THERAPEUTIC EXTENT OF AGNIKARMA

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ABSTRACT

Aacharya Sushruta who is worshipped as the father of surgery has described various modalities relating to both surgical and parasurgical procedures. ‘Agnikarma’ is one amongst those 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-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, 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 cauteterization, 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, Aacharya 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. Aacharya Sushruta has mentioned different methods of management of diseases such as bhashaja karma, shastra karma, kshara karma and agnikarma. While he mentioned yantra and its classification agni was considered as an upayana.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 sushrtra 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 cauteterization in almost every surgical procedure to ensure sterilization and asepsis. The medical practice or technique of cauteterization 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 aagnayamma prapayanti” 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 dhawagwani 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, jalanakarma 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 anushtra, upayanta and shashhti upakarma, 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 Agnneya 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 upyaatra 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 cautereering 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 ligature of the arteries as an alternative to cauterization was later improved and used more effectively by Ambroise 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, Jambavoshta, Lauh or Dhatu, Kshoudra, Guda, Sneha. Other Aacharyas have considered the following as dahanupkarana:
Upkarana of plant origin: Pippali (Piper longum), Yashanmadhu (Glycerrhiza glabra), Haridra (Curtuma 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 jambavoshta 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 raka strava.6 It can be carried out in all kinds of pain like sciatica or gridhrosi due to vata, after excision of cysts, mass, warts, tumor, fistula, and also shioroga.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. Aacharayas 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 diarrheea, 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 dahanupkara 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 mamsa

On the basis of aakriti or shape12
- Valaya or round
- Bindu or dot-like
- Vilekha or in linear pattern
- Pratisarana or without any pattern due to rubbing at the site
Agnikarma has been explained as one among the anuashastras. Almost all, Ayurvedic classics have described the use of agnikarma in 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 cannot 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 Vatakaphaja disorders. It is an ambulatory treatment modality and affordable to the common man.

REFERENCES