

A REVIEW ON RAKSHAKARMA – THE PROTECTIVE SHIELD TO THE CHILD

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ABSTRACT

Rakshakarma is a Sanskrit word which means protective measures or preventive procedure. Sushruta emphasizes in detail about the Rakshakarma in the management of wound, whereas Charaka and Vagbhata spoke about Rakshakarma especially during childcare. Present neonatal care includes special aseptic measures to be adopted aiming to prevent any infection of the newborn. According to WHO 50-60% of all neonatal deaths occurs within the first month of life due to poor aseptic technique practices in the labour room, of these more than half may die during the first week of life. Right from the initial of birth process, measures for sepsis and antisepsis such as clean hand,

clean surface, use of sterile surgical instruments (blade/scissor), clean handling of the cord, use of surgical mask, gloves, etc. are to be religiously followed until handling and resuscitation of the newborn baby. Appropriate hygiene is advised throughout the newborn care to decrease infection episodes during infancy. Present study is undertaken to review the concept of Rakshakarma and define it with modern counterpart. It's found that the concept of Rakshakarma in Ayurveda is quite efficient for providing a complete physical and psychological protective shield to the child.

KEYWORDS: Rakshakarma, Neonate, Sepsis, Resuscitation.

INTRODUCTION

Raksha and its various derivatives occur predominantly in the Vedic texts means – to protect, guard, take care of, govern, to keep, to preserve, save, to avoid, to observe or to beware of, an evil spirit, a demon.^[1]

Rakshakarma means protective measures and is one of the important procedure extensively used in Ayurveda. It is one of the procedure involved in the resuscitation and care of the newborn. The concept of rakshakarma in ayurveda is quite efficient for providing a complete physical and psychological protective shield to the newborn. Protective measures for newborn baby are taken to prevent the infections and to clean the environment as well as to increase humoral immunity. The fumigation of the sutikagara by various drugs is mentioned to protect the baby from various opportunistic infections. Ayurvedic acharyas have advocated the use of clean and fumigated clothes, beddings, etc. The various drugs mentioned in dhupana karma have antiseptic and antimicrobial properties which have been also proved experimentally in various studies. Plants protect themselves against being eaten by secreting natural pesticides, toxins, plant-based phenols, flavonoids, isoflavones, terpenes, and glucosinolates. These different chemicals are almost always bitter, acrid (pungent) or astringent in taste. In addition to their bactericidal or biological activity these substances may provide a defense against predators by making the plant unpalatable.^[2]

Chanting hymns and practicing Yama and Niyama provide a psychological support to the patient, which is helpful for quick recovery and rehabilitation. Thus we can say that rakshakarma procedure provides a effective physical and psychological protection to the mother and the child.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Ayurveda, Rakshakarma has been described as under:

1. Under Rakshakarma, Acharya Charaka gives detailed description related to protection of newborn (rakshakarama) related to antiseptics of clothing, beddings, etc. and aseptic measures to prevent infections from surroundings. All around the Sutikagara (the place where mother and child both resides after delivery) the twigs of Adani, Khadira, Karakndu, Pilu, Parushaka should be hung, and Sarshapa (yellow mustard), Atasi, Tandulakan-kanika (rice particles) should be scattered on its floor. “Tandul Bali Homa” should be done twice a day i.e. morning and evening. The musal (pestle) should be placed obliquely at the entry door. The fire should always lit by putting the dry wood of kana-kantak(ingudi) and Tinduka wood in the

Sutikagara. A packet containing Vacha, Kustha, Kshomka, Hingu, Sarspa, Atasi, Lasuna, Guggulu etc. raksoghana dravyas should be hung on the door and similar dravyas should be tied around the neck of mother and child. Well wishing skilled care taker women should be remain vigilant and attentive continuously in the sutikagara for the initial 10-12 days i.e, the baby should not be kept alone. The Sutikagara should be fulfilled with gifts, auspicious recitations, blessings, praises, playing of music and musical instruments, foods and drinks, along with devoted, loyal and delighted persons. The person having the knowledge of Atharvaveda should perform Shanti-Patha or Homa [procedure of sacrificing things in fire] in the morning and evening for the welfare of the mother and baby.^[3]

