



The Role of *Hijāma* (Cupping Therapy) in Treating Gynecological Disorders: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

The Unani system of medicine, based on Hippocrates' humoral theory, offers a holistic approach to diagnosing and managing gynecological disorders by balancing the body's humors. Its treatment approaches are based on the four primary modes of therapy: '*Ilaj bi'l Tadbir* (Regimenal therapy), '*Ilaj bi'd Dawa*' (Pharmacotherapy), '*Ilaj bi'l Ghiza*' (Diet therapy), and '*Ilaj bi'l Yad* (Surgery). Among these, Regimenal therapy, particularly *Hijāma* (Cupping therapy), plays an essential role in maintaining health and restoring humoral equilibrium. *Hijāma*, derived from the Arabic term for "drawing out," encompasses dry and wet cupping techniques that utilize suction to alleviate pain, remove particles, and balance humors. Unani medicine attributes the effectiveness of *Hijāma* to its ability to remove morbid matter, thereby normalise imbalanced temperament and promotes healing. The approach to gynecological disorders, including '*Usr al-Tamth* (Dysmenorrhea), '*Kathrat-i-Hayd* (Menorrhagia), '*Ihtibās al-Ṭamth* (Amenorrhea), and '*Marz Akyas Khusyur Rahim* (Polycystic Ovarian Disease), incorporates these therapies alongside dietary and pharmacological interventions. This system emphasises the importance of addressing underlying causes, including humoral imbalances and abnormal temperaments, to achieve optimal health outcomes.

The comprehensive, holistic nature of Unani medicine highlight its enduring relevance in managing women's health, offering safe, traditional, and effective therapeutic options grounded in centuries of empirical knowledge.

Keywords: Ilaj bi'l Tadbir, Hijāma, Cupping therapy, Usr al-Tamth, Kathrat-i-Hayd

INTRODUCTION

The Unani system of Medicine has unique observations and utilize methodologies for diagnosing and treating wide range of gynecological diseases.¹ Unani medicine employs the participants *Usool-i-Ilaj* (principle of treatment) to target the root course of the illness. The treatment approaches are broadly classifying into four courses which include '*Ilaj bi'l Tadbir* (Regimenal therapy), '*Ilaj bi'd dawa*' (Pharmacotherapy), '*Ilaj bi'l-Ghiza*' (Diet therapy), and '*Ilaj bi'l Yad* (surgery). Among these Regimenal therapies are prioritized because they adjust *Asbab Sitta daruriyya* (six essential factors) by preserving health or curing disease.

'*Ilaj bi'l Tadbir* (Regimenal therapy) involves manipulating the six essential factors to preserve or restore health. These therapies are central to the Unani system, aiming to normalize imbalanced temperaments by eliminating harmful substances and preventing their overproduction, thereby maintaining humoral balance.^{2,3}

The word *Hijāma* is derived from an Arabic term meaning "drawing out." Often referred to as "cupping therapy," it is a technique that involves creating suction on the body to draw blood and other fluids to the surface. Unani scholars have extensively interpreted *Hijāma*, highlighting its therapeutic benefits.^{4,5}

Many Unani Scholars have provided their definitions of *Hijāma* (cupping therapy), as follows:

❖ Ibn Sina defined *Hijāma* as the practice of making incisions (*Pachhna*), which is especially beneficial for removing noxious substances gathered close to the skin.⁶



❖ Jurjani describes *Hijāma* as a method that induces superficial bleeding from the smaller vessels or their branches within the muscles. This process alleviates *Imtilā'* (Congestion) while preserving the strength of the vital organs.⁷

❖ Razi explains that *Hijāma* is a technique that allows blood to ooze from the superficial small vessels within the muscles. This process helps alleviate conditions caused by *Imtilā'* in the body.⁸

❖ Allama Kabeeruddin states that performing *Hijāma* on the lower extremities, particularly around the ankle joints, is comparable to *Faşd* (venesection). This is because blood and noxious substances typically move downward, and *Hijāma* further draws them to the site. Consequently, when *Hijāma bil-Shurt* is performed at the ankle joints, the amount of blood oozed is often greater than in venesection.⁹

