



Conceptual Study of Migraine in Ayurveda (Ardhavybedhaka)

Dr Shyam Kumar Sah¹, Dr Deeraj BC², Dr Ashwini MJ³

¹PG Scholar, ²Associate Professor, ³Professor and HOD

SDM College of Ayurveda and Hospital, Hassan, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

Migraine is one of the most common neurovascular disabling disorders encountered in Shalakya practice. Migraine can be defined as a paroxysmal affection having a sudden onset accompanied by usually unilateral severe headache. In Ayurveda, Migraine is described as Ardhavybedhaka which is a major health issue among people of age group 30 to 50 years. According to WHO, migraine is the third most common disease in the world with an estimated global prevalence of 14.7% (around 1 in 7 people).¹ Chronic Migraine affects about 2% of world population² with female and male ratio 3:1.3 It is a widespread, chronic and intermittently disabling disorder characterized by recurrent headaches with or without aura. The attack gives warning before it strikes black spots or a brilliant zigzag line appears before the eyes or the patient has blurring of vision or has part of his vision blanked out. It is also called as "sick headache" because nausea and vomiting occasionally accompany the excruciating pain which lasts for as long as three days. Suppressing migraine pain with NSAIDs and analgesics gives short term relief and the pain can rebound. Dependence on medicines decreases the body's natural pain relief mechanism and long-term dependence can damage kidneys, liver or other vital organs. Ayurveda believes in treating the disease at its root cause from within. Therefore, treatments focus on balancing the vitiated Doshas in the digestive and nervous systems. This can be achieved by avoiding triggering factors and prescribing doshic specific diet, stress management, herbal formulas, lifestyle modification, Panchakarma, Kriyakalpa and other holistic modalities to create a balanced physiology.

Keywords: Migraine, Ardhavybedhaka, Tridosha, Ayurvedic Therapies.

INTRODUCTION

The Migraine Research Foundation considers Migraine is the 3rd most prevalent illness and 6th most disabling health illness in the world. Migraine sufferers have a higher chance of having depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, other pain conditions and fatigue.⁴ It is a leading cause of disability throughout the world. It has a multi factorial background such as genetic, environmental, metabolic, hormonal and pharmacological.⁵ These factors trigger the attacks of migraine vary between patients. However, it presents a common pattern of occurrence with peak incidence in adolescence and peak prevalence in middle age. Migraine is a widespread, chronic and intermittent disorder characterized by recurrent headaches attacks with or without aura usually unilateral with different intensity. About two third of the case run in the family. The headaches affect one half of the head and are throbbing and pulsating in nature, and last from 2 to 72 hours.⁶ Changing hormone levels may also play a role as migraine affects more in boys than girls before puberty and two to three times more in women than men.⁷ The pain is generally made worse by physical activity. Up to one third of people have an aura typically a short period of visual disturbance that signals that the headache will soon occur.⁸ It is highly prevalent headache disorder over the past decade having considerable impact on the individual and society. It can involve brain, eye and autonomous nervous system. Migraines are believed to be a neurovascular disorder with evidence supporting its mechanisms starting within the brain and then spreading to the blood vessels.⁹ The neurotransmitter serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine) and hormone estrogens play vital role in pain sensitivity of Migraine. Serotonin selectively constricts cranial blood vessels and also induces a massive activation of

peripheral nerve endings which play a key role in triggering migraine headache. Estrogens mainly affects female of reproductive age group.¹⁰

Migraine headaches can be classified into several types but two are the most common types.

1. Migraine with aura (classic migraine):

Aura is a combination of sensations that occur before and sometimes during the pain of migraine. Aura means “wind” and just like the wind often is a sign of an approaching storm, an aura serves as a warning of an approaching migraine. Auras may include blurry vision, blind spots, bright flashing lights, temporary vision loss, wavy or jagged lines, numbing or tingling of the skin and muscle weakness.

2. Migraine without aura (common migraine):

This type of migraine very common and does not have any warning signs but some people may still feel some symptoms that indicate a migraine is coming. The pain of the migraine attack is still severe and nausea or vomiting might happen.

Migraine can be closely related to ardhavbhedak in Ayurveda due to its cardinal feature ‘half sided headache’ which is also explained by commentator Chakrapani as Ardhamastaka vedna and also its paroxysmal nature.¹¹ Vata-pitta vardhak Ahaar, irregularities in diet, allergic reactions, bright lights, loud noises, odors or perfumes, physical or emotional stress, changes in sleep patterns, smoking or exposure to smoke and alcohol are the triggering factors.¹²

Ayurvedic causes of Migraine headache¹³

Headaches in Ayurveda are classified based on doshic involvement (body-mind-spirit). Ardhavbhedaka has been explained as Vata and Pitta predominant Tridoshaja Vyadhi, but it can also be triggered by any one of the individual doshas.¹⁴ Acharya Charak told it Vata-kaphaj while acharya Vagbhata told it Vataja. Vata controls the nervous system and brain activity. Imbalance of vatadi doshas cause the disease which occurs due to improper diet and lifestyle. Ayurveda considers headache occurs because of two primary reasons – a sensitive nervous system and impaired digestion. The sensitive nervous system lowers the ojas which is the essence of all body tissues and provides strength to the nervous system and body. Similarly, improper diet and lifestyle causes aggravation of Pitta in the body which impairs digestion leading to the production of metabolic

impurities called ama. This ama mobilized to the head and neck region by vata and other Doshas causing headache. Ardhavbhedaka is of 3 types mainly:

