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Review Article

AGNIKARMA - A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW FROM CLASSICAL SAMHITAS TO CONTEMPORARY CLINICAL PRACTICE

Bishnupriya Mohanty[1]*, Gitisha Digambar Padwalkar[2], Gauravi Gajanan Kalangutkar[2]

*[1]Professor and HOD, Department of Sanskrit Samhita and Siddhanta, [2]UG Scholar, Gomantak Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Research Centre, Shiroda, Goa, India.

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ABSTRACT

Agnikarma is one of the important para-surgical procedures described in Ayurveda for the treatment of various painful and chronic disorders. It is mainly recommended when conventional therapies such as medicines, *Kshara Karma*, or surgical procedures do not provide satisfactory results. The procedure involves the controlled application of heat over the affected area with the help of suitable instruments. Classical texts describe its usefulness in disorders involving *Twak*, *Mamsa, Snayu, Asthi,* and *Sandhi*, where it is believed to relieve pain and support the healing process. This review brings together information available in the classical Ayurvedic literature and published scientific studies to provide a clear understanding of *Agnikarma*. The article covers its basic principles, types, indications, contraindications, instruments, method of application, precautions, and probable mode of action. It also highlights the importance of this procedure in present-day clinical practice. Clinical observations suggest that *Agnikarma* offers rapid pain relief and may reduce the recurrence of certain disorders when performed according to classical guidelines. From a modern perspective, the therapeutic effect of controlled heat may be related to improved local blood circulation, relaxation of muscles, enhanced tissue metabolism, and promotion of healing. Because of its simple technique, low cost, and practical clinical value, *Agnikarma* continues to be a useful therapeutic option. Further high-quality clinical research is needed to strengthen the scientific evidence supporting its wider use in healthcare.

INTRODUCTION

Pain is one of the most common reasons for seeking medical care, and its effective management remains an important goal in clinical practice. Ayurveda describes several therapeutic procedures for relieving pain and restoring normal body function, among which *Agnikarma* occupies a unique place. This para-surgical procedure uses controlled therapeutic heat to treat selected diseases and has been practiced since the classical period of Ayurveda.[4,6] Classical texts explain that *Agnikarma* is especially beneficial in disorders involving *Twak*, *Mamsa, Snayu, Asthi,* and *Sandhi*. It is commonly advised when routine treatment measures fail to provide adequate relief or when there is a possibility of recurrence.

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Owing to its localized action, the procedure has been widely described in *Shalya Tantra* as an effective method for relieving pain and improving functional recovery. [4–6]

Interest in traditional therapeutic procedures has increased in recent years because many chronic painful conditions require safe, economical, and minimally invasive treatment options. The therapeutic principles of *Agnikarma* can also be related to the effects of controlled heat, such as improvement of local blood flow, reduction of muscle spasm, and support of tissue healing. These observations have contributed to its growing importance in present-day clinical practice. [5,7,10] This review has been undertaken to compile information from classical Ayurvedic texts and published literature regarding the concept, indications, contraindications, procedure, and clinical importance of *Agnikarma*. The article also discusses its probable mode of action and its relevance in contemporary healthcare.

Definition: *Agnikarma* is a therapeutic procedure in which *Agni* is used to treat the *Vyadhi*. It involves creating a *Samyak Dagdha Vrana* on the affected area using different *Dravyas* for the purpose of healing.[4,6]

Dahanopkarana

The equipment required for *Agnikarma* are: [4,6]

1. *Twacha Dagdha: Pippali, Ajashakruta, Godanta, Shara, Shalaka.*
2. *Mamsa Dagdha: Jambavostha*, rods of other metals.
3. *Sira Snayu Asthi Sandhi Dagdha: Shoudhra, Madhu, Guda, Sneha.* [4,6]

As per *Acharya Vagbhata*- added other instruments like *Varti, Suryakantamani, Suchi, Vasa, Madhuyasthi.* [9]

According to *Acharya Charaka*: *Sukumara yogya: Ghrita, Taila, Vasa, Majja, Madhuchistha.*

Asukumara yogya: Yantra made up of *Loha*. [8]

Agnikarma Kala- *Agnikarma* can be performed in all seasons except *Sharad Ritu* and *Grishma Ritu*. During these seasons, *Pitta Dosha* is naturally increased in the body. Since *Agnikarma* also increases *Pitta*, it is generally not advised during this time. However, in emergency conditions, *Agnikarma* can still be done in these seasons. In such cases, proper precautions should be taken, such as using *Sheeta Upachara* like appropriate clothing, diet, and application of cooling pastes to balance the increased *Pitta.*[6]

Varieties

According to *Dravya*:

Ruksha: Pippali, Ajashakruta.

