Keep *Shalaka* in the gas stove for heating. The upward moving flame should be utilized for the purpose. Ensure *Shalaka* to be red hot. Hold the red hot *Shalaka* strongly in one hand and touch in the marked points for 2-3 seconds only (depends on the site and tenderness). *Agnikarma* in the form of *samyak twak dagdh* (therapeutic superficial skin burn) was done by making a *vilekha dahana vishesa* (multiple dots in a three straight lines) with red hot *pancha dhatu shalaka*. During entire procedure, a swab soaked in *Kumari Swarasa* (fresh pulp of Aloe vera) was applied just after making each dot. Appropriate precaution was taken not to produce *asamyak dagdha vrana* (neither superficial nor too deep burn). The entire procedure was repeated three times at the interval of 7 days.

Post operative:

After completion of the procedure, keep *Shalaka* at specified place. An ointment of *Madhu* and *Sarpi* was applied over the site of *Agnikarma* has been mentioned by *sushrutacharya* as the treatment of *samyak dagdha*. Acharya Dalhana has explained that this particular ointment is meant for the *prasadana* of vitiated *Rakta* and *pitta* after the procedure. It also relieves pain i.e., *Vednopshamniya*.⁽¹⁰⁾ *Vata vardhak ahara-vihar* (diet and activities which aggravate *vata dosha*) was also restricted during the treatment and follow-up period.

Probable mode of action of Agnikarma:

Agni possesses *Ushna, Tikshna, Sukshma* and *Aashukari Gunas*, which are opposite to *Vata* and anti *Kapha* properties. Physical heat from red hot *Shalaka* is transferred as therapeutic heat to *Twakdhatu* by producing *Samyak Dagdha Vrana*. From *Twakdhatu* this therapeutic heat acts in three ways.

1. First, due to *Ushna, Tikshna, Sukshma, Ashukari Guna* it removes the *Srotavarodha*, pacifies the vitiated *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha* and maintains their equilibrium.⁽¹¹⁾
2. Secondly, it 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.
3. Third, therapeutic heat increases the *Dhatwagni*, so metabolism of *dhatu* becomes proper and digests the *Amadosha* from the affected site and promotes proper nutrition from *Purva Dhatu*. In this way, *Asthi* and *Majja Dhatu* become more stable.

Thus result is precipitated in the form of relief from all the diseased symptoms. 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 got relief from the symptoms. *Agnikarma* produces a coagulative necrosis on the surface layers of skin which causes self-healing. There is no need of post-procedural medication locally or orally.

Effect of Agnikarma:

1. Increases metabolism⁽¹²⁾

2. Increases blood circulation
3. Decreases pain
4. Exciting/stimulating nerves
5. Relaxation to muscles
6. Decreases infection
7. Decreases joint stiffness and inflammation.

Precaution:

Agnikarma should not be done empty stomach. It is better to take *Pichila anna* before the procedure and should be aware of vital parts of the body, season, *vyadhi dhoshaavastha*. Care should be taken while heating *Shalaka* and placing it in specified place after *Agnikarma*.

Importance of Agnikarma:

Acharya Sushruta and *Acharya Vagbhata* have both given superior place to *Agnikarma* as compared to *Ksharakarma* as cases treated with *Agnikarma* chances of recurrences are rare. It causes coagulation and closure of bleeding vessels and thus helps in haemostasis. Diseases which are incurable by the use of medicines, sharp instruments, and alkalies will be cured by fire (thermal cautery). It also eradicates disease from its root and so considered to be superior. Another benefit of *agnikarma* is that, as heat itself is a sterilizing agent, so it is also helpful in minimizing microorganisms load in the wound. It is safe and effective, day care procedure. *Agnikarma* will become one of the most promising branches of *Ayurveda* in future. The technique and equipments have become advance but the basic principles are still the same.

Conclusion:

Today the increasing burden of cost on healthcare system, demand to search simple cost effective, non recurrent, with no adverse effect, acceptable and effective therapy to combat the challenges of chronic diseases. This is the time to look in the traditional and time tested knowledge of *Ayurveda* and there specific procedure. It is an ambulatory treatment modality and affordable to the common man. Hence, this treatment modality can be prescribed as an office procedure considering its effectiveness and safe therapeutic regimen for chronic ailments. In the field of pain management and cosmetic therapy, *Agnikarma* procedure can be done very effectively and safely. Its procedures are simple and almost have no medicines for internal and external use. To the patients, it is very convenient and economic. *Agnikarma* procedure needed to have more scientific studies and evaluation. Total cost of *Agnikarma* procedure is very less in comparison to the therapy available today. These simple treatment technique is boon for developing and poor country because of its low cost and quite simple. It limits the hospital stay and mostly they are day care procedure. This procedure are cheap, safe, effective, and with no adverse effect. No need of anaesthetic and analgesic agents during and after the procedure. Because of its great therapeutic value it is considered superior than *Kshara*. Even in modern surgery the principles of *Agnikarma* have been adopted with advanced technology like, Radiation therapy, Laser therapy, Cauterization for haemostasis, excision etc.

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