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## Therapeutic potentials of *hijama-bila-shart* (dry cupping therapy): A review

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### Abstract

*Unani* medicine is also called as Greco-Arabic medicine there are three modes of treatment in USM, in which *Ilaj-bit-tadbeer* is one of the mode where treatment is done through several regimes in which *Hijama* (cupping) therapy is most famous among them. *Hijama* (Cupping therapy) is one of the oldest methods of treatment which was used by *Unani* physician since ancient time. It is used for diversion of morbid matter from diseased part by creating negative pressure through vacuum pump, it is indicated in various condition like arthritis, backache, migraine, hemorrhoids etc. the paper discusses the method and therapeutic potentials of *Hijama-bila-Shart*.

**Keywords:** *Unani* Medicine, *Hijama*, Cupping, Regimenal therapy

### Introduction

*Unani* medicine is also called as Greco-Arabic medicine or Islamic medicine. *USM* is based on the wisdom and tradition of great *Greek* physician and father of medicine *Buqrat* (460-377BC), Roman physician *Jalinoos* (129-200AD) medical system is also elaborate by Arab and Persian physician such as *Ibne-Sina*, *Al-Razi*, *Ibne-Nafis*, *Al-Zahrawi* [1].

Treatment strategy in *Unani* system of medicine there are three methods of treatment:- *Ilaj-bit-Tadbeer* (Regimenal therapy), *Ilaj-bid-Dawa* (Pharmacotherapy) and *Ilaj-bil-Yad* (Surgery)

*Ilaj-bit-Tadbeer* is defined as therapeutic modification in *Asbab-e-Sitta Zaruriyah*.

*Asbab-e-Sitta Zaruriyah* are six essentials factors those play a customary role in life and humans health and any alteration in these factors causes disease. These factors are: (1) *Hawa-e-Muheet* (Atmospheric air) (2) *Makul-wa-Mashroob* (Food and beverage) (3) *Harkat-wa-sukoon-e-Badni* (Physical activity and relaxation) (4) *Harkat-wa-sukoon-e-Nafsan* (Mental activity and relaxation) (5) *Naum-wa-Yaqzah* (Sleep and awake fullness) and (6) *Ehtibas-wa-Istifrag* (Retention and evacuation) [2, 3, 4].

Regimenal therapy is one of the most popular practicing method practiced by ancient *Unani* physicians based on simple physical means to cure a disease, usually used along with pharmacotherapy and dietotherapy. There are several regimens used such as *Hammam*, *Dalk*, *Takmeed*, *Cupping*, *Leeches*, *Fasd*, *Ishaal*, *Riyazat*, *Qai*, *Idrare-Baul*.

*Hijamat* is an *Arabic* word derived from "*Hajm*" which stands for "Sucking". *Hijamat* is a method used for *Imala-e-Mavad* (diversion of morbid material) or *Tanqiya-e-Mavad* (evacuation of morbid matter). In Ancient time, Hollowed out animals horns (*Singhi*) were used for the procedure of *Hijamat*. Wide opening of horn is placed on the skin of the required area and vacuum is created by sucking the air with mouth via narrow opening now days, these animal horns are replaced by sophisticated plastic and glass cups in which vacuum is created by vacuum pump [5].

### Historical background

Whatever information is available in the record of history in the form of monuments and pictures shows that *Hijamat* is an ancient method which was particularly used among the Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese, and Greeks etc. [6] According to *Arabic* writers, cupping therapy is in use since 3500 BC where Assyrians were the first Arab population to use primitive tools as animal horns; pottery cups bamboo cups for cupping therapy. *Arabic* civilization termed cupping therapy, *Al-Hijamah* therapy (which means in *Arabic*: to restore to the original size), where it was used in treating hypertension, polycythemia, headache, migraine and drug intoxication [7].

Chinese literature reports that the cupping therapy is a part of the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) dating back to at least 2,000 years [8]. In Ancient Egyptians culture, the application of cupping therapy was earlier than many old civilizations. it was one of the oldest known medical therapies in Egypt. The first report of using cupping therapy in ancient Egypt dates back to 1550 B.C. where drawings on the famous Egyptian papyrus (Ebers papyrus) and ancient Egyptian temples showed that Egyptians were advanced in treatment by using cupping therapy [9, 10]. In 400 B.C., *Herodotus* (a Greek historian) recorded that the ancient Egyptian physicians who recommended the use of sucking cups to the body have already used both wet cupping therapy and dry cupping therapy and treated various diseases by application of cupping therapy including headache, loss of appetite, maldigestion, fainting, to drain abscess, narcolepsy (repeated sleepy desires) and others [11]. *Buqrat* (460 BC) described the therapeutic prospective of both dry and wet cupping in his treatise "Guide to Clinical Treatment". He also claimed it for the treatment of angina and menstrual and other gynaecological disorders. He apparently preferred dry cupping, as this was less intrusive, gentler and fitted better with his famous principle: "First do no harm" [12].

