



Review Article

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF *SNAYUGATHA VATA VYADHI* AND ROLE OF *AGNIKARMA* IN ITS  
MANAGEMENT

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Article info

Article History:

Received: 13-01-2026

Accepted: 19-02-2026

Published: 26-03-2026

KEYWORDS:

*Snayugatha Vata Vyadhi, Agnikarma.*

ABSTRACT

*Vata Vyadhi* denotes a group of disorders in Ayurveda that arise from the qualitative and quantitative disturbance of *Vata Dosha*, the primary regulator of movement, neural activity, and musculoskeletal integrity. Vitiating of *Vata* may occur due to excessive physical exertion, trauma, improper dietary habits, suppression of natural urges, aging, or depletion of *Dhatus*. The underlying pathogenesis involves *Dhatu kshaya* (tissue depletion) and *Srotorodha* (obstruction of channels), resulting in impaired nourishment and functional derangement of joints, ligaments, muscles, and nerves. Clinically, *Vata Vyadhi* presents with characteristic features such as *Shula* (pain), *Stambha* (stiffness), *Spandana* (twitching), *Supti* (numbness), *Bala hani* (loss of strength), and restricted mobility. Conditions such as sciatica, osteoarthritis, and various paralytic disorders reflect similarities with *Vata*-dominant pathologies described in classical texts. The chronic, degenerative, and recurrent nature of these disorders often makes management complex. *Agnikarma*, elaborated by *Acarya Sushruta* in the *Sushruta Samhita*, is a distinctive para-surgical procedure indicated particularly for *Vata* and *Kapha* disorders associated with severe, localized pain. The therapeutic application of controlled heat possesses *Ushna* (hot), *Tikshna* (sharp), and *Sukshma* (subtle) qualities, which counteract the *Shita* (cold) and *Ruksha* (dry) attributes of aggravated *Vata*. It enhances local blood circulation, reduces muscle spasm, alleviates stiffness, and facilitates metabolic activity at the affected site. Furthermore, *Agnikarma* is believed to prevent recurrence by stabilizing *Vata* at the tissue level. Thus, it offers a focused, minimally invasive, and effective approach in the management of *Vata Vyadhi*, especially in chronic musculoskeletal conditions.

INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda the term *Vata vyadhi* used to describe a group of disorders that arise due to the vitiating (*Prakopa*) of *Vata dosha*. *Vata* is the governing force of all movements in the body and mind, including respiration, circulation, nerve functions, and locomotion. When aggravated by improper diet, lifestyle, aging, or trauma, it leads to various neurological, musculoskeletal, and degenerative disorders

The management of *Vata vyadhi* is always been a challenge due to chronic pain and limited response to oral medications. Ayurveda offers *Agnikarma* as a minimally invasive, localized treatment method that directly targets the pathology, especially when *Vata* and *Kapha* doshas are involved

**Pathophysiology of *Vata Vyadhi***  
***Samanya Nidana of Vatavyadhi*<sup>[2]</sup>**  
**Aharaja**

*Abhojana, Alpabhojana, Vaatala ahaara*, food having *Ruksha, Seetha, Laghu gunas*, over indulgence of food which possess predominantly *Tikta, Katu, Kasaya rasas* aggravate *Vatadosha*. *Seethaguna* causes stiffness and *Laghuguna* makes more *Chalathwa* of *Vatadosha*. *Katu, Tikta, Kasaya rasas* make an increase and *Kopa* of *Vatadosha*.

Access this article online	
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**Vihaaraja**

Vyaayaama, Prajaagara and Langhana leads to Rukshatha and thus make Dhaathukshaya and further Vatakopa.

**Maanasika**

Soka, Krodha, Bhaya, Chinta are the cause for the vitiation of Vaatadosha. Since Vata is the controller of Manas, any affliction to Manas vitiates Vatadosha.

**Agantuja**

Abhighaata, Marmaaghaata.

**Vyadhisambandhi**

Rogaadi karsana, Vishamopachaara, Dhatuksaya, Atilanghana

**Anyat nidana** - Vardhakya, Varsha rithu

**Dosha Involvement**

In Vata vyadhi, Vatadusti is more predominant in nature. However Kapha association is also in many chronic cases, where heaviness and stiffness accompany pain.

