

A BIRD EYE VIEW ON RAKSHAKARMA IN AYURVEDA**Devendra Prasad Mishra**

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ABSTRACT

Rakshakarma is a Sanskrit word which means protective measures. It is one of the important procedures extensively used and talked about in Ayurveda on different subjects. Sushruta emphasizes in detail about the *Rakshakarma* in the management of wound, whereas Charaka and Vagbhata spoke about *Rakshakarma* especially during child care. *Rakshakarma* is one of the sixty *Upkrama* (procedures) mentioned for the management of *Vrana* (wound) in *Sushruta Samhita*. *Dhupana, Mantra, Yama, and Niyama* are the procedures performed for the *Rakshakarma* as described by Sushruta. Present study was undertaken to review the concept of *Rakshakarma* and define it with modern counterpart. It was found, that the concept of *Rakshakarma* in Ayurveda is quite efficient for providing a complete physical and psychological protective shield to the patient.

Keywords: *Rakshakarma, Upkrama, Vrana, Sushruta Samhita, Dhupana*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is one of the oldest medical systems of the world, which is full with the number of mesmerizing literatures related with medical science. *Sushruta Samhita* is one of them, which is based on the practical observation rather than theoretical writings. Sushruta explained in detail about the *Rakshakarma* procedure during wound healing and also patient going through surgery in pre-operative, operative and post operative phase. Again during the chapters related with pregnancy there is a description about *Rakshakarma* for mother and child care.

Charaka and Vagbhata also follow the footsteps of Sushruta regarding the concept of *Rakshakarma*. Following is the description of *Rakshakarma* as explained by Sushruta, Charaka and Vagbhata.

***Rakshakarma* in wound care:**

Sushruta Samhita is probably the earliest book which deals with the wound healing as the foremost speciality of the medical science. There are sixty procedures for the management of wound, mentioned by Sushruta. *Rakshakarma* or *Rakshavidhan* is one of them¹.

As a post operative measure wound should be properly irrigated and then medicated paste should be applied and after that it should be bandaged. The wound should be fumigated by pain relieving and *Rakshoghana* fumes and the protection should be ensured by reciting hymns. Again Sushruta says, the wound should be fumigated with a mixture of powders of *Guggulu, Agar, Sarjarasa, Vacha, Sarshapa, Saindhava* and the leaves of *Nimba* tree along with *Ghritha*. The left over *Ghritha* then applied over the region of heart and other vital parts of the patients.

Afterwards protective hymns should be recited as – May Brahma and other gods counteract sorcery (*Kritya*) and the dread of evil spirits (*Raksasa*), serpent demons (*Naga*), devils (*Pishacha*), celestial musicians (*Gandharva*), souls of paternal ancestors (*Pitra*), spirits (*Yaksha*), evil spirits (*Nishachara*) etc.

In the same context Sushruta further spoke about the protection of strength, intellect, psyche, and understanding from the blessing of god *Indra*, *Manu*, *Gandharva* and *Varuna* respectively².

In *Chikitsa Sthan*, Sushruta says that wounds and patients should be protected from invisible creatures (*Nishachara*) by procedures like *Dhupana* and protective energy of the prophylactic prayer. He further advocated *Yama* and *Niyama* as a part of *Rakshakarma*³.

(Five *Yama* are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy and abstinence from litigation.)

(Five *Niyama* are cleanliness, satisfaction, penance, spiritual study, service of the preceptor.)

Charaka says that *Dhupana* (fumigation) with aromatic plants mixed with *Ghrita* (purified butter), *Majja* (bone marrow tissue), *Vasa* (fats) reduces pain, secretion, foul smell and kills microbes in the wound⁴.

Further in *Astangsamgraha Uttarasthana*, Vagbhata describe about *Dhupana* (fumigation) with *Srivestaka*, *Sarjarasa*, *Salla*, *Devadaru*, *Simsapa*, *Khadira*, *Asana*, *Kaidaryasara*, *Yava*, *Madhucchistha* (bee wax), *Bhurjapatra*, *Ksauma* and *Ghrita*. In *Sutrasthan* also there is mention of *Vranaraksoghna Dhupa* consisting of *Guggulu*, *Agaru*, *Sarjarasa*, *Vacha*, *Gaura-sarsapa*, *Hingu*, *Lavana* (salt), *Nimbapatra*, and *Ghrita* for the fumigation of wound. It is

also mentioned in *Uttarasthana* for the protection of newborn infant⁵.

In Egyptian mythology, from a parapsychological perspective, a wound was an opening in the body from which infernal being could enter and leave. The Egyptians were assured more than defense of this gate by application of excrement of donkey. This is based on Egyptian mythology, and it could work as psychological support which recent study shown reduces postoperative pain and increase patient satisfaction. Other alternative therapies like energy healing, guided imagery, hypnosis, prayer and relaxation technique reduces post surgical pain and enhance recovery and rehabilitation⁶.

