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Hamman therapy and its impact on Siman-e-Mufrit (Obesity): Unani Perspective

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Abstract

Siman-e-Mufrit, or obesity, is a complex global health issue with multifactorial origins, including sedentary lifestyle, poor dietary habits, and psychosocial stress. According to Unani medicine, *Siman-e-Mufrit* is viewed as an imbalance in the body's temperament (*Mizaj*) and humor (*Akhlat*), particularly an excess of *balgham* (phlegm) and *safrā* (yellow bile). Hammam is an Arabic word and derived from word "Humm" means to heat. Hammam is based on 3 rooms. In its normal function, air provides heat and water provides dampness (*Tari*). According to Unani literature, most of the diseases are caused by *Maddah*, either due to quantitative or qualitative imbalances in humours. Such diseases are referred to as "*Maddi Amraz*" and these arise due to abnormal change in the body humours. The most preferable and beneficial principle of treatment of such diseases, is the principle of "*Istifragh*" (evacuation). Hammam has been described as the best way to carry out *Istifragh* as it results in *Tanqiyah* of all body humours simultaneously. A comprehensive approach to controlling obesity is provided by *hammam* therapy, an established intervention based on the idea of *Istifragh* (evacuation). The classical foundation of *Hammam*, its physiological mechanisms, and current clinical evidence supporting its usefulness in managing obesity are all covered in this study. *Hammam* therapy promotes perspiration (*ta'riq*), enhances metabolic activity, and facilitates the elimination of morbid matter (*madda fasida*), thereby aiding in weight reduction. It also improves circulation, reduces stress, and harmonizes the body's temperament, contributing to overall well-being.

Keywords: *Siman-e-Mufrit*, Obesity, *Sue-e-Mizaj Barid*, Unani Medicine, *Hammam-e-Bukhari*

Introduction

Hammam, which comes from the Arabic word Humm, which means "spreader of warmth," is a traditional Unani hot bath used for curing and avoiding humoral disorders in addition to cleansing. It improves digestion, increases nutrient absorption, and eliminates waste through perspiration. *Hammam* usually entails moving through three rooms with different temperatures cold and wet, hot and wet, and hot and dry as well as a changing area. Its benefits and process are similar to those of contemporary aromatherapy, sauna, and spa treatments. In the past, steam baths were also considered healthy by the Greeks and Romans. In recent years, stress reduction, better circulation, detoxification, respiratory support, and skin renewal are all acknowledged benefits of *hammam*. However, improper use might have negative consequences on the heart, nerves, or other organs.

Its therapeutic efficacy in improving *Tanqiyah* (purification of humours) and restoring *Mizaj* (temperament) balance was highlighted by classical Unani scholars including *Ibn-e-Sina* and *Zakariya Razi*.

Unani defines obesity as *Siman-e-Mufrit*, a disorder of excess *Rutubat* and *Barudat* that accumulates *Madda-e-Shahmiyah* and *Balghami* humour.

Excess adipose tissue mass is known as *Siman-e-Mufrit*, or obesity^[1]. It can be characterised as an excessive expansion of the adipose tissue as a result of either an increase in the number or size of fat cells, or both^[2]. It is a dangerous medical condition linked to a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular illnesses, and several types of cancer^[3].

Many individuals believe that obesity is a "modern" illness that reflects the excesses of urbanised civilisation. It is a well-known illness that dates back to the Greco-Arab era. *Buqrat* was the first to describe it, and other well-known Unani physicians followed. (Irshad Ahmad *et al.*).

Obesity has been known since the Greco-Arabic era, despite being frequently perceived as a contemporary illness associated with urban living.

In their texts, renowned physicians like as *Buqrat, Jalinoos, Ibn-e-Sina, Razi, and Daud Antaki* described *Siman-e-Mufrit* (obesity) in great detail. In his book *Al-Hawi Fit Tibb*, *Zakariya Razi* provides a detailed account of the disease and its cure. *Ibn-e-Sina*, for example, cautioned that obesity increases the danger of heart and brain problems such as stroke, syncope, coma, palpitations, bronchial asthma, bleeding, and unexpected death.

According to Unani philosophy, *Siman-e-Mufrit* arises as a result of increased *Rutubat* and *Burudat*, which causes an imbalance of *Akhlat* (humours) in the body and predisposes the accumulation of diseased matter, or *Madda-e-Balghamiya (Shahmi Maada)*. Perhaps the most common type of malnutrition in the world is *Siman-e-Mufrit*, or obesity^[2]. It has spread throughout the world and increased the prevalence of type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular hypertension, stroke, and illness, ultimately leading to early mortality.

In present scenario the most popular method to define obesity is in terms of “Quetelet Index” (QI) or Body Mass Index (BMI=weight in kilograms divided by height in meter square).

