

***Al-Hijamah* (Cupping): The Natural Holistic Healing Art- A Review**

Md. Nafis Iqbal¹ and Prof. Anis A. Ansari²

^{1,2} Department of Kulliyat, Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

Correspondence should be addressed to Md. Nafis Iqbal, PG Scholar, Department of Kulliyat, Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College, AMU, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India, nafisnium22@gmail.com

Publication Date: 23 February 2013

Article Link: <http://medical.cloud-journals.com/index.php/IJAAYUSH/article/view/Med-46>



Copyright © 2012 Md. Nafis Iqbal and Prof. Anis A. Ansari. This is an open access article distributed under the **Creative Commons Attribution License**, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract In Unani system of medicine, various types of treatments are employed such as Regimenal therapy, Dietotherapy and Pharmacotherapy etc. Among them, the regimental therapy has very remarkable status; therefore, it is being adopted globally. *Al- Hijamah* (cupping) is one such *tadabeer* (regimen), which causes intervention through restoration of humoural balance by diverting or evacuating the morbid materials and it is practiced for many disease conditions since time immemorial. Hippocrates describes both dry and wet cupping in his *Guide to Clinical Treatment*. He recommended it for the treatment of angina, menstrual and other disorders. Later, Galen was a practitioner of the procedure. *Al-Hijamah* acts to draw inflammation and pressure away from the deep organs (especially the heart, brain, lungs, liver and kidneys) towards the skin. This facilitates the healing process. Practitioners of *Al-Hijamah* contend that this process strengthens 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. *Al-Hijamah* technique is very useful, safe and can easily be applied and incorporated in family health practices.

Keywords *Unani System, Regimenal Therapy, Al-Hijamah, Humoural Imbalance*

1. Introduction

Al-Hijamah is an Arabic word which has different meanings such as:-

- Process of scalp hair removal
- Application of cups (*Seenghi*) [1]

In Unani system of medicine, various types of treatments are employed such as Regimenal therapy, Dietotherapy and Pharmacotherapy etc. Among them, the regimental therapy has very remarkable status; therefore, it is being adopted globally. *Al- Hijamah* (cupping) is one such *tadabeer* (regimen), which causes intervention through restoration of humoural balance by diverting or evacuating the morbid materials and it is practiced for many disease conditions since time immemorial.

1.1. Historical Background

Hijamah (Cupping) has been practiced since ancient times. The ancient *Unani* physicians were the first to use *hijamah* (cupping) systemically. Hippocrates describes both dry and wet *hijamah* (cupping) in his *Guide to Clinical Treatment*. The ancient Egyptians were the first to use *hijamah* (cupping). The oldest medical text book, written in approximately 1550 BC, in Egypt, describes bleeding by *hijamah* (cupping) to 'remove the foreign matter from the body'. Later, Galen was a practitioner of the procedure. After a long period of neglect, *hijamah* (cupping) was revived in the Islamic age. The Prophet Muhammed PBUH is reported to have been a user and advocate of *hijamah* (cupping) therapy. It has been reported that the Prophet PBUH said, "*Cupping and puncturing the veins are your best remedies*". Some therapeutic *hijamah* (cupping) methods and case records of treatment were also described in early Chinese books. Zhao Xueming, a Chinese doctor practicing more than 200 years ago, completed a book named "Ben Cao Gang Mu Shi Yi", in which he described in detail the history and origin of different kinds of cupping and cup shapes, functions and applications. Initially, hollow animal horns were used for the purpose of *hijamah*, which further evolved into bamboo cups, which were eventually replaced by glass or plastic cups. In the early days the technique was used solely for bleeding purposes but now a day's various diseases have claimed that they benefited from *hijamah* [2, 3, 4].

