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Conceptualization of *Agnikarma* in *Gridhrasi*: Exploring Traditional Ayurvedic Approaches to Sciatica.

ABSTRACT:

Agnikarma has demonstrated remarkable efficacy in managing pain, a hallmark of its application within *Apunarbhava chikitsa*. Pain, often the catalyst for seeking medical intervention, can manifest and intensify across different regions of the body. *Gridhrasi*, a condition delineated in *Vatavyadhi*, manifests symptoms such as radiating pain from the lower back or hip area to the ankle or posterolateral portion of the foot. This aligns with sciatica, where discomfort originates in the lumbar region and progresses along the pathway of the sciatic nerve, increasing in severity. While painkillers offer transient relief, they do not address the underlying cause of sciatica, typically stemming from substantial nerve compression. Prolonged usage of pain medication is also discouraged due to potential adverse effects on the body. Ayurveda prescribes treatment for *Gridhrasi* encompassing *Siravedha* (Venesection), *Basti* (Enema therapy), and *Agnikarma* (Thermal cauterization). *Agnikarma*, synonymous with thermal cauterization, constitutes a traditional Ayurvedic therapeutic modality involving the application of heat for diverse health benefits, including pain alleviation, inflammation reduction, and facilitation of tissue healing. It is imperative to acknowledge that the efficacy of *Agnikarma* may vary, necessitating its administration under the supervision of qualified Ayurvedic practitioners. In the context of sciatica (*Gridhrasi*), *Agnikarma* is recommended along the trajectory of the sciatic nerve and at its originating points. This paper explores the multifaceted dimensions of *Agnikarma* as applied in everyday clinical practice.

KEYWORDS

Agnikarma, *Gridhrasi*, Sciatica, Pain management, *Vatavyadhi*

INTRODUCTION

Pain serves as a primary symptom prompting individuals to seek medical attention,[1] with its associated discomfort significantly hindering daily functioning. The spectrum of pain encompasses various types, including acute, chronic, neuropathic, and nociceptive. Each type of pain has distinct characteristics and requires different treatment approaches. *Gridhrasi*, delineated in *Vatavyadhi*,[2] presents with symptoms such as radiating pain from *Sphik* (Hip), *Kati* (Waist), *Uru* (Thigh), *Janu* (Knee), and *jangha* (Calf), respectively.[3] This condition manifests in two forms: *Vataja* and *Vatakaphaj*. [4] According to *Acharya Charaka*, *Vataja Gridhrasi* is characterized by signs such as *Stambha* (stiffness), *Ruka* (pain), *Toda* (pricking sensation), and *Spandana* (twitching), while additional symptoms of *Vatakaphaja Gridhrasi* include *Aruchi* (anorexia), *Tandra* (drowsiness), and *Gaurava* (heaviness).[5] The term "Gridhrasi" draws parallels to the gait resembling that of *Gridhra* (Vulture).[6] Modern medical understanding finds similarities between the signs and symptoms of "Sciatica" and those described in Ayurveda as *Gridhrasi*. [7] Ayurvedic literature provides insights into a broad spectrum of etiological factors contributing to *Vatavyadhi*, [8] which are now observed to manifest in conditions like sciatica. Contemporary treatments for sciatica typically involve conservative approaches such as physiotherapy, analgesics, lumbar belts, and in severe cases, surgery. Whereas *Ayurvedic* treatment modalities for *Gridhrasi* include *Siravedh*, *Basti*, and *Agnikarma*. [9]

Agnikarma is a para-surgical procedure primarily employed for immediate pain relief. The indication for *Agnikarma* is the site of intense pain, so *Agnikarma* can be done along the path of the sciatic nerve and at the root of the sciatic nerve. Its efficacy in alleviating sciatic pain and discomfort has been well-documented.

