Review Article

HIJÂMA (WET CUPPING): A HISTORICAL REVIEW;
THERAPEUTIC INDICATIONS AND CONTRAINDICATIONS

Mohd Tarique*, Mohammad Shahid Khan², Mohd Shamim³, Basharat Rashid⁴, Mohd Mohsin⁵
¹P.G Scholar, Department of Tahaffuzi Wa Samaji Tib, National Institute of Unani Medicine, Bangalore, Karnataka, India
²P.G Scholar, Department of Moalajat, National Institute of Unani Medicine, Bangalore, Karnataka, India
³P.G Scholar, Department of Ilmul Advia, National Institute of Unani Medicine, Bangalore, Karnataka, India
*Corresponding Author Email: tariquealig@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Hijama means Cupping; which refers to Wet Cupping in Arab and Muslim civilizations. Hijama therapy was passed on to the Muslim Arabs and Persians from the early Greeks and Romans, through the Alexandrians and Byzantines. The Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W) endorsed the application of Hijama. It is an essential and admired therapeutic modality of Unani system of Medicine. In the West; cupping remained a significant component of medicine and therapy, in conventional, alternative, and folk-based medicine, until the early 20th century. The surgeon Charles Kennedy wrote, in 1826: “The art of cupping has been so well-known and the benefits arising from it so long experienced, that it is quite unnecessary to bring forward testimonials in favour of what has received not only the approbation of modern times, but also the sanction of remotest antiquity.” After falling out of favour with medicine in the present era, cupping therapy is enjoying revival in fame, endorsed by acupuncturists and other holistic healthcare practitioners. New and thrilling variations on this antique technique, like cupping, massage, are also being developed. Hijama is a regimen approach for the management of various ailments suggested by renowned Unani physicians. As an adjuvant therapy Hijama offers considerable improvement in pain and has an obvious effect in improving the quality of life. It has immunomodulator outcome that could be used as monitoring means for disease activity and prognosis. It has been found that Hijama is a good palliative and anti-inflammatory regimen in contrast to other conventional therapies. Hijama is an imperative non-pharmacological regimen mode of treatment.

Keywords: Hijama; Wet cupping; Hijama bi’l Shart; Unani system of Medicine; historical review

INTRODUCTION

Hijama is gaining popularity day by day due to its effectiveness. It is evident that any procedure requires thorough knowledge for proper application and benefit. If not so, it will lose its popularity and efficacies very soon as it already occurred in middle age period. Hijama is an Arabic word derived from ‘Hajm’ which stands for “sucking.” Hijama is a method used for local evacuation or diversion of morbid humors in which a singhi (horn) is attached to the surface of skin of the diseased part through negative pressure created by vacuum. The vacuum is produced by the introduction of heat or suction. In the late period, the singhi was substituted by glass cups and hence the procedure came to be known as cupping.

Historical Background

Although there is grounds to believe the practise of Hijama dates back as early as 3000 BC, the most primitive use of cupping that is traced, is from the Ebers Papyrus, one of the oldest Medical treatises in the world. It describes the systemic use of cupping by the early Egyptians as far back as 1550 BC. Archaeologists have established proof in China of cupping dating back to 1000 BC. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates (460 BC) used cupping for both internal diseases and structural problems. The practice in varying forms, extended into the folk medicine of most Asian and European civilizations.³