1.2. Definitions of *Hijamah*

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 [5] in English language *Hijamah*, is termed as cupping. Several scholars of the *Unani* medicine have defined *Hijamah* (cupping) in their own words such as:

- ❖ Razi states that *Hijamah* is a process by which bleeding is oozing through the superficial small vessels located in muscles. *Hijamah* will relieve the diseases of *Imtila* from the body [6].
- ❖ Shaikh has described the process of making incision (*Pachhna*) is known as *Hijamah* which is more useful to excrete the noxious matter, accumulated close to the skin [7].
- ❖ Jurjani clarifies that *Hijamah* is a process by which superficial bleeding is initiated from the smaller vessels or their branches, situated within the muscles to lower down the *Imtila* without producing weakness in the power of the vital organs [8].
- ❖ Ibn-e Hubal Baghdadi has defined *Hijamah* as a process which helps in *istifragh-e-dam* from the small vessels of the skin & muscles and reduces the *Imtila* from the part applied [9].
- ❖ Allama Kabeeruddin says that *Hijamah* at lower extremities, especially at ankle joints is similar to the *fasd* (venesection) because normally blood and noxious matter move in the downward direction and *hijamah* also attracts them, so when *hijamah bil-shurt* is indicated at ankle joints the oozing of the blood is higher than in venesection [1].

1.3. Cupping Apparatus (*Ala-e-Hijamah*)

The process of *Hijamah* is also locally know as *applying seenghi* because in the ancient period *hijamah* was done by using cow horns (*seengh*) or other hollow animal horns. The apparatus for *hijamah* was termed as *Mahjama* which was either of horn-shaped or cup-shaped (*Aab-khorah*) or pumpkin shaped (*Qara*) [1].

1.4. Classification of *Hijamah*

Depending upon the method of the application of *hijamah* it is classified into two types such as:-

1. *Hijamah-Bila-shurt* (Non-invasive cupping or Dry cupping)
2. *Hijamah-Bil-Shurt* (invasive cupping or wet cupping or cupping with scarification) [9, 10, 11, 12].

Noninvasive cupping is characterized by application of cups without making an incision (*Pachhna*). Invasive cupping is indicated after making an incision on the included area.

Both of these types are further classified into two types:-

- (A) *Mahjama Nari* (Cupping with fire)
- (B) *Mahjama Ghair Nari* (Cupping without fire) [9, 11].

Such type of cupping in which any inflammable thing is placed in the cup to produce fire which creates negative pressure and thus helps in attachment of the cups at the surface of the included area is known as *Mahjama Nari*. In *Mahjama Ghair Nari* flame is not used to create the negative pressure, i.e. vacuum is created by any means other than flame (mostly by vacuum pressure pumps). [9, 10, 11, 12, 13].

(A) The following two types of *Hijamah-Bil-Shurt* were also described by some Unani scholars:

1. *Zaroori Hijamah* (Essential Cupping)
2. *Ikhtiyari Hijamah* (Voluntary Cupping) [11, 12].

Essential cupping is indicated to treat the specific ailments, described by eminent Unani scholars. For voluntary cupping induction there are ten specific rules as:

1. It should be done in mid of *Qamri* (moon) month.
2. The best time in the day for voluntary cupping is just before evening as it is the most moderate time of the day.
3. It should be done in summer weather because due to heat the harmful matter is in more dilute form.
4. It should be done in such type of persons who have more dilute blood.
5. It should be advised digestive and anti suppurative syrup before the induction of voluntary cupping.
6. It should not be indicated in loose and weak persons.
7. It is contraindicated in less than two and more than sixty years of age.
8. It should not be done in loose and weak persons.
9. It should not be done just after *hammam* bath, except such type of persons who have thick blood.
10. It is advised that cupping should not be done after heavy work load or heavy exercise [11, 12].

2. Method of Applications of Cups (*Mahjama*)

2.1. *Hijamah-bila-shurt* (Noninvasive Cupping)

Application of *Mahjama* (cups) without making an incision (*shurt*) is known as *hijamah-bila-shurt*. It is applied on affected areas by creating negative pressure inside the cups either by holding a small flame inside the cups (*Mahjama-Nari*) or by using vacuum pump (*Mahjama-Ghair-Nari*). It is specially

indicated when absorption is required without induction of *istifragh-e-dam*. *Mahjama-Nari* is more beneficial when morbid matter is relatively thicker [7, 12]. One important thing regarding the non-invasive cupping is that it should not be applied until the purification (*tanqiyah*) of body is done properly.

