



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### AGNIKARMA – THE BOON

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#### ABSTRACT

*Shalya tantra* is one of the most significant and essential subspecialties of *Ayurveda*, which includes a range of surgical and non-surgical treatments. The most common of these parasurgical techniques is *Agnikarma*, often known as heat cauterization/ intentional heat burn/ therapeutic burns. It refers to the direct or indirect application of heat to a body part using various materials in order to prevent or treat an illness. It is a powerful and minimally invasive parasurgical technique with several uses in both emergency care and chronic illnesses. *Agnikarma* has been given a special place in surgery by *Acharya Sushruta*, and the disease cured by *Agnikarma* never recurs<sup>1</sup>. Clinically, it is considered as a prime para- surgical procedure, and it provides relief in certain diseases that are not cured by herbal medicine, surgical interventions, and alkaline cauterization. *Acharya* prescribe various materials for cauterizing specific body parts, taking into account the heat retention and transmission capacities of these substances. *Agnikarma* is most frequently used to treat neurogenic pain, tendinopathies, and conditions affecting the skin, veins, ligaments, bones, or joints when pain is a determining factor. The therapeutic, preventative, and hemostatic qualities of *Agnikarma* were recognized million years ago.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Agnikarma* is the term for the heat cauterization methods proposed by *Ayurveda* to cure specific illnesses. It can be correlated with intentional heat burn/ therapeutic burns/ cauterization. The word *Agnikarma* is derived from the combination of two separate words, *Agni* and *Karma*. *Agni* has 2 types of *Nirukti*, depending on its *Swarupa* and *Swabhava*.

- According to *Swarupa*, which spreads to various parts or organ, is called *Agni*. “अग्नि-गतोः” (*Agni Gatoha*).
- According to *Swabhava*, which moves an upward direction is called *Agni*. “यद् वा गति ऊर्ध्वं गच्छति इति” (*Yad Va gathi urdhvam Gachathi ithi*). The word *Karma* means action or procedure. So, in short, it is a treatment procedure using fire in which *Samyak* *Dagdha Vrana* is produced with the help of various *Dravyas*.

#### DAHANOPAKARANAS

*Dahanopakaranas* of different origins, such as plant, animal, and metal origins, are described which are selected based on the disease, locality, and other factors. This includes the tools/materials utilized for *Agnikarma Chikitsa*. *Acharyas* mentioned different materials to perform *Agnikarma* in different structures. *Dahana Upakaranas* described by *Acharya Sushruta* are *Pippali* (*Piper longum*), *Ajashakrid* (excreta of goat), *Godanta* (cow's teeth), *Shara* (arrow head), *Shalaka* (metal rod), *Jambavaushtha* (a piece of black stone made like *Jambhuphala*), other *Lohas* (copper and silver), *Kshoudra*, *Guda*, and *Sneha*<sup>1</sup>. *Sooryakantha*, *Soochi*, and *Adhuchchista* are described in addition to the above *Dahana Upakaranas* in *Ashtanga Samgraha*. *Ashtanga Hridaya* also describes *Sooryakantha*<sup>2</sup>.

- Plant origin - *Pippali*, *Yastimadhu*, *Haridra*, *Guda*, *Sarjarasa*, etc.

- Animal origin - *Ajashakrid*, *Godanta*, *Madhuchchishta*.
- Metallic origin - made up of *Tamra*, *Loha*, etc.

S.N.	<i>Dahanopakarana</i> <sup>3</sup> (equipment required for burning)	Site of burning according to disease <sup>4</sup>
1.	<i>Pippali</i> , <i>Ajashakrid</i> (Goat excreta), <i>Godanta</i> (Cow teeth), <i>Shara</i> (Arrow head) and <i>Itarlauha</i> (metal).	Disease of <i>Twakadagha</i> (Skin).
2.	<i>Jambavaushtha</i> and rods of metals.	Disease of <i>Mamsadagha</i> (Muscles).
3.	<i>Kshoudra</i> (Honey), <i>Guda</i> (Jaggery) and <i>Sneha</i> (Fats).	Disease of <i>Sira</i> , <i>Snayu</i> , <i>Asthi</i> , <i>Sandhidagha</i> (Veins, ligaments, bones and joints).

- *Twaka Vikaram* - *Pippali*, *Ajashakritd* (goat's excreta), *Godanta* (cow's teeth), *Shara* (arrow), and *Shalaka* (metal rod) are indicated for *Agnikarma*. For *twaka*, materials that store less heat and convey less heat energy are recommended.
- *Mamsa Vikaram* - *Jambavaushta*, *Itara Loha* (other metal) are indicated. For doing *Agnikarma* in *Mamsa*, materials that have a higher thermal energy retention and transmission capacity are indicated. For example *Jambavaushta* (a stone carved in the shape of *Eugenia jambolana*).
- *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Sandhi* and *Asthi*- *Kshoudra* (honey), *Guda* (jaggery), and *Sneha* (oil, fat etc) are indicated for *Agnikarma* in *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Sandhi*, and *Asthi Vikaram*. These are used to transmit heat energy to *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Sandhi* and *Asthi*. All these materials are having higher specific heat capacity and less heat dissipation rate.

