A BIRD EYE VIEW ON RAKSHAKARMA IN AYURVEDA

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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 them.

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, Agaru, Sarjarasa, Vacha, Sarshapa, Saindhava and the leaves of Nimba tree along with Ghrita. The left over Ghrita 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 (Kriya) 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 Rakshakarma3.

( 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 Astangasamgraha Uttarasthana, Vagbhata describe about Dhupana (fumigation) with Srivestaka, Sarjarasa, Sala, Devadaru, Simsapa, Khadira, Asana, Kaidaryasara, Yava, Madhucchistha (bee wax), Bhurjapatra, Ksauma and Ghrita. In Sutrasthan also there is mention of Vranaraksogha 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 para-psychological 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 Hridya, 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 Balvacha in the new born baby for its promoting action on Medha (intelligence), Smriti (memory), health and longevity. In Astangasamgraha, 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 Trivrta, 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 unpalatable. 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 etc. 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 stress.  

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 Dhupana 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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