*Jalinūs* (130-201 AD) a renowned *Unani* physician also recommended cupping for a major therapeutic option, perhaps even more so. He prescribed the wet procedure for balance of ailments [12]. *Al-Zahrawi* (936-1036 AD) a great surgeon, described cupping and its uses in detail. He explained the specific sites of cupping as well as gave description of equipments diagrammatically which should be used during procedure [13]. *Ibne Sina* (980-1037 AD) the foremost and best known practitioner of cupping, generally accepted as the "Prince of Physicians" His thoughts on the procedure are presented in his famous book, namely the *Al-Qanoon-Fit-Tibb*. He not only detailed the underlying theory and the target disorders which would benefit, also advised on patient selection and preparation, actual technique and best time for the procedure. Other advice related to where on the body the cups should be positioned and for how long [12]. *Ismail Jurjani* (d. 1140 AD) mentioned the age restriction for *Hijamat* and describes the contraindications in children and elderly people [14]. *Ibne Hubal* (1122-1213 AD) writes in his book "*Kitab-ul-Mukhtarat-Fit-Tibb*" that *Hijamat* sucks out the blood from those minor vessels which are scattered under the muscles and skin, so it does not produce weakness like *Fasd*. Further he described that cupping have the property to reduce the congestion locally and also from adjoining structures [15]. In recent years cupping is becoming very popular mode of treatment and gaining fame globally. A number of studies reported and revealing the efficacy and value of cupping either alone or with combination of other therapies.

### Definitions of *Hijamat*

Taber's dictionary reveals that the application of a glass vessel to the skin, from which air can be exhausted by heat or by a special suction apparatus, is known as cupping. [16] In English language *Hijamat*, is termed as Cupping. Several scholars of the *Unani* medicine have defined *Hijamat* (cupping) in their own words such as:

- **Razi** states that *Hijamat* is a process by which blood oozes out from the superficial small vessels located in muscles through superficial incisions. *Hijamat* relieves

the diseases of *Imtila* of the body [17].

- **Ibne Hubal Baghdadi** has defined *Hijamat* as a process which helps in *Istifragh-e-dam* from the small vessels of the skin & muscles and reduces the *Imtila* (congestion) from the part applied [18].
- **Allama Kabeeruddin** says that *Hijamat* of lower limbs, especially at ankle joints is similar to the *Fasd* (venesection) because normally blood and noxious matter move in the downward direction and *Hijamat* also attracts them, so when *Hijamat-bish-Shart* is indicated at ankle joints, the oozing of the blood is higher than in venesection [18].

### Types of *Hijamat*

Various classification of *Hijamat* has been described in *Unani* literature are as under:

*Hijamat* therapy is broadly classified in two types but these types sub divided further by its need and use of object: (1) *Hijamat-bila-Shart* (Dry cupping) (2) *Hijamat-bish-Shart* (Wet cupping) [18, 19, 20].

According to need *Hijamat-bish-Shart* is further classified into two types, *Hijamat-e-Iztirariyah* (mandatory or essential), *Hijamat-e-Ikhtiyariah* (optional or voluntary) [19, 20]. According to the methods of applications, *Hijamat-bila-Shart* is also further divided into two types: *Hijamat-e-Nariya* (Cupping with fire), *Hijamat-e-Ghair Nariya* (Cupping without fire) [18, 19] Apart from these two types, *Abul-qasim-al-Zahravi* has mentioned a third type of *Hijamat* in his book, *Kitab-ut-Tasreef*. (3) *Hijamat-e-Mai* (*Hijamat* with hot decoction of drugs) [21].

### Therapeutic Mechanism of *Hijamat* (Cupping)

In *Unani* system of medicine *Hijamat* is practicing from thousands of years but there is no specific mechanism has been explained by any eminent *Unani* physicians. Recent studies reveal the mechanism which can be understood as follows. As per *Unani* system mechanism of action is mainly based on two ways. *Tanqiya-e-Mavad* (Evacuation of morbid matter), *Imala-e-Mavad* (Diversion of morbid matter).

***Tanqiya-e-Mavad* (Evacuation of Morbid matter):** In *Unani* literature, for any pathology there is root of cause or morbid matter which accumulates in particular site or organ. According to the principle of *Tanqiya-e-Mavad*, by applying *Hijamat-bish-Shart* evacuation of morbid matter is done directly from affected site. It helps to draw out and eliminate the imbalanced qualities i.e. heat, cold, moistness, dryness. *Hijamat-bish-Shart* opens the pores of the skin which allows the *Akhlate-Fasida* to be evacuated from the body [18]. It also provides better circulation to the area. Affected site get nourished with fresh new blood [22]. It improves the eliminative function and the evacuation of wastes from the organism. In *Unani* medicine proper and timely evacuation of wastes from the body is an important aspect of hygiene. The main objective of treatment is to remove the cause of disharmony from the body, restore the circulation and balancing in homeostasis [23].

