

CUPPING THERAPY (*HIJAMAH*): AN ANCIENT THERAPY<sup>1</sup>\*Saba Ansari, <sup>2</sup>Shazia Jilani and <sup>2</sup>Azhar Jabeen<sup>1</sup>MD Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Associate Professor  
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**ABSTRACT**

Cupping therapy (*Hijamah* in Arabic) is an ancient, holistic method for the treatment of a variety of diseases. Exact origin of cupping therapy is unknown. Diverse human civilizations such as Greeko-Egyptian, Unani have done medical practices and contributed for development and growth. Eber's papyrus (1550 BC) is the oldest medical text found in Ancient Egypt which has mentioned cupping therapy. *Hijamah* is used for prophylaxis, health promotion and treatment of a variety of ailments around the world. Cupping therapy (*Hijamah*) is a well-recognized traditional method mentioned in Classical Unani literature for managing medical conditions like musculoskeletal diseases of joints, gynaecological complaints, pharyngitis, ear ailments, angina and lung diseases. Currently, the scope of cupping therapy is expanding, and a growing body of research is providing additional evidence-based data for the further advancement of cupping therapy in the treatment for different disease.

**KEYWORDS:** *Hijamah*, Regimental therapy, Cupping therapy, musculoskeletal pain, detoxification.

**Brief history**

Cupping therapy (CT) is one of the oldest traditional procedures in holistic folk therapy used for healing. *Al-Hijamah* is an Arabic word also called Cupping therapy in English language, it has been practiced in many countries around the world since ancient times (Arslan, et al., 2014).

Several prehistoric healing systems, such as, Unani Chinese, traditional Korean and Tibetan has mentioned cupping therapy as part of their treatment in various ailments (Qureshi, et al., 2017) Traditional cupping therapy from various practitioners have been passed from generations to generations to navigate the new latitudes for medical care and cure. In that hope it has greatly motivated to determine people for migration and travel across international boundaries.

Eber's papyrus (1550 BC) is the oldest medical text found in Ancient Egypt which has mentioned cupping therapy. Its practice is documented in hieroglyphic writing. History of *Hijamah*. Classical Unani literature has defined *Hijamah*, or cupping therapy has differently defined CT under the heading of traditional and complementary medicine practice; however, objective being to eliminate out the noxious or toxic substances from the body (detoxification) by making negative pressure inside the cup.

In Unani system of medicine, *Hijamah* is an Arabic word which has two different meanings. *Hijamah* refers to the

process of removing scalp hair (*Hijamat*) or the application of cups (*Seenghi*) for sucking out toxic substances out from body (Kabiruddin, 1954) (Iqbal & Ansari, 2013).

Hippocrates (*Buqrat*) compiled extensive descriptions of the cupping application in various ailments. He described both dry and wet cupping in his treatise *Guide to Clinical Treatment* which has been widely employed for the cure of a variety of medical conditions such as management of musculoskeletal diseases of the back and extremities, gynaecological complaints, pharyngitis, ear ailments, angina and lung diseases. (Ullah, et al., 2007) (Sultan, et al., 2009-2010) (Iqbal & Ansari, 2013) (Aletra & Papavramidou, 2008) (Akhtar & Siddiqui, 2008)

*Buqrat* even described about different types of cups: one with a narrow opening and a long handle and the other with a wider opening. The first type was used to treat deep accumulation of fluids, while the second type was used to treat the spread of pain. In addition, he also advised practitioners to use cups of small diameter, spherical shape and light weight (Aletra & Papavramidou, 2008).

Razi (Razi, 2002) stated that cupping was a process in which toxic blood (impure blood) from superficial small vessels located in muscles is released.

*Ibn Sina* (Sina, 1995), defined cupping, it was the process of making an incision or scarification used to release toxic matter accumulated close to the skin.

*Jurjani* (Jurjani, 1996) clarified that cupping was a process by which superficial bleeding was initiated from the smaller vessels or their branches, situated within the muscles, to decrease congestion. Furthermore, *Jurjani* (Jurjani, 1996) believed that this process did not produce weakness in the vital organs.

*Sheikh* (Sheikh, 2011) described the process of making an incision, known as *Pachhna* (prick or puncture), in CT. accordingly, the noxious matter accumulated close to the skin was effectively removed.

*Baghdadi* (Bagdadi, 2005) defined cupping as a process which helped in blood removal from the small vessels of the skin and muscles, reducing congestion in the area where cups were applied.