**Dushya**<sup>[3]</sup>

- Asthi
- Majja
- Snayu
- Mamsa

**Srothas**<sup>[4]</sup>

- Asthivaha srotas
- Majjavaha srotas
- Mamsavaha srotas

**Samprapthi**

There are two main causes for Vataprakopa is Dhatu kshaya or Avarana. All the Nidanans will lead to Vataprakopa, in either of these modes only. The Riktatva (emptiness) in the Srothas is filled by Vata causing different Vyadhis, either in one part or whole of the body. Chakrapani explained Riktatva as emptiness, caused by reduced Snigdhatva. However, Avarana Samprapthi is different. Here other Doshas, Dhatus or Malas obstruct the normal passages of Vata, leading to its Prakopa.<sup>[5]</sup>

Athivyayama and Abhighatha causes Vatadushti (Athivyayama leads Dhathukshaya and Abhighata leads to Margavarodha) and a localized Amatwa in the affected part and its associated components. The Vata vitiates here is Vyana. During the process of inflammation, along with Vatakopa, Kopa of Pitha, Raktha and Kapha occurs. Vata gets obstructed by the Pitha, Rakta and Kapha. This leads to development of Sopha. The Sopha formed is Vathakaphadhika here. Toda and Bheda related with Sopha indicate Vata predominance." Snigdhaslakshna of Sopha indicate Kaphanubandha. After the acute stage the condition becomes Vata pradhana.<sup>[6,7]</sup>

**Roopa**

Acharyas have explained various groups of Vatavyadhi based on Sampraapthi. That is why Acharyas have stated that according to the Nidaana and Adhishtaana different Rogas will manifest. Some are Kevalavatajanya, some others are Samsrishta vatajanya and some are Aavaranajanya. There are some Roga Visheshaas caused by Prakupitha vaata taking Aasraya in different Sthanas.

**Roopa of Snayugatha Vata**

- Stambha, Kampa, Soola, Akshepana according to Susruta.<sup>[8]</sup>
- Aayama, Gridhrasi and Kubjatha according to Vagbhata.<sup>[9]</sup>
- Baahyabhyantar aayama, Khalwi, Kubjatha, Sarvangavata and Ekaangavata according to Charaka.<sup>[10]</sup>

**Chikitsa**

All the procedures adopted by Vaidya to bring normalcy of Shareera dhatus of in a Rogi are called as Chikitsa. In general, Chikitsa is divided into two- Santharpana and Apartharpana. In Dhatu kshaya and Vatavidhi santarpana is the treatment.<sup>[11]</sup>

In case of Vatavyadhi we can use treatment modalities such as Snehana, Swedana, Mrudu Samshodana, Abhyanga, Vasti etc., and in food we can use Swadu, Amla, Lavana rasa and different Snehas and Mamsarasa. Vasti is the Agrya shodana for Vata and Taila is Agrya samana for Vata and Vatakapha.<sup>[12]</sup>

If Vatakopa is in Snayu, Sandhi and Asthi snehana, Upanaha, Agnikarma, Bandhana, Unmardana are to be applied. This is explained by Sushruthacharya. Vagbhata also says Sneha, Daha, and Upanaha as treatment of Vata in Snayu, Sandhi and Sira.<sup>[13,14]</sup>

The general line of treatment suggested for Snayu gata vata are Sneha, Daha, Upanaha etc. But the application of Agnikarma is simple and cheaper.

**Role of Agnikarma**

Agnikarma is a para surgical procedure described in Susruta Samhita, where heat is applied to the affected area using various instruments.

**Nirukthi of Agnikarma**

The word Agnikarma is derived from the combination of two separate words Agni and Karma.

**Nirukthi of Agni**

The word Agni derived from the root 'Agi gathou', 'Yad va angathi oordhwam gacchathi ithi', "Agram niyate ithi agni" - that which goes in the upward direction.

Synonyms - Pavaka, Vaishwanara, Anala, Sarvapaka etc.

**Derivation of Karma**

The word "Karma" is derived from the root 'Kuru karma dhathu which means does specific work so called as Karma.

