

**AGNIKARMA: A TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUE WITH MODERN RELEVANCE- A  
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**ABSTRACT**

*Ayurveda*, the science of life has not only been known for its medicinal goodness but also for its surgical and parasurgical procedures. *Agnikarma*, a parasurgical and therapeutic procedure that uses heat or thermal cauterization for treating various disorders like, *medaja granthi* (lipoma), *kadara* (corn), *charmakeela* (skin warts) and many more. Modern cauterization method uses electric current in obtaining hemostasis during surgeries, in removal of skin warts, skin tags etc. Both the treatment modalities use the same fundamental concept of consuming energy to destroy dead or diseased tissue. This study comprises of comparison between the *Ayurveda* and modern literary reviews regarding *Agnikarma*. *Agnikarma* originated in Vedic period where *Agni* (fire) was used as a healing and purifying agent.

**KEYWORDS:** *Agnikarma*, *Ayurveda*, cauterization, hemostasis, parasurgical, Vedic.**INTRODUCTION**

*Agnikarma*, a revered parasurgical procedure which embodies the function of heat along with healing that leads to a unique approach to medical intervention. *Agnikarma* stands superior among other parasurgical procedures<sup>[1]</sup> and is known to pacify *Vata* and *Kapha dosha* conditions. Numerous *ayurvedic* texts contain detailed description of *Agnikarma* as a treatment modality. In modern era, *agnikarma* has evolved into electric cauterization for various surgical procedures. This treatment modality is effective even in bleeding disorder when other procedures fail that is, *skandana*, *sandhana*, *pachana*, *dahana* (*agnikarma*)<sup>[2]</sup> this means that when all the treatment modalities fail to obtain hemostasis then atlast *Agnikarma* (*dahana karma*) should be done. This healing process originated in Vedic period (1500- 600BC), where *Agni* (fire) was esteemed as a purifying and the healing element.

**MAJOR REFERENCES OF IT INCLUDES**

*Acharaya Sushruta* has explained in detail about *agnikarma* as follows:

- *Agnikarma* as *upayantra* and *anushastra*.
- Its application in *twak*, *mamsa*, *sira*, *snayu*, *sandhi* and *asthigata vedana* that is, *Vata* disorders.
- As a treatment procedure in *Granthi*, *Arsha*, *Bhagandara*, *Arbuda*, *Apachi*, *Slipada*, *Nadivrana* and in many more diseases.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Even in diseases of eyes and head it is beneficial.<sup>[4]</sup>
- *Agnitapta salaka* in the treatment of *kanthagata roga*.<sup>[5]</sup>

*Acharaya Charaka* has signified *Agnikarma* one among the thirty-six *upkarama*<sup>[6]</sup> of *Vrana* (wounds). It is explained in the context of *Shastra pranidhana* and is used as:

- As an *upkarama* in *dwivraniya adhyaya*.<sup>[6]</sup>
- In the management of *mamsaja vikara*<sup>[7]</sup>, *kaphaja gulma*.<sup>[8]</sup>
- In the management of *Plihodara*<sup>[9]</sup> and *Yakritodara*<sup>[10]</sup> in *Udara roga chikitsa adhyaya*.
- It also serves in the treatment of *Ardhavybedaka chikitsa*.<sup>[11]</sup>

*Ashtanga Samgraha Sutra 40 (Agnikarma Vidhi Adhyaya)* and *Ashtanga Hridaya Sutra 30 (Kshara-agni karma Vidhi Adhyaya)* also describes in detail about *agnikarma* and its effect in various disorders.

Even in the context of *Vata vyadhi*, *Yogaratanakara Chikitsasthana 157* and *Chakradatta 22/53-55* has described about *agnikarma* in relation to a disease *Gridhasi* (sciatica).

*Agnikarma* is also recognized among the eight treatment modalities explained by *Harita* in *Harita Samhita*.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, a literary analysis has been conducted from the available literatures. The primary texts references include- *Sushruta*, *Charaka*, *Vagabhata*, *Chakradatta*, *Yogaratanakara*, *Harita Samhita* along with relevant information taken from the previous research articles and thesis.