Snigdha: Madhu, Ghrita. [4,6]

Hot liquids cause burns on the skin very quickly because they can enter through the small pores of the skin. Due to this deep penetration, they produce deeper burns compared to dry heat at the same temperature. That is why burns caused by hot liquids are usually more painful. [10]

According to *Dhatu*: According to some scholars, *Agnikarma* is classified into two types only: *Twak Dagdha* and *Mamsa Dagdha*. However, in surgical practice, *Agnikarma* is not considered contraindicated for deeper structures like *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Sandhi*, and *Asthi*, and can be used in these areas when required.[4,6,9]

***Twacha Dagdha*:** Indicated in *Masha*, *Angaglani*, *Adhimantha*, *Charmakila*. [9]

Mamsa Dagdha: Indicated in *Arsha*, *Bhagandar*, *Granthi*, *Nadi*, *Dushta Vrana*. [9]

Sira, Snayu, Sandhi, Asthi Dagdha: Indicated in *Shlishtavartama*, *Asraksrava*, *Neelam*, etc. [9]

According to *Dahan Aakara:* [6]

- *Valaya*
- *Bindu*
- *Vilekha*
- *Pratisarana*

Vagbhat mentioned 7 types: [9]

- *Valaya*
- *Bindu*
- *Vilekha*
- *Pratisarana*
- *Ardhachandra*
- *Swastika*
- *Ashtapada*

According to *Vyadhi*: [6]

- In conditions like *Arsha* and *Kadara*, *Agnikarma* should be performed after *Chedana*.
- In conditions like fistula and sinus, *Agnikarma* should be done after making *Bhedana*.
- In conditions like *Krimidanta*, *Agnikarma* is performed after filling the cavity with *Guda*.

Pramada Dagdha/ Itarata Dagdha: [6]

1. *Plushta*
2. *Durdagdha*
3. *Samyak Dagdha*
4. *Ati Dagdha*

Although *Plusta Dagdha* and *Durdagdha* are both considered forms of inadequate burning, they are described separately because they differ in their symptoms and treatment methods.

Plushta Dagdha Lakshana

Plusta Dagdha is characterized by *Vivarnata* along with severe *Daha*. However, *Vagbhata* has used the term *Tuccha Dagdha* instead of *Plusta Dagdha*. According to him, *Tuccha Dagdha* shows features like skin discoloration, intense burning sensation, and absence of blister (boil) formation. [6,9]

Chikitsa: In *Plusta Dagdha*, treatment should include warming the body and using medicines that have *Ushna Virya*. When the body is warmed, the blood becomes more fluid. This helps remove the blockage that was preventing the movement of *Vata* and the release of heat. Because of this blockage, symptoms like pain, swelling, and redness occur. That is why *Sheeta Upchara* do not provide relief in this condition. Instead, *Ushna Upchara* helps by allowing proper movement of *Vata* and release of trapped heat, which reduces the symptoms. [6]

Durdagdha Lakshana: They are *Sphota*, *Tivra Chosha, Daha, Raga, Paka, Vedana, Chirat Upashamyati.* [6]

***Chikitsa*:** In *Durdagdha*, treatment should include both cold and hot therapies. Application of *Ghrita*, use of *Upanaha*, and bathing should be done with *Sheeta Jala*. According to *Dalhana*, in burns where blisters are present and the damage is deep, cold treatments should be used to calm the heated blood. On the other hand, when the condition is opposite (less deep or

without severe burning), hot treatments can be used to help in proper liquefaction and healing. [6]

Samyak Dagdha Lakshanas*:* The features indicating proper therapeutic cauterization (*Samyak Dagdha*) include:

Anavagadha– The burn remains superficial and does not penetrate excessively into deeper tissues.

Tala Phala Varna– The affected area develops a characteristic colour resembling the ripe fruit of the *palmyra* tree.