*Susruthacharya* described 14 types of *Anusasthras*. *Agnikarma* is included one among them. *Dahakarma* is described as *Sasthra karma* by *Vagbhatacharya*

### Procedure

#### Poorvakarma

Means preoperative procedures, include preparation of the patient as well as preparation of *Agni karmagara*.

#### Preparation of the patient

The patient who is eligible for *Agnikarma* should be instructed to perform all auspicious ceremonies, keep ready at hand all the needed equipment, sit or lie down with his head held by attendants. Patient is advised to take *Snigdha* and slimy food before the procedure

#### Preparation of *Agnikarmagara*

A small open hearth is to be constructed, fixed with bellows similar to that of an iron smith; into the hearth, wood of *Khadira* or *Badara* are put in and set fire.

#### Pradhanakarma

When the smoke has ceased and red burning coal is ready, the physician should put *Jambavoushta* and other instruments into the hearth, make their points red hot, take them out and place them on the body where diseased, creating marks such as circular, semicircular, straight line, dotted patch and such others; the patient being kept assured by encouraging words all the time. It should be as much as deep as required for the disease and till the symptoms of proper cauterization manifest.

In conditions such as wounds which are swollen, which have cavities, which are cut off and hanging, in cavity of tooth, wounds having worms, *Dushta Vranas* etc., *Agnikarma* should be done by filling them with hot oil, ghee, bees wax, honey or jaggery.

#### Paschatkarma

After *Agnikarma*, the area should be smeared with honey, ghee and paste of drugs which are cold and unctuous.

#### Indications of *Agnikarma*<sup>[15]</sup>

*Agnikarma* is indicated in conditions like,

- *Vata* situated in *Twak, Mamsa, Sira, Snayu, Sandhi* and *Asthi* producing *Athyugra ruja*.
- *Vranas* with *Uchritha, Katina* and *Suptha mamsa*.
- *Grandhi, Arsas, Arbuda, Bhagandhara, Apachi, Sleepada, Charmakeela, Thilakalaka* and *Anthravidhi*.
- *Sandhi-sirachedana* and *Sonith athipravarthi*.
- It is also indicated in *Siroroga, Adhimandham* and *Vartmarogam*. In *Vartmaroga* *agnikarma* should be done by keeping a wet cloth on eye. (The wet cloth acts as a protective barrier between the eyeball and

the heated instrument (*Shalaka*). Commonly used wet cloth are- Cotton cloth (*Karpasa-patṭa*): soft, breathable, and easily available. And Silken cloth (*Kauseya-patṭa*): used in very delicate cases due to its smooth texture and non-adherent nature.)

#### Contraindications<sup>[16]</sup>

- *Pithaprakrithi*
- *Anthasonitham*
- *Bhinnakoshtam*
- *Anudhritha salyam*
- *Durbala, Bala, Vridha* and *Bheeru*
- *Aneka vrana peeditha*

#### DISCUSSION

#### Probable Action of *Agnikarma*

##### Modern part

##### Effect on Metabolism<sup>[17]</sup>

According to Vant Hoff's principle the basal metabolism of the body increases by certain percentage for every 1°C rise in body temperature. That is the place where heat burns occur, the local tissue metabolism gets improved. Thus, various metabolic and rejuvenating changes take place at the site of heat burns, thus it leads to increased demand of oxygen and nutrients at the site of heat burn. It also excretes the unwanted metabolites and toxins.

##### Effect on the Blood Circulation

While doing *Agnikarma*, the superficial sensory nerves gets stimulated which leads to dilatation of local blood vessels, resulting in increased blood circulation. It leads to delivering more oxygen and nutrients and there by accelerating removal of waste metabolites.

Apart from this it also reduces the viscosity (thickness) of blood.

This occurs because elevated local temperature:

- Decreases plasma protein aggregation (especially fibrinogen and globulins).
- Increases red blood cell deformability, allowing RBCs to pass more easily through narrow capillaries.
- Reduces hematocrit aggregation temporarily, thus making the blood flow more freely.

It results in smoother, faster local blood flow and improved tissue oxygenation and there by helps in the removal of accumulated waste products.

##### Effect on Nerves

*Agnikarma* reduces the excitability of nerves, thus pain threshold gets increased.