Historical Background

Hijāma, or cupping therapy, has been practiced since ancient times. It is believed that *Hijāma* was first practiced around 3500 BC by the Assyrians, using simple tools like animal horns, pottery, and bamboo cups. The ancient Egyptians, around 1550 BC, were the first to record cupping, describing it as a way to "remove foreign matter from the body." The practice continued through the Roman Empire, including during Galen's time (129–200), but declined after the fall of Rome. It was later revived during the Islamic Golden Age (622–1258). In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), cupping is used to unblock *Qi* (vital energy) and restore balance. Over time, cupping has evolved and remains an important therapy in many cultures, including Ayurvedic and Unani medicine.^{1,3,10}

Unani Concept

Definition

Hijāma, also known as "*Singhī*" or "*Pachhna*" (horns), is a therapy that involves creating suction on the skin using various types of cups made up of glass, plastic, rubber, or silicon. A cup is placed on the skin's surface, and suction is generated either through fire or manual handheld devices. In the case of *Hijāma bilā Shart* (without incision), the procedure helps divert pain or morbid substances to another area, while in *Hijāma bi'l Shart* (with an incision), it aids in the removal of toxins from the body. This therapy is believed to enhance circulation, balance the body's humors, and improve the function of specific organs, offering pain relief and promoting overall health.¹²

Types of *Hijāma*^{12,13}

According to the Application of Incision

❖ *Hijāma bilā Shart* (cupping without scarification/dry cupping)

❖ *Hijāma bi'l Shart* (cupping with scarification/ wet cupping)

According to indications

❖ *Hijāma Ikhtiyāriyya* / *Hijāma Tahaffuzī* (prophylactic/preventive cupping),

❖ *Hijāma Daruriyya* / *Hijāma 'Ilājiyya* (therapeutic cupping)

According to the vacuum pressure

❖ *Hijāma Khafīfa* (weak/light cupping)

❖ *Hijāma Qawiyya* (strong cupping)

❖ *Hijāma Mu 'tadila* (moderate cupping)

According to the application of fire

❖ *Hijāma bi'l Nār* or *Hijāma Nāriyya* (fire cupping)



Hijāma with certain pre-procedures

❖ *Hijāma Dalkiyya* (massage cupping)

***Hijāma bilā Shart* (Cupping without scarification/dry cupping)**

Hijāma bilā Shart refers to a type of cupping therapy where no *shurt* (incision) is made on the skin. This method involves applying cups to the affected areas and creating negative pressure within them. The pressure is generated either by using heat from a small flame (*MahjamaNari*) or by a vacuum pump (*Mahjama-Ghair-Nari*). In both cases, the technique aims to *Imāla'-i-Mawād* (divert morbid matter) and Provide analgesic effect without causing any scarring or skin incision.^{14,15}

***Hijāma bi'l Shart* (Cupping with scarification/ wet cupping)**

In wet cupping therapy, strict aseptic precautions are followed, and both superficial and deep incisions are made on the skin at the selected cupping site. Cups are then applied to create suction, drawing blood from the capillaries into the cups. The vacuum inside the cup is generated using either a manual or electronic suction pump. This method involves minimal superficial scarification of the skin. The main objectives of wet cupping are *Istifrāgh-i-Mawad* (evacuation of morbid matters), *Ta'adīl-i-Mizāj* (moderation of temperament), and *Musakkin-i-Alam* (analgesia), intending to promote healing, restore balance, and relieving pain.^{16,17}

Therapeutic Mechanism of *Hijāma* (Cupping)

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).

By drawing inflammation, toxins, and harmful impurities away from vital organs such as the heart, brain, lungs, liver, and kidneys toward the skin, cupping *supports Imala-e-Mavad*, safely channelling these substances to less critical areas for removal. Simultaneously, by opening skin pores, stimulating blood and lymphatic circulation, and enhancing the body's natural detoxification processes, it facilitates *Tanqiya-e-Mavad*, ensuring the effective elimination of morbid matter.