Hijama in ancient period

Whatever information existing in the trace of history in the form of monument and pictures shows that the Hijama is an earliest method which was predominantly used amongst the Babylonians, Egyptians, Chinese and Greeks etc. The pottery cups, hollowed out animal horns and bamboo cups were used commonly for this purpose. Regarding the earliest indication of use of Hijama in Egypt, a noble writer says “The earliest recorded evidence was discovered in Egypt in a document Ebers Papyrus dating from 1550 BC. In China also Hijama was used as a cure for a range of ailments. Its use among Chinese dates back about 2000 BC.³ In Greece, the use of Hijama dates back to that era when most of the physicians were trapped in the superstitious believes. They believed that diseases were caused by incursion of devils into the body of patients. Therefore they used to execute the Taqwer (trephination) to impel away the devils from the body. Sometimes Hijama was also done to eject out the devils along with the blood. But when Buqrat (Hippocrates), the father of medicine, emerged in the medical world, he focussed the medicine towards the scientific bases and gave the notion of akhlât (humors). He believed that the
health is based on the accurate balance of four akhlāt and any imbalance in its quantity and quality may cause the disease. Therefore in the light of this concept, it was hypothesised by the physicians following Hippocrates, like Jālīnūs (Galen) that the bloodletting method might retain the balance of akhlāt. A book was also written by Hippocrates on Ḥijāma and faṣd which was later translated by Yuhanna Bin Maswaaih into Arabic and named as “Al Kitab fil faṣd wal Ḥijāma.” The ancient Arabs were much familiar with the medical science also, but the medical science was restricted only up to the knowledge of Ḥijāma, Kāiyy (cauterisation) and properties of some herbs and plants. Ḥijāma was the most admired mode of treatment in comparison to others. It has been reported that its largest use was in Ashuri tribe amongst the Arabs. In traditional Chinese medical theory, cupping therapy is directed by channel theory, and choosing the right points along the appropriate channel is essential. Internal diseases frequently evident on the body surface as ache or sensitivity, classically at ashī points.

Ḥijāma during the days of Holy Prophet (S.A.W)

More than sixty Ahadith allied to cupping are endorsed to the Prophet. According to these Ahadith, the Prophet (S.A.W) not only established its efficacy but also advised people to heal themselves through it. He determined its sites on the body and explained the most favourable time for it, indicating the specific day time, week’s days and dates of lunar month and safety measures to be taken by the individual to be cupped before and following the treatment.

Sayings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W)

- In the narration reported by Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd, May Allāh be pleased with him, the angels said, "Oh Muhammad (S.A.W) order your Ummah (nation) with Ḥijāma (cupping)." [Saheeh Sunan Tirmidhī (3479)].
- Anas ibn Mālik, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam said, "Indeeds the best of remedies you have is Ḥijāma (cupping)." [Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (5371)].
- Jabir ibn Abd-Allah, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam said, "Indeed in Ḥijāma (cupping) there is a cure." [Saheeh Muslim (5706)].
- It is narrated by Anas that The Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam said, "Whoever performs Ḥijāma (cupping) on the 17th, 19th or 21st day (of the Islamic month) then it is a cure for every disease." [Saheeh Sunan Abi Dawud (3861)].
- Abu Hurairah, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam said, "If there was something excellent to be used as a remedy then it is Ḥijāma." [Saheeh Sunan ab’i Dawud (3857), Saheeh Sunan ibn Maajah (3476)].
- Abdullah ibn Abbas, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam said, "Healing is in three things: in the Ḥijāma, in drinking honey and in cauterizing with fire, but I forbid my Ummah (nation) from cauterization (branding with fire)." [Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (5681), Saheeh Sunan ibn Maajah (3491)].
- Ibn Umar, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam said, "Ḥijāma on an empty stomach is best. In it, is a cure and a blessing..." [Saheeh Sunan ibn Maajah (3487)].
- Abdullah ibn Abbas, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam was cupped while he was in Ihraam. [Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (5701)].
- Abdullah ibn Abbas, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālāyi Wasallam was cupped while he was fasting. [Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (5694)].