The patient exhibits the expected signs of cauterization, such as a burning sensation involving the *Twacha* (skin), *Mamsa* (muscle), *Sira* (vessels), *Kandara* (tendons), *Sandhi* (joints), and *Asthi* (bone), depending on the tissue involved. [6]

Chikitsa **(Management)**

- Apply *Ghrita* processed with *Tugakshiri, Plaksha, Chandana, Gairika*, and *Guduchi* over the affected area to facilitate healing and provide a cooling effect.
- A *Lepa* prepared from the meat of *Gramya, Anupa*, and *Audhaka* animals may be applied locally as recommended.
- The remaining management should be carried out according to the treatment principles described for *Pitta Vidradhi*. [6]

Samyak Dagdha Lakshanas **Examination[6]**

Twak Dagdha Lakshana

- *Shabdha Pradurbhava*
- *Durgandhata*
- *Twaka Sankocha*

Mamsa Dagdha Lakshana

- *Kapota Vranata*
- *Alpa Shvayathu*
- *Vedana*
- *Shushka Sankochit Vrana*

Sira, Snayu Dagdha Lakshana

- *Krushna* & *Unnata Vrana*
- *Srava Sannirodha*

Sandhi Asthi Dagdha Lakshana

- *Rukshata*
- *Arunata*
- *Karkashata*
- *Sthira Vranata*

Ati- Dagdha Lakshanas**[6]**

- *Mamsa Avalambhana*
- *Gatra Vishlesha*
- *Sira, Snayu, Sandhi, Asthi Vyapat*
- *Ati matra- Jwara, Daha, Pipasa, Murcha*
- *Vrana Chiren Rohati*
- *Rudha, Vivarna Vrana*

Vagbhata has cautioned that if *Agnikarma* is performed carelessly or without proper technique, it can lead to serious and even fatal complications.[9]

Chikitsa

- Any torn or damaged muscle tissue should be removed, and then *Sheeta Upachara* should be applied.
- A paste made from broken *Tandula* and bark of *Tinduki*, mixed with *Ghrita*, should be applied on the wound.
- The wound should be covered with leaves of *Guduchi* or other aquatic plants.
- All treatments similar to those used in *Pitta*-type *Visarpa* should be followed.
- A medicated ghee can be prepared by mixing *Madhuchishta* (beeswax), *Madhuka*, *Rodhra*, *Sarjarasa*, *Manjistha*, *Chandana*, and *Murva*, and then cooking them with ghee. This medicated *Ghrita* is very useful for healing wounds in all types of burns.[6]

Indications of *Agnikarma*

Agnikarma is indicated in conditions where *Vata Prakopa* produces severe pain involving *Twak*, *Mamsa*, *Sira*, *Snayu*, and *Asthi*. It is also recommended for *Vrana* presenting with elevated, hard, or insensitive granulation tissue. Other indications include *Kaphaja Granthi, Arsha*, *Arbuda*, *Bhagandara, Apachi, Shleepada, Charmakila, Tilakalaka, Antravriddhi, Sandhi Vyadhi, Sira Chedana*, sinus formation, and *Ati-Shonita Pravritti.* [6]

Contraindications of *Agnikarma*

Agnikarma should be avoided in individuals with *Pitta Prakruti, Antaha Shonita, Bhinna Kostha*, retained *Anudadhata Shalya*, marked debility (*Durbala*), children (*Bala*), elderly persons (*Vriddha*), fearful individuals (*Bhiru*), patients having multiple wounds (*Aneka Vrana*), and those who have undergone excessive *Swedana*. [6]

According to *Vagbhata*, additional contraindications include *Jwara, Atisara, Hrudaroga*, *Shiroroga, Pandu, Aruchi, Timira, Garbhini, Rajaswala, Ajirna, Shishu, Vriddha*, and procedures involving *Dhamani, Sandhi, Marma, Sira, Snayu, Sevani, Gala, Nabhi, Vrushana*, and *Medhra*.[9]

Vishesha Sthana of *Agnikarma: Shiroroga* and *Adhimantha*: *Agnikarma* is performed over the *Bhru Pradesha, Lalata Pradesha*, and *Shankha Pradesha*.

Vartmagata Roga: The procedure is carried out at the *Vartma Romakupa*. [6]

Vidhi of *Agnikarma*

Purvakarma

In all diseases and in every season, *Agnikarma* should be performed after the patient has consumed *Picchila Ahara*. [6]

Pradhana Karma

- The patient who is fit for *Agnikarma* should first be advised to perform auspicious rituals.
- The physician should keep all the required instruments ready, and make the patient sit or lie comfortably, while attendants hold the head steady.
- A small fire place should be prepared, similar to that used by an ironsmith, using wood like *Khadira* or *Badari*. In modern practice, a gas burner can be used.
- When the smoke stops and red-hot coal is formed, the physician should place instruments like *Jambavosta* into the fire and heat their tips until they become red hot.
- These heated instruments are then applied on the patient's body to create specific patterns or marks, such as circular, semi-circular, *Swastika*, figure-eight, dots, straight lines, or dotted patches, depending on the condition.
- Throughout the procedure, the patient should be reassured and encouraged to keep them calm.
- *Agnikarma* should be performed to the required depth, according to the disease, and continued until the signs of *Samyak Dagdha* appear. [4,6]