*Kabiruddin* (Kabiruddin, 1954) added that cupping at the lower extremities, especially at ankle joints, was similar to venesection, as he believed that normal blood and noxious matter moved downward. CT further attracted these materials and, therefore, the amount of blood released during wet cupping at ankle joints was higher than that in venesection. The cupping therapist should thus be careful about excessive bleeding when cups are applied at ankle joints. Notably, bloodletting by phlebotomy and is completely different from cupping. In CT, no veins are cut, unlike phlebotomy or venesection (Kabiruddin, 1954) (Parapia, 2008).

Eminent Unani scholar Hippocrates (father of medicine) conceptualized blood and other bodily fluids as “4 humors” (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile) respectively known as *dam*, *balgam*, *sauda*, *safra* and an imbalance of any of these could lead to illness. Therefore, they had to remain in balance to maintain the healthy life (Rahman, et al., 2014).

*Hijamah* is suggested by several Unani Arbo-Islamic physicians in their text such as *Buqrat* (460-370 BC) *Ibn Sina* (AD 980-1037), *Al-Zahrawi* (AD 936-1036), and *Abu Bakr Al-Razi* (AD 854-925). *Al-Zahrawi* described cupping sites and illustrated cupping tools with diagrams in his book *Jarahat-e-Zohrawia* (Al-Zahrawi, 2012). In *Al-Qanoon*, *Ibn Sina* (Sina, 2007) said: “Cupping is neither preferred in the beginning nor the end of the month. It is preferred in the middle of the month when the toxic substances accumulate.” Furthermore, *Ibn Sina* said that *Hijamah* can treat more than 30 different diseases (Tarique, et al., 2014).

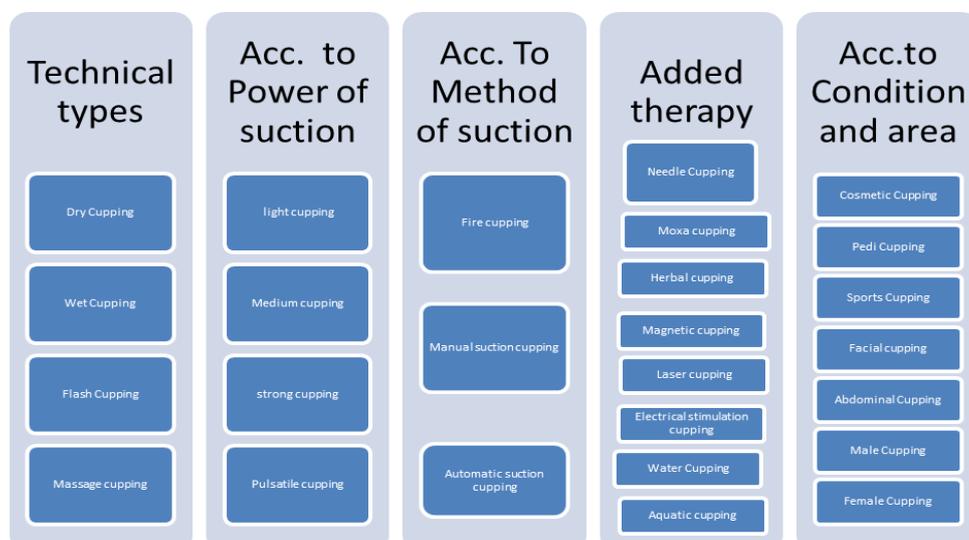
Between the 14th and 17th centuries, CT was in practice and even spread to Italy and subsequently to the rest of Europe during the renaissance. Cupping was a very popular in treatment of gout and arthritis in Italy during this period

### Types of Hijamah

In Unani system of medicine *Hijamah* is mainly categorized into two type's *hijamah bila shart* dry cupping or without scarifications and *hijamah bil shart* wet cupping or with scarifications.

*Hijamah bila shart* (cupping without scarification) diverts the morbid material, improves blood circulation and lymphatic drainage. However, *Hijamah bil shart* (cupping with scarification) relieves congestion, removes toxins and evacuates the morbid humour and detoxification. Both the types of *hijamah* are indicated for different types of ailments like musculoskeletal disorder and aches in joint (Razi, 2004) (Samaqandi, 1916) (Jurjani, 1903).

Other Classification of cupping therapy was developed in 2013, which includes five categories of cupping. Then it got updated in 2016. The updated classification has six categories of cupping therapy.