### Dahanopakarana<sup>[12]</sup>

Dahanopakarana	Charaka	Sushruta	Samgraha	Hridya
Pippali	-	+	-	+
Godanta	-	+	-	+
Ajashakrita	-	+	-	+
Shara	-	+	-	+
Salaka	-	+	-	+
Jambavostha	-	+	-	+
Dhatu	-	+	-	+
Madhu	+	+	+	+
Madhuchista	+	+	+	+
Guda	-	+	+	+
Ghrita	+	+	-	-
Taila	+	+	-	-
Vasa	+	-	-	-
Majja	+	-	-	-
Varti	-	-	-	+
Suryakanta	-	-	+	+
Ardhenduvaktra Salaka	-	+	+	+
Kolasthidala Salaka	-	+	+	+
Nadi yantra	-	-	-	+
Suchi	-	-	+	-

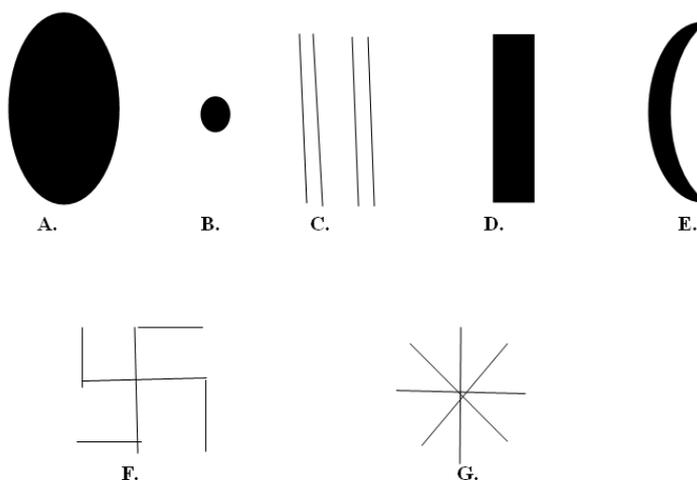
### Classification of Agnikarma

#### 1. According to Dravyas used<sup>[13]</sup>

Agnikarma	Dravya used
<i>Snigdha</i>	It utilizes <i>Madhu</i> , <i>Ghrita</i> , <i>Taila</i> and other <i>Snigdha dravya</i> in the treatment of diseases located within <i>Sira</i> , <i>snayu</i> , <i>sandhi</i> and <i>asthi</i>
<i>Ruksha</i>	It utilizes <i>Pippali</i> , <i>Godanta</i> , <i>Shara</i> , <i>Salaka</i> and other <i>dravya</i> in the management of diseases situated in <i>tvak nad mamsa dhatu</i> .

#### 2. According to the Akriti<sup>[14]</sup>

<i>Valaya</i>	Circular in shape.
<i>Bindu</i>	Dot like structure. According to <i>Dalhana</i> , <i>Salaka</i> is of <i>bindu</i> type.
<i>Vilekha</i>	Making different shapes with the help of <i>Salaka</i> . <i>Acharaya Dalhana</i> subdivided it in three subcategories- a. <i>Tiryak</i> (Oblique) b. <i>Riju</i> (Straight) c. <i>Vakra</i> (Zigzag)
<i>Pratisarana</i>	To be applied like friction
<i>Ardhrachandrakara</i> <sup>[15]</sup>	Crescent in shape.
<i>Swastika</i> <sup>[15]</sup>	Shape similar to <i>Swastika yantra</i> .
<i>Ashtapada</i> <sup>[15]</sup>	A distinct shape with eight protruding limbs extending in various directions.



3. According to Dhatu dagdha lakshana<sup>[16]</sup>

Dhatu Dagdha	Samyaka Dagdha lakshana
A. <i>Tvak Dagdha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Shabda pradurbhava</i> (production of crackling sound)</li> <li>• <i>Durgandha</i> (bad odour)</li> <li>• <i>Tvak sankocha</i> (skin contraction)</li> </ul>
B. <i>Mamsa Dagdha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Kapotvarnata</i> (color is of pigeon like)</li> <li>• <i>Alpaswayathu</i> (mild swelling)</li> <li>• <i>Alpavedana</i> (mild pain)</li> <li>• <i>Sushka sankuchita vranata</i> (dry and contracted wound)</li> </ul>
C. <i>Sira Snayu Dagdha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Krishnavranata</i> (blackish discoloration)</li> <li>• <i>Unnatavranata</i> (elevation of site)</li> <li>• <i>Srava-sannirodha</i> (stoppage of discharge)</li> </ul>
D. <i>Sandhi Asthi Dagdha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Rukshta</i> (Dryness)</li> <li>• <i>Arunta</i> (Dark reddish discoloration)</li> <li>• <i>Karkashata</i> (roughness)</li> <li>• <i>Sthirata</i> (part stability)</li> </ul>