Table 1: Classification of obesity based on BMI^[22, 23]

Category	BMI (kg/m ²)
Underweight	≤ 18.5
Normal range	18.5-22.9
Overweight	≥ 23.0
At risk	23.0-24.9
Obese class-1	25.0-29.9
Obese class-2	≥ 30.0

A BMI of 25-29.9 kg/m² signals overweight, > 30 kg/m² indicates obesity, and > 40 kg/m² denotes morbid obesity. For Asian Indians, modified BMI thresholds as per WHO Western Pacific Region and IOTF guidelines are used to better capture risk profiles.

Mechanism of Action in Unani Framework

- **Istifragh:** *Hammam* increases metabolic activity and lowers *Madda* by facilitating the evacuation of morbid humours through sweating.
- **Mizaj Correction:** In contrast to the cold and moist nature of obesity, the heat and steam of *Hammam* change the temperament from *Barid Ratab* to *Haar Yabis*.
- **Organ Stimulation:** Enhances respiration, digestion, and circulation, which indirectly aids in weight loss.

Modern Physiological Insights

- **Thermogenic Effect:** Heat exposure stimulates lipolysis and raises basal metabolic rate.
- **Detoxification:** Sweating helps get rid of heavy metals and poisons.
- **Stress Reduction:** Hammam lowers cortisol levels, which are connected to the buildup of visceral fat.
- **Skin and Lymphatic Benefits:** Promotes lymphatic drainage, enhances skin tone, and opens pores.

Classical References

- **Ibn Sina:** He states in *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* that *Hammam* is necessary to prevent *Maddi Amraz* and balance humours.

- **Zakariya Razi:** He describes *Hammam*'s function in treating obesity and its associated problems, such as asthma and stroke, in *Al-Hawi*.

Rooms of Hammam

Hammam is a type of medicated bath for which particular type of construction was done. *Hammam* has three rooms another room which is excluded from the room of *hammam* is for the changing of clothes has *Moatadil* temperament^[4].

The temperament of rooms of hammam is as follows:-

- **1st Room of Hammam:** Sard Tar (Barid Ratab) or Cold and Wet
- **2nd Room of Hammam:** Garm Tar (Har Ratab) or Hot and Wet
- **3rd Room of Hammam:** Garm Khushk (Har Yabis) or Hot and Dry
- **Changing Room or 4th Room:** *Moatadil*

Temperature of water used in Hammam

In 1724, Gabriel Fahrenheit invented the first mercury thermometer. Because of the unavailability of the instrument measuring temperature there is nothing mentioned about the temperature of water used in *hammam* in old classical text book. The temperature of water is used in *Hammam* is as follows^[5].

- Very cold water 40-65 F°
- Cold water 65-75 F°
- Tepid warm or *Moatadil* 85-95 F°
- Hot Water 95-100 F°
- Very hot water 100-110 F°
- Extreme hot water 110-120 F°

Characteristics of an Ideal Hammam^[3, 4]

- Building of *Hammam* should be old.
- *Hammam* should be spacious.
- Water should be sweet or soft.
- There should be proper arrangement for regulating the temperature.

Types of Hammam:^[6, 7]

- *Hammam-e-Barid* (Cold bath)
- *Hammam-e-Bahri* (Sea bath)
- *Hammam-e-Bukhari* (Vapor bath / Steam bath)
- *Hammam-e-Boriqi* (Borax bath)
- *Hammam-e-Turki* (Turkish bath)
- *Hammam-e-Har* (Hot bath)
- *Hammam-e-Hamiz* (Acid bath)
- *Hammam-e-Ramli* (Sand bath)
- *Hammam-e-Saboosi* (Bran bath)
- *Hammam-e-Shamshi* (Sun bath)
- *Hammam-e-qadmi* or *Pashoya* (Foot bath)
- *Hammam-e-kibriyati* (gandhak) or Sulphur bath
- *Hammam-e-labani* (Milk bath)
- *Hammam-e-nisfi* or *Aab-e-zan* (Sitz bath or Hip bath)
- *Hammam-e-wahli* (Mud bath)

Hammam Bukhari or Vapor bath or Steam bath

In this type of *Hammam* steam is passed in whole body.

Benefits or uses

- It opens the pores of skin and increases the sweating

- and thus helps to remove the toxins from the body.
- It is used to relieve the pain usually of musculoskeletal origin.
- It helps to reduce the body weight.
- It strengthens the nerves.