(Al-Bedah, et al., 2016)

### Types of Cupping sets

Depending upon sizes cupping sets should contain six different sized cups along with a method of suction like manual, automatic and self-suction cups. In ancient civilizations animals' horn were used for the procedure of *hijamah* as the mankind nurtures with revolution a need for sterile aseptic conditions different materials like bamboo, ceramic, glass, metal, rubber, plastic and silicone cupping sets were made for single use only. Another category related to use of cups are facial, female, male and massaging cups (Shaban, 2014).

### Indications

Cupping therapy (*Hijamah*) is an ancient, holistic method for prevention health promotion and therapeutic purposes in variety of disease.

Cupping therapy (*Hijamah*) has reported benefits in the treatment of lower back pain (Kim, et al., 2011) (AlBedah, et al., 2015) (Farhadi, et al., 2009) (Siddiqui, et al., 2011) neck and shoulder pain (Lauche, et al., 2012) (Cramer, et al., 2011) (Lauche, et al., 2011) (Lauche, et al., 2013) (Baig & Quamri, 2015) (Anjum, et al., n.d.) headache and migraine (Ahmed & Hssanien, 2010) (Ahmadi, et al., 2008) knee pain (Ullah, et al., 2007) (Khan, et al., 2013) (Dar, et al., 2015), facial paralysis (Cao & Liu, 2012) (Zhang & Wang, 2011), brachialgia (Ludtke, et al., 2006), carpal tunnel syndrome (Michalsen, et al., 2009), sciatica (Sheeraz, et al., 2013) (Bilal & Khan, 2016) hypertension (Lee, et al., 2010) (Aleyeidi, et al., 2015), diabetes mellitus (Vakilinia, et al., 2016), rheumatoid arthritis (Ahmed, et al., 2005), and asthma (MEMA, et al., 2015) (Aboushanab, et al., 2010). These diseases can be categorized into localized diseases (neck pain, lower back pain, and knee pain) and systematic diseases (diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and rheumatoid arthritis). Cupping therapy sites are selected according to the treated ailment. The back is the most common site of application, followed by the chest, abdomen, buttocks, and legs. Other areas, such as the face, may also be treated by cupping. *Hijamah* is proven effective in the management of different types of arthritis and various other clinical entities through various clinical studies mentioned (Mohammad, et al., 2014).

### Contraindicated

Generally, cupping is contraindicated directly on veins, arteries, nerves, and even on skin inflammation, any skin lesion, body orifices, eyes, lymph nodes, or varicose veins. Cupping is also contraindicated on open wounds, bone fractures, and sites of deep vein thrombosis.

It is also absolutely contraindicated in patients using a pacemaker and those suffering from blood disorders like haemophilia and severe anaemic conditions.

Relative cupping therapy contraindications include acute infection, using certain medications like anticoagulants.

*Hijamah* is contraindicated in severe chronic diseases (such as heart diseases) or any organ failure (hepatic failure, renal failure).

During menstruation, during pregnancy and even for people frequently taken wet cupping sessions.

Recent blood donation, medical emergencies and if patient's refuses for the wet cupping procedure *hijamah* should not be done (Siddiqui & Ahmedi, 2014).

### Adverse events

Cupping therapy is relatively safe. Adverse events (AEs) are not rare but are reported infrequently.

Most AEs are mild to moderate in severity. such as are scar formations, headache, dizziness, pruritus, bullae formation, small hematoma or pain at cupping site (Urooj, et al., 2016) (Kim, et al., 2013) Sometimes abscess formation, skin infection, insomnia, vasovagal attack and hyperpigmentation, over the cupping site which gradually disappears with time (Al-Bedah, et al., 2015) According to the adverse events reported in different studies such events can be differentiated in two types which are preventable and non-preventable events (Tamer & Alsanad, 2018).

Preventable events	Non-preventable events
Scar formation	Headache
Burn	dizziness
Bulla formation	Vaso-vagal attack
Pruritus	tiredness
Panniculitis	Koebner phenomenon
Anaemia	nausea
Abscess and skin infection	vomiting

Specific safety and hygienic measures should be taken for cupping therapy to stop preventable adverse events.

### CONCLUSION

An ancient traditional and complementary medicine which is practice and have provide significant improvement in pain and marked an effect in improving the quality of life. It has a good analgesic and anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory effect that could be used as monitoring tools for disease activity and prognosis. It is an important non pharmacological regimental mode of treatment and an emerging alternative way of pain management in various ailments. Furthermore, there is a need to validate the efficacious results of the *Hijamah* on larger sample size in future and to add more scientific value to the therapy.

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