Ayurvedic part:

##### Effect on Pain<sup>[18,19]</sup>

- ❖ According to Ayurveda the main reason for pain is the aggravation of *Vata dosha*. It has been mentioned that there is no pain without *Vata*, i.e., *Atmarupa* of *Vata* itself is *Soola*. Movement is the

unique feature of *Vata*. When the movement of *Vata* is obstructed, it leads to an aggravation of *Vata dosha*, known as *Vata prakopa*.

- ❖ The movement of *Vata* can be obstructed due to *Srotho avarodha* i.e.; obstruction of the channels by toxins known as *Ama*.
- ❖ According to Ayurveda *Agnikarma* acts against *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha* by its *Ushna* (hot), *Tikshna* (penetrating), *Sukshma* (minute), *Laghu* (small), *Vyavayi* (quick acting), and *Vikasi* (quickly spreading) *Guna* and it breaks *Srotoavarodha*, produced due to *Vata* and *Kapha*, results in relieving pain and inflammation at that site.
- ❖ *Agnikarma* may stimulates the sensory receptor lying in the tendon, by sending a message to the brain which stimulates the pituitary gland to release endorphin which in turn binds with opiate receptors in the pain cells to block the pain stimuli. Endorphin is a naturally occurring neuro peptide and like morphine and other opiates it has a marked propensity for binding on to the “opiate receptors” of the pain cell in the brain.
- ❖ The pain receptors in the skin and other tissues are all having free nerve endings, due to high temperature by *Agnikarma* there is destruction of the free nerve endings and it causes, closing the “gate” and prevent the sensory transmission of pain.
- ❖ *Vata* and *Kapha* possess *Sheeta Guna*, to neutralize this, require opposite *Guna* treatment that is *Ushna Chikitsa*. *Ushna Guna* and *Agni* having *Anyonyasritabhava*, hence *Agnikarma* by virtue of its *Ushna, Tikshna, Sukshma* and *Laghu* property breaks *Srotoavarodha*, which was produced by *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha*. Thus, *Nirama Kapha* and *Vata Dosha* are neutralized.
- ❖ *Agnikarma* also acts like a *Dosha Dushya Vighatanakaraka* because *Ushna Guna* performs two functions. Firstly, by stimulating i.e., *Utkleshana* of *Dhatvagni* and due to this action *Sama Dhatu* (localized *Ama*) is digested and secondly *Ushna Guna* dilates the channels of *Srotas*. Hence *Srotovarodha* is removed (cleaning the respective *Srota*).
- ❖ It increases the blood circulation to the affected site. When the blood circulation increases, the oxygen supply increases and it accelerates tissue healing and removes the inflammatory irritants thus helping in relieving pain.

## CONCLUSION

*Agnikarma*, as explained by Acarya Sushruta, is one of the most reliable para-surgical measures for *Vata Vyadhi* where pain, stiffness, and restricted movement are the main symptoms. *Vata*, being *Ruksha* (dry), *Sita* (cold), *Laghu* (light), and *Cala* (mobile) in

nature, is pacified by the *Ushna* (hot), *Snigdha* (unctuous), and *Sthira* (stable) qualities of *Agnikarma*.

- It provides immediate pain relief by counteracting the cold and obstructive properties of aggravated *Vata*.
- The controlled thermal cauterization enhances local circulation, reduces inflammation, and improves joint and nerve functions.
- Unlike oral medicines, *Agnikarma* directly acts at the site of pathology, making it useful in localized *Vata* disorders.
- It prevents recurrence of chronic pain conditions when performed correctly

Thus, *Agnikarma* is not only a symptomatic pain management therapy but also a curative procedure that complements classical Ayurvedic treatments of *Vata Vyadhi*. It offers a safe, simple, minimally invasive, and cost-effective approach with significant patient satisfaction.

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**Cite this article as:**

Abitha S Babu, C S Sivakumar, Deepa M S. Pathophysiology of Snayugatha Vata Vyadhi and Role of Agnikarma in its Management. International Journal of Ayurveda and Pharma Research. 2026;14(3):82-86.

<https://doi.org/10.47070/ijapr.v14i3.3989>

**Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared**

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