This dual action not only detoxifies but also regulates energy and balances bodily elements like heat, cold, dryness, and moisture. By improving the movement of blood and energy, cupping strengthens the immune system, supports *Physis*, and restores the natural harmony and homeostasis of the body. It embodies the Unani philosophy of addressing the root cause of imbalance, reinforcing the body's innate healing capacity, and promoting overall well-being.^{3,11}

Usr-i-tamth

Usr-i-tamth or *auja al-rahim* is known as pain associated with menstruation. It is caused mainly due to *Sue Mizaj Rahim*, (displacement of uterus), *Qillat-i-Tamth* (oligomenorrhoea), *insidade fam Rahim* (cervical stenosis), *Qurūh al-Rahim* (ulcers of uterus), *Saraṭān al-Rahim* (uterine cancer), etc.^{14,19}

There are five types of '*Usr al-Tamth*.

- (i) *Warmi 'Usr al-Tamth* (Inflammatory)
- (ii) *Tashannuji 'Usr al-Tamth* (Spasmodic)
- (iii) *Suddi 'Usr al-Tamth* (Obstructive)
- (iv) *Ghishā 'Usr al-Tamth* (Membranous tissue)
- (v) *Mubaizee 'Usr al-Tamth* (Ovarian)^{20,21}

The accumulation of morbid matter leads to congestion, stagnation, and blockages, which ultimately result in pain. By *Hijāma bilā 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. 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.²⁷



Kathrat-i-Hayd (Menorrhagia)

Ifrāt i-hayd or *Kathrat-i-Tamth* or *Saylan i-Hayd* is an increase in menstrual flow either in amount or duration of blood loss. According to the classical Unani literature Heavy menstrual bleeding occurs due to *Sū'-i-Mizāj-i-Rahim Sāda* or *Māddī* (Dys temperament), weakness in *Quwwat Māsika* or increase in *Quwwat Dāfi'a*, Imbalance in *Akhlāt i-Salasa*, *Qurū ḥ al- Rahim* (uterine polyps), *Qurūḥ al- Rahim* (uterine ulcer), *Nawāṣīr* (fissure) and *Sartan-e-unq-urRahim wa Rahim* (carcinoma of cervix and uterus), etc. which leads to weakening of uterine vessels and causes vasodilation. Seldom the cause of excessive bleeding is the decreased viscosity of blood. *Hijamat-bila-Shart* (Dry cupping) reduces congestion, clears blockages, and alleviates stagnation, thereby addressing one of the root causes.^{14,22}

Iḥtibās al-Ṭamth (Amenorrhea)

Amenorrhea (*Iḥtibās al-Ṭamth*) is described as the cessation of menstruation in classical Unani literature. It can range from a little flow to a total stop, or it can occur at intervals of less than two months. Amenorrhea results from the uterus's abnormal temperament, which causes the menstrual blood to become more viscous and create obstructions in its flow.^{23,24}

Jurjani and Ibn Sina stated that the application of wet cupping on the calf muscles can stimulate menstruation in cases of amenorrhea. This therapeutic technique works by redirecting blood flow towards the uterus, thus aiding in the process of *tanqia badan* (detoxification of the body) and promoting the expulsion of toxic substances, which manifest as menstruation.^{7,14,24}

Marz Akyas Khusyur Rahim (PCOD)

The Unani word for PCOD, *Marz Akyas Khusyur Rahim*, is really an Arabic version of the English word. Unani doctors have labelled this illness as having symptoms of amenorrhea, obesity, phlegmatic sickness, and liver diseases. The primary foundation of the unani notion of PCOD is *Khilt Balgham* (phlegm) predominance. As the liver cannot convert chyme into blood but must instead turn it into phlegmatic blood or tenacious phlegm, *Sū'-i-Mizāj- barid* (abnormal cold temperament) has been referenced in classical texts as having the potential to cause abnormal phlegm production. *Balgham Mayi*, which has a thinner consistency and can build up in sacs to produce cysts, is one of the aberrant varieties of phlegm.^{14,18,25,26}