Paschat Karma: Apply *Madhu* and *Ghrita* mixture over it. [6]

Components of *Panchadhatu Shalaka*[4]

- *Tamra*: 40%
- *Loha*: 30%
- *Yashada*: 10%
- *Rajata*: 10%
- *Vanga*: 10%

Precaution: *Shastra, Kshara,* and *Agni* are considered very powerful tools, even compared to the weapons of the lord of death. Therefore, a physician should use them very carefully and responsibly during treatment.[6]

Mode of Action

Agnikarma is considered one of the best therapies for *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha.*[4,6] This is because *Agni* has *Gunas* like *Ushna, Sukshma, Tikshna*, and *Ashukari*, which are opposite to the *Gunas* of *Vata* and *Kapha*. [4,9] Due to these properties, *Agnikarma* helps to remove *Srotovarodha* and improves the circulation of *Rasa* and *Rakta* at the affected area.[1,3,5] The heat produced during *Agnikarma* also increases *Dhatvagni*. This enhances metabolism in the tissues and helps in the digestion of *Ama*. [1-3,5]

DISCUSSION

Agnikarma is an important para-surgical procedure described in Ayurveda for the management of diseases in which *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha* are predominant. Because of its *Ushna, Tikshna,* and *Sukshma* properties, it helps counteract the qualities of aggravated *Vata* and *Kapha*. As a result, it is widely used to reduce pain, stiffness, and restricted movement, particularly in chronic musculoskeletal disorders. Classical texts also mention that when *Agnikarma* is performed properly, the chances of recurrence of certain diseases are comparatively less.[4,6,7,9] The therapeutic effect of *Agnikarma* can be understood from both Ayurvedic and modern viewpoints. According to Ayurveda, the heat generated during the procedure helps remove obstruction in the channels, promotes normal tissue function, and supports the digestion of *Ama*. These actions contribute to pain relief and gradual recovery of the affected part. [1-3,4,6,9]

From a modern scientific perspective, the controlled application of heat may improve local blood circulation and increase tissue metabolism. Better blood flow supplies oxygen and nutrients to the affected area while helping remove waste products. Heat also relaxes muscles, reduces spasm, and decreases pain, which explains the quick symptomatic relief reported in many patients. The mild inflammatory response produced by controlled thermal stimulation may further support tissue repair and healing. [5,7,10]

Although *Agnikarma* has several therapeutic advantages, it should always be performed after careful assessment of the patient. Individuals with conditions associated with Pitta predominance, poor healing capacity, or reduced physical strength require special attention. Proper patient selection, adherence to classical principles, and correct procedural technique are essential for achieving good clinical outcomes while minimizing complications. Further well-designed clinical studies are required to strengthen the scientific evidence regarding its mechanism of action and long-term effectiveness. [4,6]

CONCLUSION

Agnikarma is a well-established *Parashastra karma* described in Ayurveda that uses controlled heat for therapeutic purposes. It remains an effective treatment option for several painful and chronic conditions, especially those associated with *Vata* and *Kapha Dosha*. The procedure is simple to perform, economical, and can be carried out in an outpatient setting when appropriate precautions are followed. The principles of *Agnikarma* described in the classical texts continue to have clinical relevance. Its

therapeutic effects can be explained through both Ayurvedic concepts and modern scientific understanding. The application of controlled heat may help relieve pain, improve local circulation, promote tissue healing, and support functional recovery of the affected area. Successful outcomes depend on proper patient selection, careful assessment of the disease, adherence to classical guidelines, and correct procedural technique. Attention to indications, contraindications, and necessary precautions is essential to ensure safety and obtain the desired therapeutic benefits. Although existing clinical observations indicate promising results, stronger scientific evidence is still needed. Future well-planned clinical studies with larger sample sizes and standardized methods will help establish the effectiveness and mechanism of *Agnikarma* more clearly. With continued research and appropriate clinical application, *Agnikarma* has the potential to remain an important therapeutic procedure in integrative healthcare while preserving the principles of classical Ayurveda.

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***Address for correspondence**
Dr. Bishnupriya Mohanty
Professor and HOD.
Department of Sanskrit Samhita and Siddhanta.
Gomantak Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Research Centre, Shiroda, Goa.
Email: drbishnupriyadas@gmail.com

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