Rakshakarma in child care:

Under *Rakshakarma*, Charaka gives detailed description related to protection of newborn related to antisepsis of beddings, clothing, and aseptic measures to prevent infections from surroundings. All around the *Sutikagara* (labor room), the twigs of *Adani*, *Khadira*, *Karakandu*, *Pilu*, *Parushaka* should be hung, and *Sarshapa*, *Atasi*, *Tandula*, *Kan-kanika* should be scattered on its floor. A packet containing *Vacha*, *Kustha*, *Kshomka*, *Hingu*, *Sarshpa*, *Atasi*, *Lasuna*, *Guggulu* etc. *Rakshoghana dravyas* should be hung on the door and similar *dravya* should be tied around the neck of mother and the child. Well wishing care taker women should be remained vigilant and attentive in the *Sutikagara* for the initial 10-12 days⁷.

Sushruta directed the newborn to be wrapped in *Kshauma* (linen) cloth and made to sleep on a bed covered with soft linen. Twigs of *Pilu-Badar-Nimba-Parushaka* are to be used to gently fan the baby. A tampon impregnated with oil (*Taila pichu*) should be applied over the baby's forehead daily.

Dhupana (fumigation) with *Rakshoghana dravya* should be done in the *Sutikagara*.

In *Astanga Hridaya*, Vagbhata described similar *Rakshakarma* as described by Charaka. In addition, Vagbhata has also counseled use of herbs as *Brahmi*, *Indryana*, *Jivaka* and *Rishbhaka* to be tied around hands or neck of the newborn.

Vagbhata also mentions use of *Balvalcha* in the new born baby for its promoting action on *Medha* (intelligence), *Smriti* (memory), health and longevity⁸.

In *Astangasangraha*, Vagbhata described to tie a cotton pouch containing *Hingu*, *Vacha*, *Turuska* and *Sarshapa*, on the upper frame of door and head side of bed (cradle) and also in the neck of infant and mother. Further there is mention of *Dhupana* for baby's apartment consisting of dried crow feathers along with *Trivrita*, *Vacha*, *Kustha*, *Srivesta*, *Sarshapa*, added with little *Ghrita*.

DISCUSSION

According to modern medicine, proper sterilization is helpful in wound healing and fumigation with different chemicals is one of the methods to achieve sterilization. Same principle also applies during child and mother care. From literature review it is clear that from ancient Egyptian medicine there was concept of safety of diseased person with regards to evil spirits.

Ayurveda also speak about care of diseased person from evil spirits and also give enough importance to safe guard the patient from visibly present creatures. What we found interesting in Ayurvedic literature is the use of different kinds of herbs during preparing different kinds of decoction or placing them in the patient/mother/child body or spreading them over the room and

also fumigating with their smoke. Here we need to look for the antimicrobial properties of these different herbs based on their ayurvedic and modern pharmacological properties.

In a recent study it was found that plants protect themselves against being eaten by secreting natural pesticides and other toxins, plant-based phenols, flavonoids, isoflavones, terpenes, and glucosinolates. These different chemicals are almost always bitter, acrid (pungent), or astringent in taste. In addition to their bactericidal or biological activity these substances may provide a defense against predators by making the plant unpalatable⁹. When we look up the herbs used for different purpose of *Rakshakarma* in ayurveda, we found that most of these herbs are bitter, astringent and pungent in taste, because of the presence of different chemical constituents in them. These herbs probably have bactericidal and insecticidal activities which safeguard the patient from infections.

In a recent clinical study with TCM, it was found that fumigation with a mixture of traditional Chinese medicine promotes wound healing and prevents the wound of postoperative complications, including pain relief, reduce swelling and infection etc¹⁰.

Another aspect is related with hymn chanting in the room of the patient probably a kind of psychological counseling to the patient, so he can feel safe and cared. This is to provide a positive environment for the healing of wound and also support to the mother in post partum phase to avoid any kind of stress.

Recent studies add to growing evidence that psychology impacts wound repair, and highlight in particular the positive

role of social support on modulating the negative effects of stress¹¹.

CONCLUSION

From the above description it is evident that, *Rakshakarma* was used extensively in the cases of wound care and child care. In earlier times there were different kinds of decoctions of herbs were used for cleaning the wound. Same context Sushruta also give enough importance to *Rakshakarma* procedure, where he spoke about the use of *Dhupana* (Fumigation) of different herbs around the wound and patients and the room of the patient.

Ayurvedic Acharya have advocated measures which aim to protect the newborn baby from various infections as in use of clean clothes, beddings etc. *Dhupana* (fumigation) of the *Sutikagara* (sanatorium/labor room) by various herbs is mentioned to protect the baby from various opportunistic infections/diseases. It is probably because of the antiseptic and antimicrobial property of *Dhupan karma*. This procedure can be correlated with that of fumigation procedure of sterilization in current modern medical practices.

Chanting hymns and practicing *Yama* and *Niyama* provide a psychological support to the patient, which is helpful for quick recovery and rehabilitation of the patients.

So *Rakshakarma* procedure provides a complete physical and psychological protective covering to the patients.

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