In ancient periods the application of *Mahjamah* or cups on the specific areas was achieved by holding a small flame inside the cup, to create vacuum pressure, the cups were then placed quickly on the skin over the area to be treated and were allowed to be in the place for ten to fifteen minutes. The strength of vacuum pressure was modulated by the size of the flame, the time of exposure to the flame and how quickly the cup was placed on the affected area.

2.2. Hijamah-bil-shurt (Invasive Cupping)

For induction of invasive cupping firstly cups are placed on the affected area simply, just like noninvasive cupping and create moderate vacuum pressure for a relatively short duration. This method should be done repeatedly until the affected area become reddish and swollen. Then *shurt* is done carefully, if the patient is weak only one *shurt* is sufficient but it should be wider and deeper. If blood is thick (concentrated), then *shurt* is done for two times one for dilute blood flow and other for concentrated blood flow. If blood has some impurities then one more *shurt* may be done to clarify it. So it is clear that if less amount of bleeding is needed then only one *shurt* is sufficient while in case of heavy bleeding requirement many incisions may be given [13].

2.3. Sites for Cupping Application

Different eminent Unani scholars have described following areas for the induction of *hijamah*:

1. **Hijamah Naqrah** It means cupping at the back or neck, which is beneficial in heaviness of the eye and inflammatory conditions of the eyes and bad odour from mouth [7].
2. **Hijamah –Kawahil** It is done at inter-scapular region especially in cases of palpitation, neck pain & shoulder joint pain etc. [8].
3. **Hijamah Akhda-ain** It is done on either of the *Akhda* (right and left carotid) or the lateral side of the neck. It is effective in *amraz-e-raas* (the diseases of the head e.g. diseases of the ear, nose, throat and teeth etc.) and other vital organ disorders. [14].
4. **Hijamah Qamahduwa and Yafookh** *Hijamah-e-Qamahduwa* is done on the protuberance behind the ear and the *Hijamah-e-Yafookh* is done on the middle and crown of the head. According to some Unani physicians these types of *hijamah* is beneficial in case of confusion, anxiety and migraines while some others say that it is beneficial for eye diseases [14].
5. **Hijamah-Tahtul-Zaqan** It is done on the chin and is beneficial the recurrent attack of stomatitis and other problems of gums and cheeks [6].
6. **Hijamah-Qutun** It is done on the folds of thighs (loin) and is effective in gout, hemorrhoids, elephantiasis, urinary bladder diseases and uterine diseases etc. [15].
7. **Hijamah Fakhzaain** It is done on the thighs. Cupping on the anterior aspect of thigh is beneficial for orchitis and the lower limb abscess, while cupping on the posterior aspect of thighs is beneficial in coxalgia, hemorrhoids and anal fissure etc. [14].

8. **Hijamah Tahtul Rakbain** When *Hijamah* is done at the lower aspect of the knee joints. It is beneficial in the knee joint pain which is due to accumulation of the noxious matter (*Akhlat-e-fasidah*). It is also beneficial in the abscess and chronic ulcers of lower limbs [14].
9. **Hijamah Ka'abaain** It is done on ankle joints and it is beneficial in case of sciatica, gout & early menopause etc. [14].
10. **Hijamah Pistaan** Cupping at breast, which is effective in epistaxis and menstrual problems. . [14].
11. **Hijamah Warikaain** It means cupping on hips or buttocks. It is beneficial in the management of piles, proctitis, haematuria, epistaxis, burning micturition and other diseases of the kidney and the urinary bladder [14].
12. **Hijamah Maq'ad** It is cupping on the anal area and is effective in case of anal-fistula [14].
13. **Hijamah Rusug** It is done on wrist joints and is much beneficial in scabies, itching & ulceration of hands [14].
14. **Hijamah Uzn** When cupping is done on the tragus of ears; it is beneficial in heaviness and pain in the eyelids [14].
15. **Hijamah Manakib** It means cupping on shoulder joints. Cupping on the right shoulder is beneficial in liver diseases and on left shoulders in spleen diseases and quartan fever [14].