## CLASSIFICATION OF AGNIKARMA

### 1) According to *Dahana prakara* (by *Sushruta*)<sup>5</sup>

- **Valaya:** Circular shape.
- **Bindu:** Dotted shape, Acharya *Dalhana* explained that *Shalaka* should be of pointed shape.
- **Vilekha:** Parallel line.
- **Pratisarana:** It means rubbing at the site by heated *Shalaka* and without making any specific shape.

*Acharya Dalhana* subdivided *Vilekha* further into three types

- **Tiryak:** oblique.
- **Riju:** straight.
- **Vakra:** zigzag.

*Acharya Vagbhata* added three more *Akriti* along with these four *Akriti* mentioned above.

- **Ardhachandra:** crescent shape.
- **Swastika:** four tailed mark.
- **Ashtapada:** eight tailed mark.

### According to *Dravya*<sup>6</sup>

- **Snigdha Agnikarma:** *Agnikarma* with *Madhu*, *Ghrita*, and *Taila*, which are used in *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Sandhi*, and *Asthi* are examples of *Snigdha Agnikarma*.
- **Rooksha Agnikarma:** *Agnikarma* with *Pippali*, *Shalaka*, *Godanta*, and which are used for *Twak* and *Mamsa*, are examples of *Rooksha Agnikarma*.

### According to site

- **Sthanik**(local site) - as in *Vicharchika*, *Kadara*, *Arsha*.
- **Sthanantariya**(distal to site of disease) - As in *Visuchika*, *Apache*, *Gridhasi*, etc.

### According to the dhatu involvement<sup>7</sup>

- *Twak Dagdha*
- *Mamsa Dagdha*
- *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Asthi*, *Sandhi Dagdha*

### Based on the disease

- In diseases like *Kadara*, *Arsha*, etc where *Agnikarma* is done after *Chedana Karma* (surgical excision).
- In diseases like *Bhagandara*, *Nadivrana*, etc *Agnikarma* done after *Bhedana Karma* (surgical incision).
- In *Krimidanta* condition, *Agnikarma* after filling the cavity with *Guda*, *Madhuchchishta*, etc.
- The specific site for *Agnikarma* is mentioned only for a few diseases. The rest has to be performed according to the *yukti* of the Surgeon.

S.N.	Dhatu involvement in Agnikarma	Sign and symptoms produce after Agnikarma <sup>8</sup>
1.	Twakadagdha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crackling sound</li> <li>• Bad odour</li> <li>• Contraction of skin</li> </ul>
2.	Mamsadagdha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pigeon like discoloration of the part (ashy, dark grey)</li> <li>• Mild pain</li> <li>• Inflammation</li> <li>• lesion get dried up</li> <li>• Shrivelled</li> </ul>
3.	Sirasnayudagdha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black discoloration</li> <li>• Swelling of lesion</li> <li>• Cessation of discharge</li> </ul>
4.	Asthi and Sandhidagdha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dryness</li> <li>• Redness</li> <li>• Hardness</li> <li>• Fixity of lesion</li> </ul>

### INDICATIONS OF AGNIKARMA<sup>9</sup>

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Agnikarma* can be done in the conditions such as presence of very severe pain in the skin, muscles, veins, ligaments, joints caused by aggravated *Vata*; ulcers; tumors; hemorrhoids; fistula in ano; sinus; lymphadenopathy; filariasis; warts on the skin; moles; hernia. It is also used to stop hemorrhages, and the hemostatic effect of *Agnikarma* is a boon in surgical practice. It is the *Raktha Stambhana Upaya* mentioned by *Sushruta*.

### CONTRAINDICATIONS OF AGNIKARMA<sup>10</sup>

*Agnikarma* should be avoided in persons of *Pitta* predominant constitution, in case if internal hemorrhage, when there is a rupture of the abdominal organs, unretrieved foreign body, which is a potent source of infection, the debilitated, very aged, the fearful (because of their weak mental status), multiple wound, etc..

The persons contraindicated for *Swedana* are also contraindicated for *Agnikarma*, as it causes further vitiation of *Pitta*. *Agnikarma* can be done in all the seasons of the year except *Sharad* and *Grishma Ritu*. *Dalhana* opines that, in an emergency, it can be done in any season. But precautions like covering the site with moist, heavy clothes, having cold foods, and smearing cold pastes over the body have to adopted, so that *Pitta* vitiation can be countered by the cold applications. According to *Charaka*, *Agnikarma* should not be done in the *Vrana of Snayu, Marma, Netra, Kushta, and Vrana with Visha and Shalya*.

