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“AGNIKARMA AS A TOOL FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT”

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Abstract : Pain is one of the most distressing symptoms encountered in clinical practice. Ayurveda recognizes pain primarily as manifestation of Vata. Dosha vitiation, either independent or in association with other doshas. Among various therapeutic modalities described for pain management, Agnikarma holds a unique & significant position. Ancient Acharya's have described Agnikarma as para-surgical procedure capable of providing instant long lasting relief from pain, especially in musculoskeletal & neurological disorders.

Objective : To review ayurvedic concept of Agnikarma with respect to pain management with its classification, instruments, types, etc. to correlate these concepts with contemporary medical understanding.

Material & methods – Classical Ayurvedic texts including Susruta Samhita, Charak Samhita & Astanga Hrudaya were reviewed.

Result – Ayurveda provides a comprehensive and staged management approach including lifestyle modification, pharmacotherapy, para-surgical & surgical procedures. Among these Agnikarma offers effective minimally invasive alternatives.

Conclusion : Agnikarma's principles provide a holistic & rational framework for managing pain. Integration of Agnikarma can improve modern diagnostic understandings, outcomes & reduce recurrence.

INTRODUCTION : Pain is one of the most common and distressing clinical symptoms encountered in medical practice and significantly affects the quality of life of patients. In Ayurveda, pain (Shoola) is predominantly attributed to the vitiation of Vata Dosha, either independently or in association with other Doshas. Effective management of pain therefore requires therapeutic interventions that pacify Vata and remove the underlying pathological factors. Among the various parasurgical procedures described in Ayurvedic literature, Agnikarma holds a distinctive and important place in the management of pain-related disorders. Agnikarma is a therapeutic procedure involving the controlled application of heat using specially designed metallic instruments or substances. Acharya Sushruta has described Agnikarma as a superior modality among Anushastra Karma and emphasized its effectiveness in conditions where other treatment measures fail. Classical texts state that diseases treated with Agnikarma show minimal recurrence, highlighting its longterm therapeutic value. The procedure is particularly indicated in disorders of Asthi, Sandhi, Snayu, Mamsa, and Sira, where pain, stiffness, and functional limitation are predominant symptoms. From an Ayurvedic standpoint, Agnikarma alleviates pain by

counteracting the Sheeta (cold), Ruksha (dry), and Chala (mobile) qualities of aggravated Vata through its Ushna (hot), Tikshna (sharp), and Sukshma (subtle) properties. This results in improved local circulation, removal of Srotorodha (channel obstruction), and normalization of Dosha imbalance. Consequently, pain is relieved and tissue function is restored. In contemporary medical terms, the analgesic effect of Agnikarma can be correlated with thermal stimulation leading to vasodilation, enhanced blood flow, muscle relaxation, and modulation of pain pathways through neural mechanisms. The controlled heat application may also activate the gate control mechanism of pain and stimulate the release of endogenous opioids, contributing to sustained pain relief. Due to its minimal invasiveness, cost-effectiveness, and outpatient applicability, Agnikarma has gained renewed interest as a complementary approach to pain management. Thus, Agnikarma emerges as a safe, effective, and holistic modality for managing various painful musculoskeletal and neuromuscular conditions. A systematic exploration of its classical basis, procedural methodology, and analgesic mechanisms is essential to establish its relevance in integrative pain management practices.

CONCEPT OF AGNIKARMA -

The term Agnikarma is derived from two words -

Agni-Fire or heat and Karma Therapeutic procedure

Thus, agnikarma refers to therapeutic application of controlled heat to specific body parts for disease management

Classical definition -

"अग्निनां कृत्वा यत्कर्म, अग्ने संबाधि वा यत्कर्म तदाग्निकर्म।" (डल्हणसु.सू. १२/२)

When samyak Dagha Vrana Produced by Agni with help of various dravyas is called as 'Agni Karma'.¹