'Uqr (Infertility)

In classical Unani literature, infertility is termed as "*Uqr*" which occurs due to defect in male *mani* (sperm) or female *mani* (ovum) or male and female reproductive organs. even idiopathic infertility has been described in detail. Various formulations are mentioned for the treatment of *uqr*, possessing the properties of *Muqawwī-i-Rahim* (utero tonic) *Moaen e hamal* (helpful in conception) and *Muwallid-i-manī* (ovulation inducing drug).^{14,23}



TABLE 01: Hijama in Gynaecological Diseases

Sl. No	Disease	Type of Cupping	Site and Duration	Quantity of Cups	Specific Type of Cup
01.	<i>Usr al- Tamth</i> (Dysmenorrhoea)	<i>Hijamat Bila Shurt</i> (Dry Cupping)	2 cups Below the umbilicus (over the suprapubic region) 3 days before the onset of menses till day 3 of the cycle for 10-15 mins for 3 consecutive cycles.	2 cups	1-2 cups Medium size/2 or 3 No.
		<i>Hijāma Nāriyya</i> (Fire Cupping)	<i>Fawq al-Surra</i> (above the umbilicus)	1-2 cups	1 or 2 No. <i>Usr al- Tamth</i> (Dysmenorrhoea)
02.	<i>Kathrat-i-Hayd</i> (Menorrhagia)	<i>Hijāma bilā Shart</i> (Dry Cupping)	<i>Qatan</i> (lumbar region)	4-6 cups (2 or 3 on each side of L2-L4)	1 or 2 or 3 No. (according to the surface of lower back)
			1 cup Below each breast for 15 mins from day to day 5 for 3 consecutive cycles	1 cup each side	2 or 3 No
		<i>Hijāma bi'l Shart</i> (Wet Cupping)	<i>Qatan</i> (lumbar region)	2-4 cups (1 or 2 on each side of L2-4)	1 or 2 or 3 No. (according to the surface of the lower back)
03.	<i>Istihāda</i> (Metrorrhagia)	<i>Hijāma bilā Shart</i> (Dry Cupping)	2 cups Below the umbilicus (over the suprapubic region) days before the onset of menses till day 3 of the cycle for 10-15 mins for 3 consecutive cycles	1 cup (each side)	2 or 3 No.
04.	Postpartum Low Back Pain	<i>Hijāma bilā Shart</i> (Dry Cupping)	3 cups on the Lower back for 15-20mins for 7 days		
05.	<i>Ihtibās al- Tamth</i> (Amenorrhea)	<i>Hijāma bilā Shart</i> (Dry Cupping)	1 cup on each Calf muscle on day 1 & day 4 of each 3 cycles	1 or 2 cups	2 or 3 No.
06.	<i>Akyās al-Rahim</i> (Uterine Cysts)	<i>Hijāma bi'l Shart</i> (Wet Cupping)	1 cup on each lumbar region 3-5 sitting every week	2-4 cups (1 or 2 on each side of L2-4)	1 or 2 or 3 No. (according to the surface of the lower back)
07.	<i>Uqr</i> (Infertility)	<i>Hijamat Bil Shurt</i> (Wet Cupping)	1 cup on each Calf muscle 3-5 sitting every week		29
08.	<i>Qillat-i- Tamth</i> (Oligomenorrhoea)	<i>Hijāma bilā Shart</i> (dry upping) & <i>ijama Nāriya</i> (Fire Cupping)	<i>Surra</i> (umbilicus)	1 cup	1 or 2 No.
09.	<i>Nafkh al- Rahim</i> (Physometra)	<i>Hijāma bilā Shart</i> (Dry Cupping)	<i>Batn</i> (abdomen) ' <i>Ana</i> (pubic region)/ (<i>Magām-i-Rahim</i>) <i>Taht al-Surra</i> (below umbilicus)	1-2 cups	1 No
		<i>Hijāma bi'l Shart</i> (wet cupping)	' <i>Ana</i> (pubic region)/ (<i>Maqam-i-Rahim</i>)	1 cup	2 or 3 No.
10.	<i>Ikhtināq al-Rahim</i> (hysteria)	<i>Hijāma bilā Shart</i> (dry cupping)	<i>Taht al- Surra</i> (below umbilicus) <i>Sāq</i> (calf muscle) <i>Fakhidh</i> (medial side of the thigh)	1-2 cups	2 or 3 No.
		<i>Hijāma bi'l Shart</i> (wet cupping)	<i>Taht al- Surra</i> (below umbilicus)	1-2 cups	2 or 3 No.