### PRAMADA DAGDHA<sup>11</sup>

Signs of *Heena* and *Athi Dagdha Lakshanas* are similar to those of improper burning/*Pramada dagdha*. *Acharya Sushruta* classified it into 4 types.

- *Plushta* - According to *Acharya Vagbhata*, it is named as 'Tuttha'
- *Durdagdha*
- *Samyakdagdha*
- *Athidagdha*

S.N	Kind of Dagdha <sup>12</sup>	Modern corelation	Symptoms and Signs <sup>12</sup>	Treatment <sup>13</sup>
1.	<i>Plushta</i>	Scorched burn	Discoloration and blistering from the root (plusa)	-Hot and dry fomentation-Warm plasters -Hot food and drink
2.	<i>Durdagdha</i>	Blistered burn	-Raising of big blisters with burning sensation. - Reddening ulceration - Severe pain. - It takes longer time for palliation.	Warm and cold measures are adopted. - Application of <i>Ghruta</i> poultice and bathing should be done in cold state.
3.	<i>Samyak dagdha</i>	Superficial burn	- Not so deep . - Having the color of <i>palmyrah</i> fruit ( <i>Tala</i> fruit). - Evenly formed . -Having previous symptomatology.	- <i>Ghruta</i> processed with <i>tugaksiri, plaksa, chandan gerick</i> and <i>Amrita</i> should be applied over the body. -Use of <i>Gramya Aadhak</i> animals flesh as paste. -And same as <i>Pittaja Vidhradhi chikitsa</i>
4.	<i>Atidagdha</i>	Deep burn	- Hanging of muscle tissue -Separation of the particular part of the limb - Painful disturbances in the vein, ligament, joint, and bones -Complications like fever, burning sensation, thirst, and Syncope . - A wound made by such burning takes a long time for healing, and it becomes discolored after healing.	Hanging loose muscle excised by cutting followed by cold therapies -Apply a paste of broken rice, <i>tinduki</i> bark mixed with <i>ghrita</i> and cover the wound with leaves of <i>guduchi</i> or an adequate plant like lotus. -The same as <i>visarp chikitsa</i> .

## AGNIKARMA KALA<sup>14</sup>

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Agnikarma* can be done in all seasons, except *Sharada* and *Grishma Ritu*. It is because it is *Sharada* season there is *Pitta Prakopa*, and *Agnikarma* also aggravates *Pitta*, which may lead to *Pitta Prakopa*, leading to the production of various disorders due to vitiated *Pitta*. *Agnikarma* is contraindicated in *Grishma Ritu*, as it is the hot season, which will again cause *Pitta* aggravation. But in an emergency, *Agnikarma* can be done in any season.

## AGNIKARMA VIDHI<sup>15</sup>

Before doing *Agnikarma*, a thorough evaluation should be made. Surgeons must carefully assess the source of the disease, its kind, the season, and the locations of the *Marma*. Preoperatively the patient should be instructed to take *Picchila Anna*. *Acharya Dalhana* explained the properties of *Picchila Virya Anna* as *Sheeta*, *Mridu*, *Picchila Virya* and has *Pittaghna* property. Because of reflux peristalsis, contents of the stomach either moves in *Urdhwa* or *Adha* direction; thus in the following diseases, viz- *Moodhagarbha*, *Ashmari*, *Bhagandara*, *Arsha*, *Mukharoga*, and *Udararoga* surgical procedure should be performed without taking food. After proper *Dagdha*, the area should be anointed with a mixture of *madhu* and *ghrita*. According to *Dalhana*, it helps in the *Prasadana* of vitiated *Rakta* and *Pitta* after the procedure, and it also reduces pain.