***Imala-e-Mavad* (Diversion of morbid matter):** *Hijamat-bila-Shart* (Dry Cupping) works on the principle of *Imala-e-Mavad*. In this method, there is diversion of morbid matter from one site to other [22]. By this diversion, *Hijamat-bila-Shart* helps the *Tabiyat mudabera badan* to act on this

matter and resolves it [24]. Because accumulation of any morbid matter produces congestion, stagnation and blockage which results in pain. By *Hijamat-bila-Shart* (Dry cupping) there is breaking of congestion, resolving of blockage and there is restoring free flow of blood circulation and relieving the painful muscle tension [25]. It also helps to withdraw inflammation and pressure away from the deep organs (especially the heart, brain, lungs, liver and kidneys) towards the skin or to exterior surface of the body. This facilitates the healing process and provides strengths to the immune system, so encouraging the optimum functioning of the body. In other words, it assists the actions of *Physis*. In doing so, it diverts toxins and other harmful impurities from these vital organs towards the less-vital skin, before expulsion. The blood which is diverted allows a fresh stream of blood to that area [23].

**Equipments of *Hijamat-bila-Shart*:** Glass/ acrylic cups with Vacuum pump, Antiseptic lotions, Sterilized gloves, Cotton and medical gauze, micropore tape, Razor [26].

**Therapeutic Purpose of *Hijamat-bila-Shart*:** (1) Diversion of matter (*Madda*): To divert the morbid matter from one placed to another; *Hijamat-bila-Shart* is applied at the site where material is to be diverted. e.g. in menorrhagia *Hijamat* is done under breast, and in epistaxis *Hijamat* is applied on abdominal muscles (2) For displacement of organ: In case of inguinal hernia *Hijamat* is done on the abdominal muscles of affected area. To return the displacement part of intestine (3) For Drawing out disease body. e.g. in condition of internal piles (4) In regeneration of warmth and movement in a paralyzed muscles (5) Non-healing wound: Apply cups on wounded site to draw out the pus and morbid matter (6) To divert the secretions outside or towards periphery. e.g. in leucorrhoea the *Hijamat* is done on pubic region (7) In colic pain and sciatica on site of pain (8) For absorption and dissolution of *Riyah* and induction of warmth in any organ, e.g. in case of *Burudat-e-Riyah* fire cupping is done on stomach area and (9) To relieve pain. To make inflammatory conditions more accessible to medication [15, 27, 4, 24].

Therapeutic Sites and indication sites of *Hijamat-bila-Shart* [21]

S. NO	Site	Indications
1	<i>Tahat-us-Sadyain</i> (Below the bust line)	Menorrhagia, metrorrhagia and epistaxis
2	<i>Na' f</i> (umbilical region)	Abdominal colic, tenesmus, dysmenorrhoea
3	<i>Lower abdomen</i>	Inguinal hernia
4	<i>Loin</i>	Renal stone and obstruction
5	<i>Right hypochondric region</i>	Liver disorders, epistaxis from right nostrils
6	<i>Left hypochondric region</i>	Spleen disorders, epistaxis from left nostril
7	<i>Warkain</i> (buttocks)	Sciatica and dislocation of hip
8	<i>In between Warkain</i>	Piles, hydrocele, disorder of hip and thigh
9	<i>Miq'ad</i> (Anus)	Intestinal disorder, piles, diversion of matter from head, menstrual disturbances, disorder of anus
10	<i>Medial and dorsal aspect of thigh</i>	Sciatica
11	<i>Uzun</i> (ears)	Fistula

**Contraindication of *Hijamat*:** Renowned *Unani* physician, *Jalinus (Galen)* quoted that *Hijamat* should not be performed during early pre inflammatory stages because when *Hijamat* is done at this stage, it will not extract or divert the morbid matter completely leaving behind some residue that may create the foundation for chronic disease. [14] Children below 2 years and elders above 60 years, Pregnant and lactating women, During menstrual cycle, Patients having history of cardiac complications, Patients of contagious disease, Patients on anticoagulant medicine, Immune-compromised patients [24]. Should be avoided in obese patients [28]. In severe accumulation of raw matter, Just after sexual intercourse and some heavy exercise, *Hijamat* should not be performed after *Hammam* except in cases of patients having viscid blood [18]. It should be avoided after excessive work due to *Kasrat-e-Tahleel*., *Hijamat* should be avoided in the beginning and the end of lunar month [29]. In late stages of abscess [30].

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