AGNIKARMA:

Agnikarma, elucidated by *Acharya Sushruta* in chapter 12 of *Sutrasthana*, stands as a para-surgical procedure with significant therapeutic implications. [10] *Sushruta* highlights its efficacy in cases where diseases persist despite treatment with *Bheshaja* (medications), *Shastrakarma* (surgical procedures), and *Kshaarkarma* (alkaline cauterization). Notably, diseases addressed through *Agnikarma* exhibit a reduced tendency for recurrence, suggesting its enduring benefits. [11] This procedure serves to rebalance local *Vata dosha*, crucial for restoring health. *Agnikarma* employs specialized instruments, known as *Dahanopkarana*, tailored to the specific organ or site involved. The choice of instrument is contingent upon its capacity for heat retention and transmission. These instruments fall into three categories: [12]

- A) *Tvakgata* (dermal involvement): Examples include *Pippali* (Long pepper), *Ajashakrut* (Goat dung), *Godanta* (Cow's teeth), and *Shara* (Arrow).
- B) *Mamsagata* (muscular involvement): Utilized instruments encompass *Jambavoshtha* (Lead) and various metals such as copper, silver, iron, and gold.

- C) *Sira, Snayu, Sandhi, Asthi gata* (involvement of vessels, ligaments, joints, and bones): Employed substances include *Kshaudra* (honey), *Guda* (jaggery), and *Sneha* (oils or fats).

The selection of the appropriate instrument is crucial, ensuring optimal outcomes in *Agnikarma* procedures.

The *Agnikarma* procedure unfolds in three distinct phases: *Purvakarma* (Pre-procedure), *Pradhankarma* (Main procedure), and *Paschatkarma* (Post-procedure).

During *Purvakarma*, the patient is thoroughly briefed about the *Agnikarma* process, and they are advised to consume *Picchila ahaar* (unctuous diet) beforehand. Additionally, the site exhibiting maximum tenderness is carefully marked for precise treatment.

In *Pradhankarma*, the patient assumes a prone position, optimizing exposure of the lower back region and the affected sciatic nerve along the lower limbs. A suitable *Dahanopkarana* (instrument) is selected, heated until red hot, and then applied to the designated site. To prevent the intersection of two *Dagdha vranas* (burned wounds), minimal distance (1-10mm) is maintained between *Agnikarma* points.

The final phase, *Paschatkarma*, involves the application of *Siddha Ghruta* (medicated ghee) at the site of the *Dagdha* (burned) area.[14] Subsequently, the patient is closely monitored for the ensuing 30 minutes to ensure proper healing and comfort. *Acharya Sushruta* has outlined specific *Pathyapathya*

(regimens) post-*Agnikarma*, crucial for the optimal recovery of *Samyak Dagdha Vrana* (properly burned wounds).

CLASSIFICATION OF AGNIKARMA:

- A. Based on *Akruti*: - 1) *Bindu* (Droplet) 2) *Vilekha* (Scratch) 3) *Valaya* (Band) 4) *Pratisaran*. [15]
Vaghbhatta added 3 more 1) *Ashtapada* (Octagon) 2) *Ardha Chandrika* (Crescent) 3) *Swastika*. [16]
- B. Based on *Dhatu*: - 1) *Twakdagdha* 2) *Sira snayu Dagdha* 3) *Mamsa Dagdha* 4) *Asthi Sandhi Dagdha* [17]
- C. Based on *dravya*: 1) *Snigdha Agnikarma* (Oleation) 2) *Ruksha Agnikarma* (Dry Heat therapy) [18]

The qualities indicative of a well-executed *Agnikarma* vary according to the specific site targeted: [19]

- A) *Tvak dagdha* (skin involvement): Proper execution results in the production of a crackling sound, the emergence of a foul odour, and skin contraction.
- B) *Mamsa dagdha* (muscle involvement): Desired outcomes include a colour resembling that of a pigeon, characterized by ashy or dark grey hues, along with mild swelling, mild pain, and a dry, contracted wound.
- C) *Sira Snayu dagdha* (involvement of vessels and ligaments): Successful treatment is marked by the appearance of black colourations, elevation of the site, and cessation of discharge.

D) *Sandhi Asthi dagdha* (involvement of joints and bones): Indicators of proper treatment encompass dryness, dark red colouration, roughness, and stability of the affected part.

These qualities serve as crucial benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of *Agnikarma* interventions tailored to specific anatomical structures and conditions.

