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International

Journal of AYUSH

ISSN: 2349 7025

Review Article

Volume 4 Issue 2

### HIJAMAH (CUPPING THERAPY) AS A PREVENTIVE MEDICINE-

#### A RETRO-PROSPECTIVE ANALYTICAL STUDY

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#### Article history:

Received: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015

Received in revised form:

25<sup>th</sup> March 2015

Accepted: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015

Available online:

25<sup>th</sup> March 2015

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#### Keywords:

Hijamah, Cupping therapy,  
Unani, Preventive medicine

These authors have no  
conflict of interest to  
declare.

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International Journal of  
AYUSH

Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani,  
Siddha and Homeopathy)

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#### Abstract

*Hijamah* (Cupping therapy) is an age old method of bloodletting through a local suction on the skin after scarification in order to preserve health and prevent diseases. Its evidence exists in the classical literature of Unani Medicine day back from the time of Buqrat (Hippocrates 460-370 BC). Cupping therapy is found to have both curative and preventive capabilities. By improving the circulation of blood, lymph and other vital fluids and breaking up and dispersing blockages and congestions offending waste matter, toxins and morbid humors, cupping improves the eliminative functions and the evacuation of wastes from the body. In Unani Medicine, the proper and timely evacuation of wastes from the body (*Istifragh*) forms an important aspect of hygiene and preventive medicine. The present study is an attempt to reveal the role of cupping therapy in health promotion and disease prevention.

## INTRODUCTION:

Hijamah is an Arabic word which comes from the root word 'hajm' meaning to suck or to extract. Hajjam is the one who does cupping i.e. cupper. Mihjam is the tool used by the cupper. Hijamah(cupping) is an ancient method of treatment used by unani physicians for local evacuation or diversion of morbid humors by creating negative pressure by creating vacuum on the surface of the skin. This therapy has been advocated as having both curative and preventive capabilities and regarded as an effective treatment and management for a number of diseases such as hypertension, arthritis, sciatica, back pain, migraine, amenorrhoea, headache etc. Hijamah is an Arabic word used for cupping therapy which means to do sucking. The practice of hijamah (cupping) has been for thousands of years in most cultures in one form or another with citations dating back to the time of Hippocrates (400 BC).The oldest recorded medical text book Ebers

Papyrus written in approximately in 1550 BC in Egypt mentions cupping .

Hijamah (cupping therapy) is divided into two broad categories:1) Hijamahbilashurt (dry cupping) and 2) Hijamahbilshurt (wet cupping).

## SYNONYMS:

The synonyms of *Hijamah* or Cupping therapy mentioned in various literatures are as follows:

- *Singhi lagana*
- *Pachnay lagana*
- *Bekam*
- *Kyukaku*
- Horn therapy
- Blood stasis therapy
- *Micheme*
- Eliminating therapy
- Diversion therapy

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

“What medicines do not heal, the lance will; what the lance does not heal, fire will.”-

### **Buqrat (Hippocrates 460-370 BC)**

*Hijamah* is an antique medical therapy practiced traditionally since primitive time in different cultures and civilizations. Its evidence exists in the classical literature of Unani Medicine day back from the time of Buqrat (Hippocrates 460-370 BC). The legendary Unani physicians including Jalinoos (Galen 130-200 AD), Zakariya Razi (Rhazes 865-925 AD) and Avicenna (960-1037 AD), have not only practiced it but they have systemically documented various books and treatise based on its therapeutics, indications, precautions, methodology and clinical observations.

Cupping therapy has a long history as part of East Asian medicine and as an adjunct to the practice of acupuncture. The earliest Chinese sources mention that cupping are from the Han dynasty

(206 -220 AD). Cupping often referred to as “Horn therapy” was mentioned in the Wu Shi Er Bing Fang text dating 168 BC. The primary use of cupping therapy seems to have been for blood stasis conditions which led to the alternate name as ‘blood stasis therapy’.<sup>44</sup> Developing along with acupuncture and herbal medicine over the centuries, cupping therapy has been used for a wider range of disorders.