Importance -

क्षारादग्निर्गरीयान् क्रियासु व्याख्यातः, तद्गन्धानां रोगाणामपुनर्भावाद्वेषजशस्त्रक्षारैरसा-घ्यानां तत्साध्यत्वाच्च ॥ ३ ॥ सु. सू 12/3

Agni (fire is better than alkali in action of burning); it is said so, because disease treated by burning not reoccur again & also because those disease which are incurable by the use of medicines ,sharp instruments & alkalies will be cured by fire (thermal cautery).²

According to Ashtang hrudayam -

अग्नि क्षारादपि श्रेष्ठस्तद्द्वयानामसम्भवत् ।

भेषजबार स्त्रैच न सिद्धानां प्रसाधनात् ॥ अ.ह.सू. ३०/५०

According to vagbhatacharya Agnikarma is superior to ksharakarna because disease treated by agnikama do not relapse as well as diseases cannot be get treated by ksharkarma, operations can be cured by Agnikarma³

Use of agnikarma in Pain with classical reference-⁴

त्वङ्गाससिरास्नायुसन्ध्यस्थिस्थितेऽत्युग्ररुजे। सुसू 12/10

According to sushrutacharya, Agnikarma should be performed in cases of severe pain in skin, muscles, Vein, ligaments, Joints & bone caused by Vata (aggravation)

Instruments used for Agnikarma :⁵

अर्थमानि दहनोपकरणानि भवन्ति । तद्यथा पिप्पल्यजाशकृद्रोदन्तशरशलाकाजाम्बवीष्टेतर-लौहाः क्षौद्रगुडस्नेहाश्च । तत्र

पिप्पल्यजाशकृद्गोदन्तशरशलाकास्त्वग्गतानां,

जाम्बवीष्टेतरलौहा मांस-गतानां, क्षौद्रगुडस्नेहाः

सिरास्नायुसन्ध्यस्थिगतानाम् ॥ सू. सू. 12/4

Equipments required for

burning(agnikarma) are pippali, ajasakruta

(excreta of goat), Godant (cows tooth),

Sara (arrow head), Shalaka (metal rod),

Jambavostha, rods of other metals, honey

Jaggery and Fats like oils, ghee, etc

Sushrutacharya explained use of instrument on the basis of organ or tissues -

a) Twacha dagdha- pippali, goats excreta (ajashaknut), cows teeth (godant), shara, shalaka are used for branding in diseases of skin

b) Mamsa dagdha - Jambavostha (it is rod like instrument made up of piece of black stone and shape resembles the jambuphala) & rod of other metals used for branding in diseases of muscles.

c) Sira, snayu, asthi sandhi dagdha - Honey, Jaggery and fats (oil, ghee) are used for branding bony disease presenting in veins, ligaments, bony Joints & bones⁵

Acc. to charakacharya

Charakacharya described instruments on the basis of person's physiological condition-

Sukumar Yogya Ghrita (Ghee), Tail (oil), Vasa majja, madhuchista

Asukumar yogya Yantra made up of loha (iron)⁵

Procedure (Agnikarma vidhi)

-Agnikarma should be done after the patient has taken pickhila (slimy food)

-Physician should keep ready at all with all instrument required for agnikarma & make patient sit or lie down with his head held tight by attendant.

-A small open hearth is to be constructed, fixed with bellows similar to that of an ironsmith, into the hearth, wood of khadira or badari are put in and set Fire. Now day's gas burner is used

-when the smoke has ceased & red burning coal is ready the physician should put instruments into the hearth, make their

points red hot

- Take them out and place them on body of the patient creating marks such as -

according to Sushrutacharya –

तत्र वलयबिन्दुविलेखाप्रतिसारणानीति

दहनविशेषः। सु.सु. 12/11

Valay (circular ring like), bindu (dot), vilekha (straight line) & pratisarana (Spread different patterns of wide, flat) are different patterns of agnikarma described by sushrutacharya⁷

as well as some patterns like semicircular, Swastika number eight, dotted patch are described by other acharyas

Patient being kept assured by encouraging words all the time. Agnikarma should be as much as required for the disease and till symptoms of deep samyak dagdha manifest.