4. Dahanopakarana according to the site<sup>[17]</sup>

Site of application	Dahanopakarana
A. <i>Tvak Dagdha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pippali</i></li> <li>• <i>Ajashakrita</i></li> <li>• <i>Godanta</i></li> <li>• <i>Shara</i></li> <li>• <i>Salaka</i></li> </ul>
B. <i>Mamsa Dagdha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Jambavostha</i></li> <li>• <i>Itarlanuha</i> (other metal <i>Salaka</i>)</li> </ul>
C. <i>Sira Snayu Sandhi Asthi Dagdha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Madhu</i></li> <li>• <i>Guda</i></li> <li>• <i>Sneha dravya</i></li> </ul>

5. According to types of Dagdha<sup>[18]</sup>

Type of Dagdha	Lakshana
<i>Plushta Dagdha</i>	<p><i>Vivarnata</i> (skin gets excessive discolored)  <i>Plushyate ati matra</i> (excessive swelling)  <i>Acharaya Vagbhata</i> termed it as <i>Tutha Dagdha</i>.<sup>[19]</sup></p>
<i>Durdagdha</i>	<p><i>Utatishanti sphota</i> (blister formation)  <i>Teevrya chosha</i> (intense drying)  <i>Daha</i> (intense burning sensation)  <i>Raga</i> (intense redness)  <i>Paka</i> (suppuration)</p>

	<i>Vedana</i> (excessive pain)
<b>Samyaka Dagdha</b>	<i>Na avagadha</i> (not deep seated) <i>Taalphala varmta</i> (dark bluish or blackish in color)
<b>Atidagdha</b>	<i>Mamsavalambana</i> (flesh or muscle appear to hang loosely) <i>Sira snayu sandhi asthi vyapadanam atimatram</i> (excessive involvement or destruction of veins, ligaments, joints and bones) <i>Jwar daha pipasa murcha upadrava bhavanti</i> (complications such as, fever, burning sensation, excessive thirst or fainting may occur) <i>Vrana chiren rohati</i> (wound heals slowly) <i>Rudha vivarna bhavati</i> (discoloration is present even after wound healing)

## 6. Indications of Agnikarma<sup>[20]</sup>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive pain in <i>tvak, mamsa, sira, snayu, sandhi, asthi</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Tilakalaka</i> (pigmented moles)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Granthi</i> (enlargement of lymph nodes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Antravriddhi</i> (inguino-scrotal hernia)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Arsha</i> (Haemorrhoids)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Siracheda</i> (cutting of veins)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Bhagandara</i> (Fistula)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Nadivrana</i> (sinus formation)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Apache</i> (lymphadenitis)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Sandhi roga</i> (diseases of joints)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Shlipada</i> (filariasis)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Arbuda</i> (carcinoma cells)</li> </ul>

Some other Acharayas has mentioned some other diseases where *agnikarma* can be performed such as, *Shiro-roga, Ardhavabhedaka, bhru-lalata vedana, Vartmagata roga, Pakshmakopa, Danta nadi, kunakha, chippa, kadara, valmika, Visha chikitsa, vishwachi, galaganda, gandamala, gulma, alasaka, vishuchika, vilambika, sanyasa, unmada, visarpa, sotha* and many more.<sup>[21]</sup>

## 7. Contra-indications of Agnikarma<sup>[22]</sup>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Pitta prakriti</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Bala</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Antaha-shanita</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Vridhdha</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Bhinna kostha</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Bhiru</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Anudhrita salya</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Anek Vrana pidita</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Durbala</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Aswedya</i></li> </ul>

According to Acharaya Charaka, *Vrana* of *snayu, marma, netra, kushtha* and *Vrana* that comprises of *visha* and *salya* are contra indicated for *agnikarma*.<sup>[23]</sup>

According to *Ashtanga Samgraha*, after *virechana*, patient suffering from *atisaara*, patient having *salya* in his body, patient having boils on body, patient contra indicated for *kshara karma* are also contra indicated for *agnikarma*.<sup>[24]</sup>

### Suitable season for *agnikarma*<sup>[25]</sup>

*Agnikarma* can be performed throughout the year except in *Grishma* and *Sharada ritu*, but during emergency conditions *agnikarma* can be performed in these two *ritu* after considering all the counter measures.

### Diet to be advised before *agnikarma*<sup>[25]</sup>

Almost in every disease and in every season after the intake of *pichhila* diet *agnikarma* should be done except in *ashmari, bhagandara, arsha, mukhroga* *agnikarma* to be done after keeping the patient nil orally.

## Procedure of Agnikarma

### *Purvakarma* (Pre-procedure of the *Agnikarma*)

Before beginning the procedure, clinician must ask the patient has either taken the diet as advised or not. After that all the vitals of the patient to be measured carefully then site, shape and size of the lesion should be carefully examined before starting the procedure.