Clinical Evidence

- A study by Irshad Ahmad *et al.* evaluated the efficacy of *Riyazat* (exercise) combined with *Hammam-e-Bukhari* in 30 obese patients over 5 weeks. Results showed statistically significant reductions in weight, BMI, and waist circumference without adverse effects.
- Another review by Wani *et al.* emphasized *Hammam*'s role in managing *Sue-e-Mizaj Barid Ratab*, the underlying temperament in obesity, and its ability to burn excess calories and eliminate *Madda-e-Balghamiya*.

Management

Obesity is becoming more common, yet the only effective treatment available in the current medical system is bariatric surgery, which is costly, intrusive, and has many side effects. Many drugs have been created in modern medicine, but their adverse effects have limited their efficacy to treat obesity. There is a growing need to discover and develop an alternative anti-obesity drug that is safe, effective, well-tolerated, and requires little to no pharmaceutical intervention in order to treat these difficult conditions and their harmful implications. The Unani medical system uses a variety of drugs to treat *Siman-e-Mufrit*, yet there is a gap in the treatment of sickness by altering *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya* or treating it using *Tadabeer* (regimens). *Siman-e-Mufrit* is managed by *Ilaj Bil Ghiza* (Dietotherapy), *Ilaj Bit Tadbeer* (Regimenal Therapy), and *Ilaj-bil-Dawa* (Pharmacotherapy). Since *Sue-e-mizaj Barid* causes obesity, the major therapy principles are as follows:

- Taqleel-e-Ghiza* (Diet Control)
- Tahleel-e-Balgham* (Resolving *Madda-e-Balghamiya*)

The best treatment for *Madda-e-Balghamiya* is *Hammam-e-Bukhari*, or steam bath. In this kind of Hammam, steam travels throughout the entire body [8]. *Hamma-e-Bukhari* is utilised to rid the body of *Madda-e-Balghamiya* (*Shahmi Madda*), which causes obesity through perspiration [9]. For people who don't exercise or have a phlegmatic temperament, using steam or vapour instead of water during hammam is advised. This encourages the breakdown of fluids and removes contaminants through perspiration [10].

Because *Hammam-e-Bukhari*, also known as steam therapy, raises the body's temperature to the appropriate level, similar to a fever, increases metabolic rate and the consumption of stored calories, and functions as a potent detoxifier by causing perspiration, it is advised as a stand-alone treatment for obesity or in combination with other therapies [11, 12]. Obese people are required to take baths without eating [13]. When consumed during a fast, it promotes *tahleel* (dissolution) of *ratoobat-e-asliya* (natural fluids), which renders *badal ma tahallul* (substitute for replenishment) inaccessible and resulting in dryness, which in turn produces obesity [14, 15].

Within the cabinet, steam is regulated to keep the temperature between 100 and 120 °F. Depending on the patient's rate of perspiration, the application duration may

be 10 to 20 minutes or longer [16]. A steam bath promotes endogenous warmth and eliminates the "coldness" that is causing the disease by heating the patient's body both internally and externally [17].

Possible Mechanism of Action of *Hammam-e-Bukhari* in *Siman-e-Mufrit* (Obesity)

Three unique characteristics of *Hammam* are thought to be responsible for its possible mode of action:

- Tahleel*:** is the process of employing heat from a *hammam* to remove waste and unhealthy stuff from the body.
- Taqtee*:** The release of diseased materials in the interstitial spaces of organs is facilitated by hot water.
- Talteef*:** is the property of warm water used in steam bath reacting with the body's *Quwwat Tabiyah* (natural faculty) to divide morbid matter into smaller parts [18].

In his book *Al-Hawi Fit Tib*, *Zakariya Razi* recommends this routine for managing obesity. In particular, sweating in a *hammam* causes the skin's pores to open, allowing *Balghami Maddah* to be evacuated from the body. Additionally, it accomplishes *Nuzj in Mawad* and expels it outside the body [19].

Conclusion

In conclusion, this highlights the unani medical view of obesity, or *siman-e-mufrit*, as a humoral imbalance that is especially associated with a chilly and phlegmatic disposition. A comprehensive, non-invasive approach to managing obesity is provided by Unani treatments like *hammam-e-bukhari* (steam therapy), which emphasise purification, better circulation, and the balancing of body humours. *Hammam-e-bukhari* is a potentially useful tool for individuals searching for natural, non-pharmacological strategies to manage obesity because clinical studies on steam baths reveal promising results for short-term weight loss and metabolic enhancement. Combining these conventional techniques with modern strategies may provide a more thorough and individualised response to the world's obesity problem.

Unani remedies like *hammam-e-bukhari* may be incorporated into more comprehensive healthcare initiatives in light of the growing obesity rates and the shortcomings of traditional medicines. Healthcare professionals may provide a more individualised, all-encompassing approach to managing obesity by fusing traditional and modern treatments, promoting long-term health and wellness.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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