## MODE OF ACTION

- *Agnikarma* is suggested for disorders that are mostly caused by *Vata* and *Kapha* vitiation. It eliminates *Srotorodha*, regulates vitiated *Vata* and *Kapha dosha*, and maintains their equilibrium because of the *Ushna*, *Sukshma*, *Teekshna*, and *Aashukari Guna* of *Agni*.
- *Ayurveda* believes in the concept of *Dhatwagni*, where each and every *Dhatu* possess its own *Dhatwagni*. When this *Agni* becomes low, diseases begin to manifest, and in this condition, *Agnikarma* works efficiently. Because of *Laghu*, *Sukshma*, and *Teekshna Guna* of *Agni*, it can penetrate deeper into the *Dhathus*. As a result, *Dhathwagni* increases, so the metabolism of *Dhathu* becomes proper and digests the *Amadosha* from the affected site and promotes proper nutrition from the *Purva Dhatu*. So, in short, *Amapachanam* occurs, which in turn removes *Srotorodham* and pacifies *Vata*.
- Application of *Agni*, or local heat, increases the local temperature, which enhances the perfusion and does efficient delivery of oxygen to the tissues. Because of the better blood perfusion, ischemia is overcome, and degeneration-related tissue injury get healed. There is clearance of local inflammatory mediators, and so inflammation is resolved, and finally pain is reduced.
- The probable mode of action of *Agnikarma* can also be explained through the 'Gate control theory of pain'. This theory explains that the transmission of pain signal can be modulated at the dorsal horn of spinal cord level by non painful inputs as well as some descending signal from the brain. This theory explains how non-painful sensations can override and reduce painful sensations. The local heat acts as a touch stimulus, which increases large fiber activity, and it has an inhibitory effect on pain signals.
- According to Vant Hoff's principle, the basal metabolism of the body increases by a certain percentage for every one degree rise in body temperature. Rise in temperature induces relaxation of muscles, and hence muscle spasm with inflammation and pain gets reduced. Muscle relaxes most readily when tissues are warm, which in turn reduces the spasm, inflammation, and pain.

So, in a nutshell *Agnikarma* optimizes metabolism, blood circulation, decreases pain and excitation of nerves, causes relaxation of muscles, decreases infection, stops hemorrhages, decreases joint stiffness and inflammation.

## Importance of Agnikarma

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Agnikarma* is used in two manners viz, one for the *Roga Unmulana* that is to cure disease, and other for the pain management. *Acharya Sushruta* and *Acharya Vagbhatta* both have given a superior place to *Agnikarma* as compared to *Ksharakarma*. It helps by closure of bleeding vessels and also does coagulation resulting in hemostasis. It is considered a superior procedure as it eradicates diseases from their root thus preventing the recurrence of disease. It has a *Shamaka* effect on both *Vata* and *Kapha doshas*.

## Modern Procedures Inspired from Agnikarma

There are various procedures used nowadays that uses heat energy for the treatment of diseases. All these are referred to as heat therapy or thermotherapy that are very much inspired by the ancient Ayurvedic practices called *Agnikarma*. Thermotherapy is done for the purpose of changing the cutaneous, intra-articular and core temperature of the soft tissue with the intention of improving the symptoms of disease. Using heat as a therapeutic intervention, increases tissue metabolism, blood flow and decreases inflammation, oedema and hence decreases pain in the joint and muscle as well as soft tissues. Thermotherapy can be done in two ways: viz, either superficially or deep. The superficial heating modalities include wax therapy, moist heat application, contrast baths, hydrotherapy, whirlpool baths, electric heating pads, etc. The deep heating modalities includes shortwave diathermy, ultrasonic diathermy, infrared hot lamp, laser, hot needling, fire cupping, etc. Cauterization is also one of the procedures or techniques of burning a part of a body to remove or close off a part of it. It destroys some tissues to mitigate bleeding and to damage or remove an undesired growth. It also minimizes other potential medical harm, such as infections. The ancient cauterization process used tools like knives or lances or any metal piece that was heated over the fire and then was applied over the wound. With advancements in science and technology, electrocautery and chemical cautery evolved gradually as two main forms of cauterization that are being used nowadays by the medical practitioners.

## DISCUSSION

*Agnikarma* is superior among all the parasurgical procedures and a boon for local *Vata* and *Kaphaja Vyadhi*. It acts due to *Ushna*, *Teekshna*, *Sookshma*, and *Aashukari Guna* of *Agni*. *Acharyas* mentioned different materials to perform *Agnikarma* in different structures for the temperature regulatory purpose.

**The benefits of *Agnikarma* are.**

- It relieves pain.
- Causes *Amapachana* and *Vata Shamana*.
- Causes coagulation and closure of blood vessels and helps in hemostasis.
- *Agni*, being a sterilizing agent, *Agni*, aids in reducing the load of microorganisms in the wound.
- Destroy unhealthy granulation tissue.
- Safe, cost effective, minimally invasive procedure.

## CONCLUSION

*Agnikarma* is a simple, safe, cost-effective, minimally invasive parasurgical procedure. It eradicates the disease from its root and is considered to be better than *Kshara karma*; and the diseases treated with *Agnikarma* has no chances of recurrence. It cures the diseases that are not managed with *Bheshaja karma*, and *Shastra karma*, so is considered to be superior. Due to its cost-effectiveness, it is very convenient and economical. It lowers extremely severe pain, especially that which is related to the musculoskeletal system. *Agnikarma* has gained worldwide popularity because of its simple administration and efficacy in variety of disorders. Hippocrates, Father of medicine quotes; “What drugs will not cure, the knife will; what the knife will not cure, the cautery will; what the cautery will not cure must be considered as incurable”. *Agnikarma* will become one of the most promising therapeutic modality of Ayurvedic science in the future.

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