### *Pradhanakarma* (Main procedure of *Agnikarma*)

Before starting the procedure, *Swastivachana* (auspicious invocation) should be done. Then the patient should be taken in a position according to the site where *agnikarma* has to be performed, keeping his head in the east direction and patient to be held steady with the help of skilled assistants. The surgeon then uses the heated *Salaka* in a smoke free fire of *Khadira* or *Badara* wood to create shape as per the need. The completion of the procedure should be assessed with the help of *Samyaka Dagdha Lakshana* according to the *dhatu* as described earlier and also:

- Crackling sound
- Stoppage of bleeding
- Change of color
- Easy healing
- Minimal pain

### *Paschatakarma* (Post *Agnikarma* management)-

After obtaining *Samyaka Dagdha Lakshana*, *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrita* (clarified butter) should be applied on the part for its easy and early healing and also to get relief from the burning sensation.

**Probable mode of action of Agnikarma**

Agnikarma due to its *ushna* (hot), *tikshna* (sharp), *sukshma* (subtle) and *ashukari* (quick) *guna* (properties)



It causes *dhatu utkleshnam* (aggravation to *dhatu*)



Activates *dhatwagni* (metabolic energy present in each *dhatu*)



Digests *aama* (pathological condition caused due to improper digestion and achieves *nirama avastha* (body is clear of *aama* and performs its normal functions)



Pacifies *Vata* and *kapha dosha*

**Effects of Agnikarma**

It increases the body and tissue metabolism, blood circulation especially to the site where *agnikarma* is performed and decreases the pain, stimulates the nerves, relaxes muscles, decreases joint inflammation and stiffness.

**Superiority of Agnikarma**

*Agnikarma* is superior among all the four treatment procedures that are, *Bhesaja* (medicine), *Shastra* (surgical procedure), *Kshara* (concentrated alkaline extract) and *Agnikarma* (thermal cauterization) as the diseases cured with the help of *agnikarma* never occurs again.

**Historical uses of Agnikarma (Cauterization)**

- In Egyptian culture, cautery was used to cure aneurysm, breast tumor, ulcers and cysts.
- In Indian System of Medicine it is used widely in many diseases as described.
- In Chinese Medicine System, moxibustion (cautery) was used in fatigue, fibromyalgia, musculoskeletal injuries, arthritis, digestive disorders and many more diseases.
- Greco-roman physicians used this cauterization technique in the diseases like, gout, headache, hemorrhoids, prolapsed anus, sciatica, plague, trachoma, gangrene and many more conditions.
- Unani physicians used this technique to stop bleeding in bleeding disorders, entropion, trichiasis, inguinal hernia, warts etc.

**Uses of Modern Cauterization techniques**

Speciality	Examples
1. ENT	Epistaxis, nasal turbinate reduction.
2. Dermatology	In removal of warts, moles, skin tags.
3. Gynecology	In Cervical erosion.
4. Surgery	In obtaining hemostasis during any surgery, in treatment of hemorrhoids, fistula.
5. Ophthalmology	In obtaining hemostasis during eye surgeries.

**Cauterization in Modern Medicine**

It refers to the destruction of tissues by heat, electricity or chemicals to:

- Obtain hemostasis
- Remove abnormal tissue growth
- Prevent infection

**Types of Cauterization**

**1. Electrocautery (most commonly used method)-**

- It uses direct electric current to heat metal wire (electrode), when applied to the tissue.
- In this method current do not pass in the body only the heat does.
- It is of two types-
  - a. Monopolar Cautery- In this the current flows from the electrode to a grounding pad and then back to the machine. It is mainly used in cutting or coagulating large area.
  - b. Bipolar Cautery- In this the current flows between the two tips of a forcep-like instrument. It is used mainly in delicate body structures.

**2. Electro-surgery (Diathermy)-**

- It uses high frequency alternating current (HFAC) to coagulate or cut a tissue.
- In this method, current passes through the body tissue, generating the heat inside.
- It includes; cutting (continuous wave), coagulation (interrupted wave) and blend (mixed mode).

**3. Chemical Cauterization**

- It uses caustic chemicals like silver nitrate sticks, tri-chloro-acetic acid to burn the tissue.
- It is used for treating warts, granulation tissue, small bleeding conditions like nasal epistaxis.

**4. Laser Cauterization**

- It uses focused local beams like of carbon di oxide to vaporize or coagulate the tissue.
- It is commonly used in dermatology, ophthalmology and ENT.

