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## Review Article

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

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#### ABSTRACT

Hijāma means Cupping; which refers to Wet Cupping in Arab and Muslim civilizations. Hijāma 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 Hijāma. 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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. Hijāma is a regimen approach for the management of various ailments suggested by renowned Unani physicians. As an adjuvant therapy Hijāma 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 Hijāma is a good palliative and anti inflammatory regimen in contrast to other conventional therapies. Hijāma is an imperative non pharmacological regimen mode of treatment.

**Keywords:** Hijāma; Wet cupping; Hijāma bi'l Shart; Unani system of Medicine; historical review

#### INTRODUCTION

Hijāma 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. Hijāma is an Arabic word derived from 'Hajm' which stands for "sucking."<sup>1</sup> Hijāma 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.<sup>2</sup>

#### Historical Background

Although there is grounds to believe the practise of Hijāma 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.<sup>3</sup>

#### Hijāma in ancient period

Whatever information existing in the trace of history in the form of monument and pictures shows that the Hijāma 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 Hijāma 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 Hijāma was used as a cure for a range of ailments. Its use among Chinese dates back about 2000 BC.<sup>4,5</sup> In Greece, the use of Hijāma 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 Hijāma 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 akhlāt (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 Jālinūs (Galen) that the bloodletting method might retain the balance of akhlāt.<sup>6</sup> A book was also written by Hippocrates on Ḥijāma and faṣd which was later translated by Yuhanna Bin Maswaih into Arabic and named as “Al Kitab fil faṣd wal Ḥijāma”<sup>7-10</sup>. The ancient Arabs were much familiar with the medical science also, but the medical science was restricted only up to the knowledge of Ḥijāma, Kaiyy (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.<sup>4</sup> 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 ashi points.<sup>11</sup>

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

More than sixty Ahadeth allied to cupping are endorsed to the Prophet. According to these Ahadeth, 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'ud, 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 Ālayhi Wasallam said, "Indeed the best of remedies you have is Ḥijāma (cupping)." [Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (5371)].
- Jabir ibn Abdullah, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālayhi Wasallam said, "Indeed in Ḥijāma (cupping) there is a cure." [Saheeh Muslim (5706)].
- It is narrated by Anas that The Messenger Sallallāhu Ālayhi Wasallam said, "Whoever performs Ḥijāma (cupping) on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Ālayhi Wasallam said, "If there was something excellent to be used as a remedy then it is Ḥijāma." [Saheeh Sunan abi Dawud (3857), Saheeh Sunan ibn Maajah (3476)].
- Abdullah ibn Abbas, May Allāh be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger Sallallāhu Ālayhi 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 Ālayhi Wasallam said, "Hijama 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 Ālayhi 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 Ālayhi Wasallam was cupped while he was fasting. [Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (5694)].<sup>12,13</sup>

### 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.<sup>14</sup> Nearly in each and every medical books of that time, containing chapters of Uṣūl-i-Ilāj, Ḥijāma have been mentioned thoroughly. Razi has described the cure of different diseases by Ḥijāma in his book Al Hawi fit Tib and Kitbul Mansoori. He wrote under the management of ‘Irq al-Nasā (sciatica) 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.”<sup>15</sup> 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 imtilā.”<sup>16</sup> Ali Ibne Abbas Majoosi has also described the types, sites, indications, precautions, and the most accurate time about Ḥijāma in his book Kamilus Sanaa’h volume of.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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

Ibn Sina in his treatise “Al-Qānūn fi’l Tib” and Ismail Jurjani in his book Zakhira 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

- Hijāma is less advantageous in obese person having viscid blood as it is difficult to suck the blood due to its viscosity.<sup>19,20</sup>

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'l shart.<sup>20</sup> Ibn Hubal writes in his book "Kitabul Mukhtar 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."<sup>21</sup> Ibnul Quf in his book "Kitabul Umdah fil Jarahat" described Hijāma bilā shart and Hijāma bi'l shart 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.<sup>22</sup>

### 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 achieved 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'l shart (cupping with scarification / wet

cupping)

2. Hijāma bilā shart (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'l 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'l Shart

- 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<sup>23,24</sup>.

Normally cupping has a diversity of therapeutic functions including inducing sweating, dispelling exogenous pathogens, relieving swelling, alleviating pain, promoting 'gay', blood circulation, accelerating healing and regulating body temperature.

Table 1: Indications of Hijāma Bi'l Shart according to Site of Application

S. No.	Sites	Indications
1.	Yafookh (fontanelle)	Dwar, Diseses of eyes, Ikhtilaj-e-Aql
2.	Qamhadwah	Kudoorat-el-Hawas
3.	Naqrah (nape)	Nervous diseses, Ramad, Waja'al-Udhun, Kalaf, Barash, Namash
4.	Kah'il (inter scapular region)	imtilā with Khafqān, chest diseases, throat diseases, shoulder and joint pain
5.	Akhda'	Tremor of head, Diseases of head
6.	Zaqn (chin)	Stomatitis, Diseases of gums and cheeks
7.	Qutn (waist)	Gout, Piles, Hikkatl zahr, waja'al-zahr, Niqris
8.	Fakhz (thigh)	Orchitis, Coxalgia, Anal fissure
9.	Rakbah (knee)	Waja'al-mafāsil, Waram Rakbah
10.	Ka'ab (heel)	Sciatica, Gout, Ihtibas-e-Tams
11.	Wari'k (hip)	Piles, Proctitis, Epistaxis, Burning micturition, Haematuria
12.	Manak'ib (shoulder)	Liver diseases, Hummā al-Rib <sup>16,22-26</sup>

### Contraindications

- Hijāma should be avoided in the beginning and the end of lunar month.<sup>19,20,22,23,25-27</sup>
- It should be avoided in infants, preferably up to the age of two years and in elderly persons after 60 years.<sup>22,23</sup>
- It should be avoided in extremely cold or hot weather.<sup>15</sup>
- It should not be done in standing position to avoid the

patient from falling down, as the patient may get fainted.<sup>15</sup>

- It should not be done on an area having poor musculature.<sup>15</sup>
- It should not be done on an area having major blood vessels particularly in those people who are lean and thin.<sup>15</sup>
- It should be avoided in torn ligaments of the joints.<sup>15</sup>
- It should be avoided on the oedematous knee but may

- be performed on the adjacent areas.<sup>15</sup>
- It should be avoided shortly after food up to two hours.<sup>15</sup>
- It is suitable to evade Hijāma after bath except in the case of viscid blood.<sup>19,20,22,23,25-27</sup>
- It should not be performed in the pregnant women on the lower abdomen and chest predominantly in first trimester.<sup>23,24</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It can be calculated that a complete knowledge is must for the Hijāma (cupping regimen). It is evident from the descriptions of various classical books and historical review that in past, the persons practicing Hijāma 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 Hijāma, must be institutionally qualified with sound knowledge of the regimen, in case of failure it will become history again.

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