3. Basic Principles of Cupping

Rabban Tabri and Abu Sahal Maseehi have described three ways for voluntary bleeding:

1. Cupping for subcutaneous bleeding.
2. Leeching for relatively deep bleeding.
3. Venesection for bleeding from inner-most areas [11, 16].

Hijamah is applied in the types of ailments which can be managed by superficial or subcutaneous bleeding. There are some following important principles regarding the cupping [8, 11, 13].

Hijamah may be done after two years of age and up to sixty years of age only. *Hijamah Naqrah* should be done after completion of *istifragh* of the whole body. *Hijamah Kawahil* should be done slightly above the exact part because if it is done at the lower side it produces weakness of stomach and heart. It is instructed that the patient should take water in excessive quantity on the day of cupping. In *Balghami* and *Saudawi* temperaments *Tiryag-e-Farooq* or *Dawa-ul-Misk* or any other hot drugs should be used before cupping to liquify the blood. *Muqawwi-e-meda* drugs (digestive tonics) such as *Sharbat Anar*, *Sharbat Bahi* etc. should be given to the patient before cupping. *Hijamah* should be done specially in such type of patients who have relatively diluted blood. If cupping is required in those patients who have more concentrated blood then it should be done after *Hammam*. If there is excessive accumulation of morbid matter then *hijamah* should be done after induction of venesection. If accumulated morbid matter is more concentrated then heavy massage should be done prior to non- invasive cupping induction. In the case of invasive cupping, an incision should be made according to quantity and thickness of accumulated matter, e.g. deep incision is done if morbid matter is thick [8, 11, 13].

3.1. Contraindications of *Al-Hijamah*

The following are the contraindications for *hijamah* as described by various eminent scholars of the Unani system of medicine:-

1. Before two years and after 60 years of age.
2. Just after *hammam* except if the blood is more viscous.
3. More obese patients.
4. In excessive accumulation of morbid matter.
5. In patients having weaker muscles tone.

Just after sexual intercourse and some heavy exercise [8, 11, 13].

3.2. Precaution after *Al-Hijamah*

1. One should not take eggs just after cupping.
2. Heavy meal intake should be avoided just after cupping.
3. If the patient is weak and of hot temperament then after *hijamah*, the types of drugs which empower the vital organs should be used e.g.: *Tiryag-e-Farooq* and *Dawa-ul-Misk* etc.
4. If the patient is of cold temperament then chicken curry or pigeon curry should be advised after cupping.
5. It is better to use sour things for eating after cupping.
6. Patients should be advised to take *Arq Ghulab*, *Arq Kasni* and *Sharabat -Anar* etc. in case of choleric temperament.
7. *Hammam* may be advised after 2 hours of invasive cupping [9, 11, 13].

4. Mechanism of Action

In the *Unani* system of medicine *hijamah* has been in use for thousands of years but there has been no specific mechanism of the action described by any eminent *Unani* scholars. Recent studies show the mechanism which can be understood as follows:

Cupping acts to draw inflammation and pressure away from the deep organs (especially the heart, brain, lungs, liver and kidneys) towards the skin. This facilitates the healing process. Practitioners of Cupping contend that this process strengthens 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 for a fresh 'stream' of blood to that area [2].