**5. Cryocautery (Cryotherapy)**

- It uses extreme cold that is, liquid nitrogen to destroy tissue by freezing.
- It is not a ‘heat’ cautery method but still it is considered under the tissue destructive modalities.

**Similarities in both the methods**

- It lowers the risk of infection as heat sterilizes the area.
- Minimal bleeding.
- Enhances faster and easy healing of tissue.
- Precise control of tissue destruction.

**Potential complications in both the techniques**

- Thermal burns to the surrounding tissues, if not done properly.
- Delayed wound healing, if overdone.
- Nerve injury, if done near the nerve trunk.

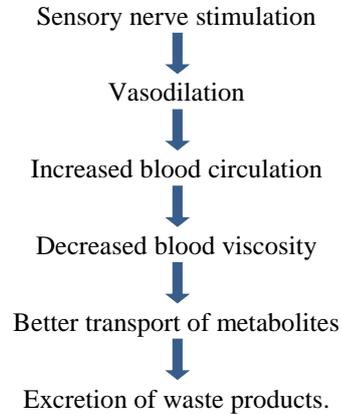
**DISCUSSION**

*Agnikarma*, a parasurgical and therapeutic procedure described in *Ayurvedic* texts, stands out in its unique approach in treating various diseased conditions and most importantly, in obtaining the state of hemostasis. In contemporary medicine system, modern cautery instruments echo the same principle of *Agnikarma* as stated in *Ayurvedic* literatures, hence signifying its enduring relevance.

The pro-inflammation theory suggests that inducing a stage of acute inflammation attracts more lymphocytes, neutrophils, histamines and prostaglandins to a specific area, helping to resolve the existing stage of chronic inflammation.

The principle of thermodynamic when applied on to the biological system indicates that when thermal energy is transferred from a device to a body tissue, the internal energy of a tissue increases leading to the absorption of heat by the tissues. This localized increase in the temperature of the tissue activates the thermostatic center in the body, which then distributes the heat throughout the body leading to vasodilation resulting in the increased blood flow. This increase in temperature promotes muscle relaxation that relieves muscle spasm, inflammation and pain.

According to Dr. Ven Hoff, heat leads to the improvement in metabolism of local tissue, thus various metabolic and rejuvenating changes occurs at the site of heat leading to increased oxygen demand and tissue at the site of heat burns and excretes out unwanted metabolites and toxins.



**Other theory at spinal level suggests**

Due to afferent stimulation of thermoreceptors

Decreased sympathetic tone and relaxes muscle tone

Warm blood reaches thermoregulatory center that is, hypothalamus

Causes expanded metabolism and perspiration leading to excretion of waste products

**At tissue level,**

Local heat to the tissue

Increased tissue elasticity and viscosity

**Comparison of mode of action of *Agnikarma* and Cauterization**

Mechanism	<i>Ayurvedic</i> view	Modern view
Hemostasis	Stops <i>Raktasrava</i>	Prevents bleeding
Tissue destruction	Pacifies <i>dushta dhatu</i>	Destroys abnormal body tissue
Nerve ending damage	Alleviates pain (as it pacifies <i>Vata dosha</i> )	Reduces transmission of pain
Local immune response	Decreases <i>Srotorodha</i> and balances all <i>dosha</i> and <i>dhatu</i>	Promotes healthy tissue healing/ promotes fibrosis
Anti-bacterial action	Prevents <i>Vrana dosha</i> (infection)	Sterilizes the area

**Effect of heating**

**1. Direct heat**

- Has analgesic action.
- Relieves muscle spasm.

**2. Indirect heat**

- Increases vasodilation
- Decreases blood pressure

- Due to vasodilation it leads to exudation of fluid into tissues leading to increased antibody and WBCs and finally deals with infected organism leading in control of infection.
- Decreases pain as it releases endorphins.

**Contra-indications**

- In sensitive skin.
- Acute trauma.

- Venous hindrance.
- Arterial insufficiency.
- Malignancy.

This article endeavors to provide comprehensive insight into *Agnikarma*, dealing both *Ayurvedic* and modern points and detailing its methodologies, benefits, indications, contra-indications and the underlying principle that makes *Agnikarma* an exceptional therapeutic treatment procedure.

### CONCLUSION

*Agnikarma* involves the use of thermal energy in the body and is a powerful as well as minimal invasive therapeutic procedure. This treatment modality is widely acceptable for both chronic conditions as well as in emergency condition especially in a bleeding disorder. Modern surgical technique uses cauterization, laser treatment and radiation reflects the broad use of *Agnikarma* although the mode of energy is different.

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