The ancient Arabs knew of cupping perhaps influenced by neighboring societies, then Islam came and approved of the practice. The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH), praised, practiced and encouraged others to do cupping. In the *Saheehain*, it says that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was treated with cupping and he gave the cupper his fee.<sup>45</sup> Thus Islam promoted and raised the status of cupping therapy, confirming its benefits, as in the words of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH),: “The best of your medical treatments is Cupping.”

High cost, resistance and toxicity led to decline in popularity of antibiotics and modern medicine.

Once again people took treatment from alternative systems of medicine and opted for various regimes of these systems of medicines. Hence, the return of cupping shakes the throne of Western medicine.

Hence, *Hijamah* once again started gaining popularity globally. Currently *Hijamah* (Cupping therapy) is practiced in countries like China, Germany, United States, Australia, Finland and Vietnam. In India also, this therapy has gained popularity and is practiced in cities like Delhi, Aligarh, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Patna, Chennai and Calicut etc.

## TYPES:

Basically, *Hijamah* is classified into two types:

***Hijamah-bila-Shurt:*** It can be called as **Dry Cupping**. It is a method of relieving local congestion by applying a partial vacuum that is created in a cup either by suction created by

manual suction pump or by fire (also called as ***Hijamah-e-Nariya* or fire cupping**).



## DRY CUPPING

***Hijamah-bil-Shurt:*** It can be called as **Wet Cupping**. It starts with the procedure of dry cupping. After appearance of congestion at the site of dry cupping, multiple small scratches or incisions are made with a lancet. Then blood is sucked after applying cups to the incised area. The pressure difference extracts blood from the *Hijamah* site.



## WET CUPPING

Following are a few modified methods of *Hijamah*:

- **Light Cupping-** Uses a weak suction in the cup to do light cupping. It is suitable for children and elderly people.
- **Medium Cupping-** A medium strength for general purpose cupping.
- **Strong Cupping-** Suction will be great and therefore, it is not suitable for young children and elderly people.
- **Moving Cupping or Massage Cupping-** This is a great method of massage and is

done by applying oil to the skin and moving the cup, by a weak suction, on the area treated.

- **Flash Cupping-** In this procedure several medium sized cups are used to perform cupping several times in quick succession along the area being treated.
- **Herbal Cupping-** A suitable herbal tincture is put into the cup and then suction is applied.
- **Needle Cupping-** Acupuncture and cupping are done in the same place by applying the needle first and then the cup is applied over the needle.
- **Hot Cupping-** Dried Mugwort (*Artemesia vulgaris*) leaves sometimes called by its oriental name Moxa is a great warming herb. We use a needle warmed by dried Mugwort, and then cup is applied over it.<sup>97</sup>
- **Water Cupping-** It is the least practiced method. It involves filling a third of the cup with warm water. While holding the cup

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close to the client with one hand, bring it close to the point to be cupped and insert burning cotton wool inside the cup, then swiftly and simultaneously turn the cup onto the skin. When performed properly, no water spillage occurs.

## INDICATIONS:

- *Hijamah bil Shurt* (Wet Cupping) is indicated in all diseases that occur as a result of dominance of the humors especially '*damvi khilth*'.
- To divert the morbid matter by *Hijamah bila Shurt* (Dry Cupping)
- In cases of displacement of organ
- To bring back the warmth and movement in a paralyzed muscle.
- To withdraw the pus in non-healing wound.
- To bring the secretions outside or towards periphery eg. In leucorrhoea the *Hijamah* is done on pubic region.

- On the basis of religious belief as '*Sunnah*' procedure on 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> of any lunar month at '*Sunnah point*' i.e. over 7<sup>th</sup> cervical vertebra.
- Apart from these, *Hijamah* is a useful treatment in various diseases like frozen shoulder, sciatica, knee pain, asthma, gynecological problems, acne, stress, infertility, amenorrhea, arthritis, migraine etc.