INDICATIONS OF AGNIKARMA: [20]

Agnikarma finds its indications primarily at sites of intense pain, with several specific examples listed, including:

Shiroroga (headaches), *Adhimantha* (eye disorders), *Vartmaroga* (vascular diseases), *Vrana* (wounds), *Granthi* (cysts or tumours), *Arsha* (haemorrhoids), *Arbuda* (cancer), *Bhagandar* (fistula-in-ano), *Apachi* (carbuncles), *Shlipada* (filariasis), *Charmakila* (chronic ulcers), *Tilakalaka* (wart-like growths), *Antravruddhi* (internal growths), and others.

These conditions represent a diverse range of ailments where *Agnikarma* is deemed beneficial for symptom relief and therapeutic management.

CONTRAINDICATIONS OF AGNIKARMA: [21]

The contraindications for *Agnikarma* include individuals with *Pitta prakruti* (constitution dominated by Pitta dosha), *Durbal* (weak), *Baal* (children), and *Vruddha* (elderly). Additionally, individuals contraindicated for *Svedana karma* (sudation therapy) should avoid *Agnikarma*.

Moreover, *Agnikarma* is not recommended during the *Sharad* (autumn) and *Grishma*

(summer) seasons. These seasons are characterized by the predominance of *Pitta dosha*, and *Agnikarma*, being a *Ushna chikitsa* (hot therapy), may exacerbate *Pitta* and lead to *Pittaja* disorders. However, *Agnikarma* is considered highly beneficial for patients suffering from *Vataja* and *Vata-kaphaj* disorders, especially during other seasons.

COMPLICATIONS OF AGNIKARMA: [22]

Complications associated with *Agnikarma*, as classified by *Acharya Sushruta*, are as follows:

1. *Plushtadagdha* (Suppurative Burns): This complication is characterized by discolouration of the affected area and a severe burning sensation without the formation of boils.
2. *Durdagdha* (Severe Burns): In this scenario, the patient may experience the formation of boils, along with intense burning, pain, and delayed healing of the wound.
3. *Atidagdha* (Extensive Burns): This is the most severe complication, involving the destruction of muscles and other bodily tissues. Complications related to *Sira* (vessels), *Snayu* (ligaments), *Asthi* (bones), and *Sandhi* (joints) may arise. Additional symptoms can include fever, unconsciousness, and dryness of the mouth, alongside persistent burning sensations.

DISCUSSION: [23]

The precise mechanism of action of *Agnikarma* remains a subject of ongoing discussion. However, several principles are proposed to elucidate its therapeutic effects:

- A) *Dosha* consideration: Diseases involving *Vata* and *Kapha* are predominantly characterized by *Sheet Guna* (cold qualities). *Agnikarma*, with its inherent properties of *Ushna* (warmth), *Tikshna* (sharpness), *Sukshma* (subtlety), and *Aashukari* (rapid action), is believed to mitigate these *doshas*, thereby restoring balance.
- B) *Vata* subsidence: By diminishing *Vata dosha*, *Agnikarma* alleviates localized pain typically caused by *Srotorodha* (obstruction) attributed to the *Sheeta* and *Sthamban* (cold and immobilizing) characteristics of *Vata*.
- C) Sciatic Nerve Involvement: The sciatic nerve, originating from the lumbosacral plexus and extending through the lower back and down the leg, plays a pivotal role in motor and sensory functions. Sciatica, often stemming from hip trauma, spinal anaesthesia mishaps, or poor posture, results in lumbar disc compression and subsequent nerve irritation. *Agnikarma's* subtle (*Sukshma*) and warming (*Ushna*) properties are believed to penetrate through the skin to the affected lumbar discs, annulus fibrosis, nucleus pulpous, and sciatic nerve, thereby relieving compression and mitigating accumulated *Vata dosha* due to obstruction.

CONCLUSION:

The prevalence of *Gridhrasi* is on the rise, significantly impacting individuals' daily lives with its debilitating pain and interference with routine activities. The prolonged use of painkillers poses risks,

making them an unsustainable solution. However, *Agnikarma* emerges as a promising alternative, offering notable relief from *Gridhrasi's* symptoms without adverse effects on other bodily systems. Its swiftness, cost-effectiveness, and efficacy position *Agnikarma* as a superior therapeutic intervention for *Gridhrasi*, addressing the need for faster and more efficient pain management solutions.

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