Acc. to sushrutacharya - samyak dagha manifest –

तत्र शब्दप्रादुर्भावो दुर्गन्धता त्वक्सकोचश्च

त्वग्दग्धे कपोतवर्णताऽल्पश्वयथुवेदना शुष्क

सङ्कुचितवणता च मासदग्ध, कृष्णान्नतवणता

सावसन्निरोधश्च मिरास्तायुदर, रुक्षारुणता

कर्कशस्थिरवणता च सन्ध्यस्थिदग्धे: सु.सु. 12/8

Twak dagha lakshana -Crackling sound

-bad smell

-contraction of skin

Mamsa dagdha - Manifestation of colour of pigeon (light grey or ash)

-Pain

-Slight swelling

-wound become dry & constricted without any exudation

Sira-snaya dagdha -wound become black & swollen

-caesation of bleeding & discharge.

Sandhi asthi dagdha

-Roughness

-Dark reddishness

-Hardness

-Firm wound⁷

सम्यकदग्धमनवगाढ तालवर्ण सुसंस्थित

पूर्वलक्षणयुक्त चासु. 12/28

-which is not deep

- Has the colour of tala phala
- Having the purva lakshana yukta means symptoms of burning sensation in skin, muscles, blood vessels, ligaments, Joints & bones⁸

Probable mode of action

Agnikarma is considered as best therapy for vata and kapha dosha because agni possesses ushna, sukshma, tikshna, aashukari guna which are opposite to vata & kapha. It removes strotovarodha increase the rasa rakta samvahan to affected site
Hence vata aggravation stops and pain causing by it reduces

Possible scientific explanation

1. Gate control Theory –

The application of heat stimulates A-delta fibers, which carry 'Fast' pain signals to the spinal cord. This "effectively close the gate" on the "slow" pain signals carried by C-fibres, providing immediate relief for chronic, dull pain.

2.Descending Pain inhibitory (DPI) mechanism -

Agnikarma stimulates the CVS to release endogenous opioids from brainstem & arcuate nucleus, which act as natural painkillers.

3 . Nerve desensitization –

TENS effect - trans electric nerve stimulation

High intensity heat can cause denaturation of superficial pain receptors & free nerve endings, temporarily blocking the transmission of pain signals to the brain.

Pain receptors of skin and motor end plate stimulated at 45°C. Pathway for pain & thermal signals run parallel and end in same area but only stronger one can be felt. Therefore complete exclusion of pain impulse by heat occurs

4 . According to scientist Dr. Ven Hanff

Place where heat burns the local tissues metabolism is improved and thus it leads to increased demand of oxygen & nutrients of the tissues. This causes enhanced delivery of nutrients and more efficient removal of waste products, hence speeding up the natural process of repair.

Ushna Guna	Thermal energy/ vasodilation
Vata shaman	Pain modulation / Neuromodulation
Strotoshodhan	Improved microcirculation & waste clearance
Dhatwagni deepana	Increased local basal metabolic rate (BMR)
Samyak Dagdha	Therapeutic micro burn/Cauterization

Vascular metabolic corelation

Local application of heat produces measurable physiological changes - Vasodilation -Heat increase local blood flow (hyperemia) which improves oxygen delivery & nutrient perfusin to ischemic or degenerated tissues.

Metabolic clearance - Increased circulation helps ‘flush away’ inflammatory mediators & metabolic waste products (like lactic acid) thatcontribute to pain & stiffriess

Muscle Relaxation - Therapeutic heat reduces muscle spasm by lowering gamma fiber activity, thereby easing joint muscle tension

CONCLUSION :

Agnikarma's principles provide holistic & rational framework fore

managing pain. Integration of agnikarma can improve with modern diagnostic understandings outcomes & reduce rercurence.

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