## CONTRAINDICATIONS:

- Jalinoos ( Galen 129-200 AD), stated that *Hijamah* should not be performed during early stages of inflammatory condition because *Hijamah* when done at this stage will not extract the morbid material completely leaving behind the residue, thus laying the foundation for chronic destructive disease.
- Children below 10 years of age and elderly above 60 years.

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- Pregnant and lactating women.
- During menstruation
- Patients with contagious disease or serious cardiac problem
- Patients having bleeding disorders
- Patients on anti-coagulant therapy
- Immuno-compromised patients

performed: the occiput, the inter-scapular region, the two sides of the neck, the chin , the two shoulders, the coccyx, the middle of the forearms, the two legs and the two heel-veins. He said: "The application of *Hijamah* to the shoulders helps in palpitation of the heart arising from plethora and heat."

## PROCEDURES:

Part to be cupped first should be shaved, then thoroughly cleansed and sterilized by spirit swab. For wet cupping minute oblique incisions are made on the skin before the application of cups and in dry cupping cups are directly applied without any scarification. Sets of 4, 6, or 10 cups are applied according to the extent of condition for 5, 10 or more minutes and repeated on every 4-6 months depending on the nature of the disease.

## SITES AND BENEFITS:

Abul Qasim Al-Zahrawi (936-1013 AD) listed several points at which *Hijamah* (Cupping) is

For each complaint there is a specific site for *Hijamah* (Cupping therapy) as summarized below:

- Temple - for melasma, cholasma, eye diseases
- Nape of neck – for fetor of mouth, headache, conjunctivitis etc.
- Occiput – for mania, giddiness
- Supraclavicular – for glossitis, gingivitis, mumps
- Under the chin- for mouth ulcers, stomatitis, tonsillitis
- Between the shoulder blades – for pain in the arms, bronchial asthma



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- Calf muscles – for renal colic, metritis, amenorrhoea
- In front of thighs – for orchitis, leg ulcers, metritis
- Below mammary glands – for menorrhagia, puerperal diseases
- Extremities – for headache, meningitis, pyrexia
- Knees – for arthritis

It is said that there are 98 sites for cupping, 55 of which are on the back and 34 on the face and abdomen. For every disease there are specific sites for cupping (one or more sites for each) on the human body. The most important of these sites, which is common to all diseases, and is that with which we always start, is the upper back, the seventh vertebrae, i.e., in level with the shoulders and below the neck. Some new doctors follow the instructions of Muhammad Shaikho, who said that the upper back alone is the only valid site for cupping, because it is the graveyard for bad blood.

## EFFECTS OF HIJAMAH (CUPPING THERAPY):

Cupping consists of two components:

- **Segmental therapy**- the location is essential.
- **Regulation therapy**- extravasates acts as stimuli.

Both these components affect only the source of illness but not the healthy tissues and body functions.

**Segmental therapy** occurs via the 'head zones' via the so called cutivisceral reflex paths (connections between skin and organ). Through the nervous system this has a curative effect on disturbed neuro-vegetative functions and diseased viscera.

**Regulation therapy** is a naturopathic method in which a stimulus is applied to increase the organism's power of resistance. In cupping, extravasate (i.e. fluid discharged from blood vessels) is created by the principle of suction. The



resulting hematoma (bruises) causes irritation which in turn activates the body's own localized and generalized healing powers.

## ADVERSE EFFECTS:

*Hijamah* (Cupping therapy) has no major side effects aside from minimal discomfort due to the application of skin cuts to the patient.

## PREVENTIVE ACTION ACCORDING TO UNANI SYSTEM OF MEDICINE:

The prime objectives of *Hijamah* are:

- Evacuation of morbid matter (*Tanqiya-e-mavad*)
- Diversion of morbid matter to the associated organ (*Imala-e-mavad*)

The Unani text very well explains the association between pain and conditions of congestion, stagnation and blockage. Not only pain, but the vast majority of illness and disease comes from stagnation, congestion and blockage of vital fluids or humors like blood, phlegm or lymph. The

suction applied by cupping sucks out and breaks up that congestion, stagnation or blockage restoring a free flow to the humors of the organ.