During cupping, both blood and lymph circulatory systems are simultaneously stimulated to work more efficiently. This results in a more efficient collection and transportation mechanism for toxic substances, depositing it into the lymphatic system to be destroyed and allowing the circulation of fresh lymph in order to nourish the tissues and generate a booster for the immune system. Cupping regulates the energy and blood flow. It helps draw out and eliminate the imbalanced quality i.e. heat, cold, moistness, dryness. Cupping also opens the pores of the skin thus allowing for the precipitation of toxin through the skin. Nothing moves blood and energy as efficiently as cupping. Where the patient's energy is deficient, the movement of blood would be slow, if the energy is abundant, the movement will be much quicker. The main objective of treatment is to remove the cause of disharmony from the body, restore the circulation of blood, energy and fluids thus aiding *physis* in reestablishing homeostasis [2].

5. Conclusion

Ilaj Biltadbeer means treatment through regimen which is a method through which care of the sick person and maintenance of general health as well as treatment of various diseases are performed with the help of certain procedures, tools and equipments. It is based on the theory of humours and temperament. Hijamah has been considered as an important part of this treatment. It is used to produce humoral and temperamental equilibrium in human body. Applications of *Hijamah* are very useful, safe and can be easily applied and incorporated in family health practices. *Hijamah-bila-shurt* stimulates the organs and increases the local blood circulation and carries away the morbid material through *Imala-e-Mavad*. *Hijamah-bil-Shurt* is useful to eliminate the morbid material by *Tanqiya-e-Mavad* there by relieving a number of diseases. It is also suitable for people from all walks of life for a variety of conditions and can be used both in hospital and at home to promote health and well-being virtually no side effect.

References

- [1] Kabiruddin M., 1954: *kulliyat-e-nafisi*. Idara kitab al Shifa, New Delhi, India.
- [2] University of the Western Cape School of Natural Medicine, 2009: *Cupping Therapy*. freecourseware.uwc.ac.za/ripmixlearners/_media/cupping_notes.doc
- [3] Bhikha A. Rashid, 2008: *Adjunctive Cupping Therapy in the Treatment of Diabetes, Hypertension and Osteoarthritis*. Pilot Research Project, University of Western Cape, Republic of South Africa.
- [4] Zhao X.M., 1963: Ben Cao Gang Mu Shi Yi [in Chinese]. People's Medical Publishing House, Beijing, China.
- [5] Thomas C.L., 2001: *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*. 20th Ed. F.A. Davis Company, Philadelphia.
- [6] Razi ABMBZ, 1991: *Kitabul Mansoori*. Urdu Translation by CCRUM, New Delhi, India.
- [7] Kantoori G.H. *Tarjuma Al Qanoon*. Vol. I, Idara Kitab Al Shifa, New Delhi, India.
- [8] Jurjani S.I., 2000: *Zakhira Khwarzam Shahi*. Vol. I (Urdu Translation by Hadi Hussain Khan), Matba Nami Munshi Nawal Kishore, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.
- [9] Ibn-Habal et al. *Kitab-UI- Mukhataraat Fil-Tib*. Vol. I: CCRUM, Ministry of H & FW, New Delhi, India.
- [10] Chandpuri K., 1984: *Maujiz-Al-Qanoon*. Matba Taraqqi, Urdu Beauru, New Delhi, India.
- [11] Ibn Al Qaf. *Kitab-ul-Umdah fil Jarahat*. Part-I, CCRUM, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India.
- [12] Gazrooni S., 1911: *Kulliyat-e-Sadeedi* (Urdu Translation by Syed Abid Hussain). Matba Munshi Naval Kishor, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.
- [13] Zahrawi AQ. *Jarahiyat-e-Zahrawiyah* (Urdu Translation by Nisar Ahmad Alvi). Matba Dar-ul-Isha'at, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.
- [14] Kabiruddin M., 2006: *Tarjuma wa Sharha Kulliyat-e-Qanoon*. Ejaj Publishing House, New Delhi, India.

- [15] Anwar S.A., 2001: *Ilm-ul-Jarahat*. Afeef Offset, Delhi, India.
- [16] Tabri R., 2010: *Firdousul Hikmat*. (Urdu Translation by MA Shah S). Idara Kitab Al Shifa, New Delhi, India.