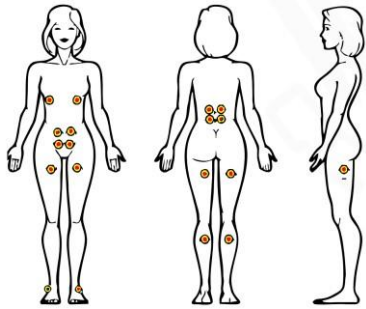




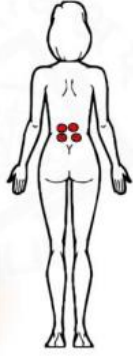
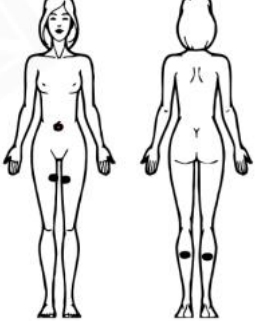
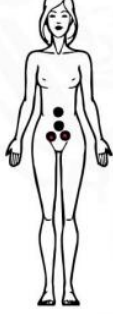
		
<p><i>Kathrat- i-Tamth</i> (Menorrhagia)</p>	<p><i>Istihāda</i> (Metrorrhagia)</p>	<p><i>Ihtibās al- Tamth</i>(Amenorrhea)</p>
		
<p><i>Usr al- Tamth</i> (Dysmenorrhea)</p>	<p><i>Qillat-i- Tamth</i> (Oligomenorrhoea)</p>	<p><i>Akyās al- Rahim</i>(Uterine Cysts)</p>
		<p>● Hijama bi'l Shart</p> <p>● Hijāma bilā Shart</p> <p>● Hijāma Nāriyya</p>
<p><i>Ikhtināq al-Rahim</i> (Hysteria)</p>	<p><i>Nafkh al- Rahim</i> (Physometra)</p>	

Figure 1: *Hijāma* Points for Gynecological Disorders.¹²

Conclusion

The Unani system of medicine provides a holistic and time-tested framework for addressing gynecological disorders, emphasizing the balance of humors and the correction of altered temperaments. Among its various therapeutic approaches, *Hijāma* (Cupping therapy) stands out as a significant Regimenal treatment, offering both preventive and curative benefits. By integrating techniques like dry and wet cupping, Unani Medicine demonstrates its ability to manage a range of conditions, including dysmenorrhea, menorrhagia, amenorrhea, and polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD).

Unani therapies focus not only on symptom alleviation but also on addressing root causes through dietary adjustments, pharmacological remedies, and regimens tailored to individual temperaments. This ancient system leverages its rich historical and philosophical foundation to remain highly relevant in contemporary healthcare, particularly for women's health. The integration of cupping therapy with other Unani modalities ensures a holistic approach to treatment that promotes overall well-being. Extensive research and clinical studies further validate the efficacy of Unani practices, paving the way for wider acceptance in modern medicine.



This ancient system offers a safe, natural, and effective alternative for managing gynecological disorders, reinforcing its enduring value in both traditional and modern therapeutic landscapes. By preserving its principles and integrating them with modern medical advancements, Unani Medicine has the potential to provide sustainable solutions for a wide range of health challenges. Therefore, it can be concluded that cupping therapy plays a vital role in the management of a broad spectrum of gynecological disorders.

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