2. Acharya Sushruta directed the neonate to be wrapped in kshauma (linen) cloth and made to sleep on a bed covered with soft linen. Twigs of pilu-badar-nimba-parushaka are to be used to gently fan the baby. A cotton tampon impregnated with oil (tailapichu) should be applied over the baby's head daily. Fumigation with Rakshoghana dravyas should be done in the Sutikagara. These Rakshoghana drugs should be tied over the hands, feet, head and neck. Tila, Atasi, Sarshapa and Kana (rice particles) should be scattered all over the Sutikagara. The fire should be lit in the place. Else should be followed as described in Vranitopasniya context.^[4]

There are sixty procedures for the management of wound, mentioned by Sushruta. Rakshakarma or Rakshavidhan is one of them.^[5] The wound should be fumigated by pain relieving and Rakshoghana fumes and the protection should be ensured by reciting hymns. Again Sushruta says, the wound should be fumigated with a mixture of powders of Guggulu, Agar, Sarjarasa, Vacha, Sarshapa, Saindhava and the leaves of Nimba tree along with Ghrita. The left over Ghrita then applied over the region of heart and other vital parts of the patients. Afterwards protective hymns should be recited as – May Brahma and other gods counteract sorcery (Kriya) and the dread of evil spirits (Raksasa), serpent demons (Naga), devils (Pishacha), celestial, musicians (Gandharva), souls of paternal ancestors (Pitra), spirits (Yaksha), evil spirits (Nishachara) etc. In the same context Sushruta further spoke about the protection of strength, intellect, psyche, and understanding from the blessing of god Indra, anu, Gandharva and Varuna respectively.^[6]

In Chikitsasthan, Sushruta says that wounds and patients should be protected from invisible creatures (Nishachara) by procedures like Dhupana and protective energy of the prophylactic prayer. He further advocated Yama and Niyamaas a part of Rakshakarma (Five Yama are

non- violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy and abstinence from litigation and Five Niyama are cleanliness, satisfaction, penance, spiritual study, service of the preceptor).^[7]

3. Acharya Vagbhata described similar rakshakarma as described by Charaka in addition; Vagbhata had also counselled use of herbs such as brahmi, indryana, jivaka and rishbhaka to be tied around hands or neck of the newborn. Vagbhata also mentions use of balvacha. It promotes medha, smriti, health and longevity of the baby.^[8]

In Astangasangraha, Vagbhata described to tie a cotton pouch containing Hingu, Vacha, Turuska and Sarshapa on the upper frame of door and head side of bed (cradle) and also in the neck of infant and mother. Further there is mention of Dhupana for baby's apartment consisting of dried crow feathers along with Trivruta, Vacha, Kustha, Srivesta, Sarshapa, added with little Ghrita.^[9]

Acharaya Vagabhata has also advised the use of protective measures on the 6th night of birth (SasthiRatri). He says that on 6th night of birth of the newborn, all family members and friends remain awaken and rakshakarma should be performed by offering sacrifices. Ancient scholars have observed very closely about the most crucial period of infancy and marked it up to six days. Care of 6th night indicates that from birth upto first week i.e. early neonatal period, babies are most susceptible to various infections and other complication. After one week, the incidence of infections and complication reduce, therefore the chances of survival increase.

According to Aroyakalpdruma, Kumaramaragara should be fumigated. The horns, hooves of Krishna, Saralu, Laya, Avi- Dears and Gandaka along with Gojihva and Shewta Sharshapa (white mustard) are taken in equal amount, powdered and mixed with butter and heated. The fumes generated (Dhupana) helps to protect the child.^[10]