Ḥijāma during Middle Era

Muslim physicians during the middle ages used and further developed the “Ilāj bi’l-Ḥijāma theoretically as well as practically. Unani medical books expose that it was amid the most popular methods of treatment in all communities of that period. Even a fully fledged book “Al-Kitab fil Ḥijāma” was written by Raban Tabri. Nearly in every medical books of that time, containing chapters of Uṣūl-i-lāj, Ḥijāma have been mentioned thoroughly. Razi has described the cure of different diseases by Ḥijāma in his book Al Hawi fit Tib. He wrote under the management of ‘Iq al-Nasā (scatica) in Al Hawi fit Tib “if the thick and firm morbid materials are collected in hip, Ḥijāma becomes necessary and has a considerable role also.” He further mention that “Ḥijāma is a process by which bleeding is promoted after incising the superficial small vessels, located in muscles. Ḥijāma is useful in the diseases caused by intīlā.” Ali Ibn Abbas Majōosi has also described the types, sites, indications, precautions, and the most accurate time about Ḥijāma in his book Kamilus Sanaa’h volume of. Abul Qasim Zahrawi has described the types of Ḥijāma in his book “Kitabut Tasreef”.

He further mentioned the sites of Ḥijāma which are being mentioned below.

- Nuqrah (nape)
- Kah’īl (inter scapular region)
- Akhda’in (both lateral margins of the neck)
- Zaqaq (chin)
- Katifa’in (both shoulders)
- Us’as (coccyx)
- Zanda’in/zindain (both forearms)
- Saqa’in (both shanks)
- Urqūbā’īn (both achilles tendons)

Ibn Sina in his treatise “Al-Qīmūn fi’l Tib” and Ismail Jurjani in his book Zakkira Khwarzm Shahi has discussed about Ḥijāma and pointed out certain important aspects as follows;

- For local evacuation of humors, Ḥijāma is superior than faṣd
- Ḥijāma should be preferred in persons with diluted blood than in concentrated blood


Page 374
· Hijāma is less advantageous in obese person having viscid blood as it is difficult to suck the blood due to its viscosity.\textsuperscript{19,20}

Apart from this, Ismail Jurjani also mentioned the age restrictions for Hijāma. He advocated that Hijāma is contraindicated in children under the age of 2 years and in elderly persons, beyond the age of 60 years. This age limit is predominantly for Hijāma bi’il šarṭ.\textsuperscript{20} Ibn Hubal writes in his book “Kitabul Mukhtarat fit Tib”. “Hijāma sucks out the blood from those small blood vessels which are scattered in the muscles and skin, so it does not cause weakness like faṣd. It has ability to reduce the congestion from the site of application and also from the adjoining organs.”\textsuperscript{21} Ibnul Quţ in his book “Kitabul Umdah fil Jarahat” described Hijāma bilā šarṭ and Hijāma bi’il šarṭ in two separate sections, describing the principle of Hijāma he wrote that for the evacuation sanguineous substances from Superficial part of the body; Hijāma is the best method.\textsuperscript{22}

Present scenario of Hijāma
It was a very popular mode of treatment in older time but as the time passed the rules of Hijāma were gradually forgotten. Due to the improper performance by some non-medical persons, it did not achieve the expected results and people started to avoid it. They did not take care about the indications, contraindications, time and sites of Hijāma, so the people did not achieve the promised benefits. In view of popularity and efficacy of Hijāma in the treatment of various musculoskeletal disorders, several Government and Non-Government Organisations of India have started clinical research work to prove the efficacy of Hijāma.

Types of Hijāma
On the basis of bloodletting and non-letting, Hijāma has been classified into two types;
1. Hijāma bi’il šarṭ (cupping with scarification / wet cupping)
2. Hijāma bilā šarṭ (cupping without scarification / dry cupping)

On the basis of method of cupping the above types have been further divided into two types;
1. Hijāma bi’il nār (cupping with fire)
2. Hijāma bilā nār (cupping without fire)

Equipments of Hijāma
· Glass/acrylic cups
· Vacuum pump
· Medical antiseptic lotions
· Sterilized gloves
· Sterilised surgical blade
· Sterilised medical scalpel
· A pack of cotton and sterilised medical gauze
· Micropore tape
· A razor to remove the hair of the site if needed

Therapeutic uses of Hijāma Bi’il Šarṭ
· To allay pain, as such in the cases of intestinal colic and pain in the abdomen due to flatus, sciatica, low back pain, dysmenorrhoea etc.
· To restore an organ in its proper position which was displaced from their normal position like inguinal hernia, fracture, dislocation.
· To draw an inflammatory process from the deep parts towards the surface and so render it accessible to some medicament.
· To divert inflammatory matters from a noble organ to a neighbouring but less important organ\textsuperscript{23,24}.