Cupping also removes pathogenic heat, toxins by bringing them to the surface for release. *Hijamah* can even be instrumental in mitigating or relieving fevers in acute crisis stage, and in mitigating and reducing the putrefaction of blood and other humors, a common cause of fevers. By drawing congested blood or other humors to the surface, cupping is a form of 'deviation therapy'. This means diversion of substances away from the site of blockage and obstruction in order to relieve congestion and restore health and patency to the organ. Toxins, morbid humors and other congested offending matter can do more harm when they are deep within the organism, obstructing the functioning of vital organs at the body's core. The '*Tabiyat Mudabira - e- Badan*', whenever it can it will try to peripheralize such morbid matter by sending it to service in the form of various cysts, boils or eruptions, even though

they may be unsightly. *Hijamah* is a way of activating this peripheralization and relieving pathogenic congestion to the internal organs, thus averting or preventing more serious disorders.

By improving the circulation of blood, lymph and other vital fluids and breaking up and dispersing blockages and congestions offending waste matter, toxins and morbid humors, cupping improves the eliminative functions and the evacuation of wastes from the body. In Unani Medicine, the proper and timely evacuation of wastes from the body (*Istifragh*) forms an important aspect of hygiene and preventive medicine.

## PROPHYLACTIC ACTION ACCORDING TO MODERN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE:

There are many theories that explain the mechanism of action of cupping therapy such as:

- **PAIN GATE THEORY:**

This theory states that there is a gate or channel to transfer pain signals from its

actual place to the brain. There are gates and channels that transmit the pain in our body. And when we place the vacuum cup over this channel it produces pain which interfere with the actual pain which can't transmit in the same gate or channel and elimination of this pain occurs.

- **PROSTAGLANDIN THEORY:**

Prostaglandins are products of inflammation in our body and they transmit pain signals to the brain. By doing wet cupping therapy, we take these products out from the body and this kills the pain.

- **ENDORPHINS AND ENKEPHALIN PRODUCTION THEORY:**

These are natural components released in our body and these components are called 'endogenous pleasure substances' which reduce the pain and enhance the mode.

- **NITRIC OXIDE THEORY:**

This substance is very important substance released in the body from any trauma and released also during and after cupping therapy. The functions of nitric oxide are:

1. Vasodilatation- this gives more blood to the area
2. Two way vasodilatation effects
3. Muscle relaxation which cure spasms
4. Anti-thrombotic- protects the vessels from thrombosis
5. Anti-inflammatory and prevents stenosis of blood vessels

The researchers Louis J. born in 1941, Ferid Murad born in 1936 and Robert F. in 1916 who discovered nitric oxide were awarded the Nobel Prize of Medicine in 1998.<sup>97</sup> If there is abnormality in nitric oxide release it leads to many diseases like obesity, hypertension, cardiac failure and many other diseases.

- **TAIBAH THEORY:**

This theory is currently the most accurate scientific explanation of *Hijamah's* curative properties. *Taibah* theory explains that *Hijamah* is a minor surgical excretory procedure and its effect is similar to the mechanism of excretory function via glomerular filtration of the kidney as well as abscess drainage, by which pathological substances are removed from the body.

Apart from the above theories, there are other numerous theories ranging from; blood detoxifications, redistributing positive energy (qi), immune system activation, massage theory, increasing blood circulation theory, psychosomatic and counter-irritation theories have been cited as offering explanations into the efficacy of cupping therapy.

More and more beneficial facets of the preventive and curative mode of action of *Hijamah* are coming to light with advances in scientific techniques and technology.

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## CONCLUSION:

Many documented claims in the classical Unani literature are being scientifically researched and validated in today's era of scientific advances. Hijamah (Cupping therapy) is one among them. Many KAP studies reveal that it is widely accepted in masses for their illnesses for both therapeutic and prophylactic purposes. Hence based on its curative and preventive capabilities a futuristic approach can be developed to incorporate this therapy in health care delivery system of the nation.

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