Placing of herbs in ward room and tying it to neonate reduces chances of infection as these medicines have rakshoghna (anti- microbial) properties. Scattering of small seeds on floor serves similar purpose along with the practical benefit that insects find it difficult to crawl on such surface reducing chances of insect bite. Fumigation of the sutikagara by various drugs is mentioned to protect the baby from various opportunistic infections. Lighting of fire inside the ward room provided better visibility of neonate for its care especially at night. Female attendants remaining awake at night are required for catering to needs of baby so that mother

can have adequate rest. Offering of prayers are a form of daivyapashraya treatment which is a source of psychological support to mother and family. Also regular cleaning of the ward room prior to performing prayers serves to observe hygiene. Raksha karma is prescribed for at least ten days which includes early neonatal period, the most vulnerable time for a newborn. Keeping a large pestle obliquely at the entrance of sutikagara may serve as a no entry signal to avoid unnecessary overcrowding, thus checking potential source of contamination in baby's and mother's room.^[11]

DISCUSSION

From the above description, it is evident that with respect to rakshakarma, Ayurvedic acharyas have advocated measures which aim to protect the newborn baby from various infections as in use of clean clothes, beddings etc. The fumigation of the sutikagara (sanatorium / labour room) by various drugs is mentioned to protect the baby from various opportunistic infections/diseases. The various drugs mentioned in dhupana karma have antiseptic and antimicrobial properties which have been proved so experimentally in various studies. As per ancient text, room should be kept warm by fire, lighting in the room to prevent hypothermia, now a days Radiant warmer are available for this purpose.

According to modern medicine, proper sterilization is helpful in wound healing and fumigation with different chemicals is one of the methods to achieve sterilization. Same principle also applies during child and mother care. From literature review it is clear that from ancient Egyptian medicine there was concept of safety of diseased person with regards to evil spirits.

Ayurveda also speak about care of diseased person from evil spirits and also give enough importance to safe guard the patient from visibly present creatures. What we found interesting in Ayurvedic literature is the use of different kinds of herbs during preparing different kinds of decoction or placing them in the patient/mother/child body or spreading them over the room and also fumigating with their smoke. Here we need to look for the antimicrobial properties of these different herbs based on their ayurvedic and modern pharmacological properties.

In a recent study it was found that plants protect themselves against being eaten by secreting natural pesticides and other toxins, plant-based phenols, flavonoids, isoflavones, terpenes, and glucosinolates. These different chemicals are almost always bitter, acrid (pungent), or

astringent in taste. In addition to their bactericidal or biological activity these substances may provide a defense against predators by making the plant unpalatable. When we look up the herbs used for different purpose of Rakshakarma in ayurveda, we found that most of these herbs are bitter, astringent and pungent in taste, because of the presence of different chemical constituents in them. These herbs probably have bactericidal and insecticidal activities which safeguard the patient from infections.

In a recent clinical study, it was found that fumigation with a mixture of traditional Chinese medicine promotes wound healing and prevents the wound of post-operative complications including pain relief, reduce swelling and infection etc.^[12]

Another aspect is related with hymn chanting in the room of the patient probably a kind of psychological counseling to the patient, so he can feel safe and cared. This is to provide a positive environment for the healing of wound and also support to the mother in post-partum phase to avoid any kind of stress. Recent studies add to growing evidence that psychology impacts wound repair and highlight in particular the positive role of social support on modulating the negative effects of stress.^[13]

CONCLUSION

From the above description it is evident that, Rakshakarma was used extensively in the cases of mother and child care. In earlier times there were different kinds of decoctions of herbs were used for cleaning the wound. Same context Sushruta also give enough importance to Rakshakarma procedure, where he spoke about the use of Dhupana (Fumigation) of different herbs around the wound and patients and the room of the patient. After delivery the mother and the newborn baby, both can be well compared with [vrunita] a wounded person and need special care. Ayurvedic Acharyas have advocated measures which aim to protect the newborn baby from various infections as in use of clean clothes, beddings etc. Dhupana(fumigation)of the Sutikagara by various herbs is mentioned to protect the baby from various infections. It is probably because of the antiseptic and antimicrobial property of Dhupan karma. This procedure can be correlated with that of fumigation procedure of sterilization in current modern medical practices.

Chanting hymns and practicing Yama and Niyama provide a psychological support to the patient, which is helpful for quick recovery and rehabilitation of the patients. Thus we can say that Rakshakarma procedure provides a complete physical and psychological protection

to the mother and the child.

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