Normally cupping has a diversity of therapeutic functions including inducing sweating, dispelling exogenous pathogens, relieving swelling, alleviating pain, promoting qay’\textsuperscript{7}, blood circulation, accelerating healing and regulating body temperature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Indications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Yafookh (fontanalle)</td>
<td>Dwar, Diseases of eyes, Ikhtilaj-e-Aqil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Qemhadwah</td>
<td>Kudourat-el-Hawas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Naqnah (napec)</td>
<td>Nervous diseases, Ramad, Waja’al-Udhun, Kalaf, Barash, Namash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Kahl’il (inter scapular region)</td>
<td>intıla with Khafqīn, chest diseases, throat diseases, shoulder and joint pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Aklda\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>Tremor of head, Diseases of head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Zaq (chin)</td>
<td>Stomatitis, Diseases of gums and cheeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Qtn (waist)</td>
<td>Gout, Piles, Hikkatzl zahr, waja’al-zahr, Niqris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Fakhz (thigh)</td>
<td>Orchits, Cnosalga, Anal fissure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Rakhbah (knee)</td>
<td>Waja’al-maftajal, Wame Rakbah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ka’ab (heel)</td>
<td>Sciatica, Gout, Itibas-e-Tama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Wari’k (hip)</td>
<td>Piles, Proctitis, Epistaxis, Burning miqtiirtiun, Haematurea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Manak’ib (shoulder)</td>
<td>Liver diseases, Hummā al-Rīb\textsuperscript{25,26}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contraindications
· Hijāma should be avoided in the beginning and the end of lunar month.\textsuperscript{19,20,22,23,25-27}
· It should be avoided in infants, preferably up to the age of two years and in elderly persons after 60 years.\textsuperscript{22,23}
· It should be avoided in extremely cold or hot weather.\textsuperscript{15}
· It should not be done in standing position to avoid the patient from falling down, as the patient may get fainted.\textsuperscript{15}
· It should not be done on an area having poor musculature.\textsuperscript{15}
· It should not be done on an area having major blood vessels particularly in those people who are lean and thin.\textsuperscript{15}
· It should be avoided in torn ligaments of the joints.\textsuperscript{15}
· It should be avoided on the oedematous knee but may
It can be calculated that a complete knowledge is must for the Hijāmā (cupping regimen). It is evident from the descriptions of various classical books and historical review that in past, the persons practicing Hijāmā were well aware of the procedure, its indications and contra indications. It is also worthy to say that standard operating procedure of the regimen is much needed task along with description of its mode of actions scientifically, so the patient can get extra benefit from the regimen safely. The triumph of alternative treatment technique can no longer be denied because they do, in fact exist. It is also the thrust area of research for Unani system of medicine. The person involved in practice of Hijāmā, must be institutionally qualified with sound knowledge of the regimen, in case of failure it will become history again.

CONCLUSION

It can be calculated that a complete knowledge is must for the Hijāmā (cupping regimen). It is evident from the descriptions of various classical books and historical review that in past, the persons practicing Hijāmā were well aware of the procedure, its indications and contra indications. It is also worthy to say that standard operating procedure of the regimen is much needed task along with description of its mode of actions scientifically, so the patient can get extra benefit from the regimen safely. The triumph of alternative treatment technique can no longer be denied because they do, in fact exist. It is also the thrust area of research for Unani system of medicine. The person involved in practice of Hijāmā, must be institutionally qualified with sound knowledge of the regimen, in case of failure it will become history again.

REFERENCES

27. Anonymous. Cupping in the Middle East and Muslim World (Hijama); 2014.

Cite this article as:

Source of support: Nil; Conflict of interest: None Declared