1. **Vataja headache** - caused by Vata prakopaka ahaar (diet) and vihar (lifestyle) like sleeplessness, hurry, worry, indigestion, fasting, irregular food habits, fear, stress, extreme cool condition, suppression of natural urges, etc.
2. **Pittaja headache**- caused by Pitta prakopaka diet like hot spicy food, junk food, beverages, sunlight, heat, profuse sweating, stress, etc.
3. **Kaphaja headache**- caused by Kapha pakopaka practices such as guru ahara having high calorie foods, processed canned food and drinks, dairy products, fermented foods, meat products, lack of exercise, excessive sleep at day time, etc.

Symptoms:¹⁵

- Migraine due to Vata dosha has constipation, dry skin and acute pain; Pitta dosha has Irritability, sensitivity to light, burning sensation in the eyes and Kapha dosha has Headache with throbbing pain, nausea and fatigue.
- Pain is usually Ardhha shira (unilateral) in Manyu, Bhru, Shankha, Karna, Akshi and Lalaata.¹⁶ Intensity of pain is severe stabbing or cutting type and increases with every pulse. It may radiate to the neck and shoulder of the same side.
- Migraine attacks are more often during the time of depression, irritability, menstrual period and loss of appetite. People with migraine get it at the frequency of once in a week or fifteen days or once in a month. The headache lasts for three to four hours but in worst cases the pain lasts for two to three days as well.

Treatment of migraine through Ayurveda¹⁷

In contemporary science, management of Migraine is prophylactic only. But in Ayurveda, there are various treatment protocols explained by acharyas. Treatment can be achieved by avoiding triggers and prescribing doshic-specific diet, Stress management (meditation, relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, yoga and mantra), herbal formulations, lifestyle modification, panchakarma and other holistic modalities to create a balanced between body-physiology and body- mind to bring complete relief to migraine patients. In Ardhavbhedaka among Tridoshas, mainly Vata Dosha is vitiated. Treatment plan is considered according to Shiroroga Chikitsa and Vatvyadhi Chikitsa. Only herbal medications or other topical procedures are not

enough for the treatment. First of all Shodhana karma is required for pacification of vitiated Doshas such as Mridu Shodhan, Nasya, Basti, Shirobasti, Shirolepa, Shirodhara, Kavala Graha and other internal medications are planned as per vitiated Doshas.

Sanshodhana Therapy¹⁸

Virechana is indicated in Shiroroga by all Acharyas. It is the first line of treatment. Particularly MriduVirechana is advisable due to vitiation of mainly Vata. Acharya Charaka mentioned Mridu Virechana in Vatvyadhi. Snehana and Swedana pre operative should be done before Virechana according to Prakriti and Agni of patient.

Nasya¹⁹

In Ayurveda Nasya Therapy is considered as one of the most promising treatment for all the Urdhwajatrugata vikaras. There are three nasya-Virechana nasya, Brihan nasya, and Shaman nasya which help in the management of Ardhavbhedaka. This therapy is administered through the nasal route. Medical oils such as shidbindu taila or anu taila are put in the nostrils. Some other important measures are:

Basti²⁰

Acharya Charak described Ardhavbhedak in Trimarmiya Siddhi Adhyaya. Shira Marma is one of the most important Marma amongst all Trimarma. Basti is the best treatment for pacifying Vata as well as for Shiroroga.²¹

Shirovasti²²

Shirovasti is another effective ayurvedic therapy. The medicated oils that pacify vata and kapha doshas can be used for shirovasti. This therapy helps in curing diseases related to the brain such as migraine, throbbing pain and depression.

Shirolepa²³

Shirolepa is considered to be highly effective in curing migraines caused due to stress. It is a specific technique in which certain herbs are mixed to form pastes which are applied on the head and left for an hour and wiped off with warm water.

Shirodhara²⁴

Shirodhara is an excellent Ayurvedic therapy that has a profound impact on the nervous system. A thin stream of liquid (mostly, warm oil) is poured continuously over the shiro marma (forehead) the area

where our nerves are highly concentrated. The pressure of the oil creates a vibration on the forehead, which allows our mind and nervous system to experience a deep state of mental rest. The feeling is almost similar to that of meditation. This therapy is beneficial for pitta and vata doshas. In pittaja type Cow milk can also be used to perform shirodhara called ksheera dhara. Headache due to obstruction to the vata, buttermilk is used for shirodhara termed as takra dhara.

Kavala Graha²⁵

Kavala graha (oil pulling) is highly recommended in Ayurveda. It has a very powerful detoxifying effect. Chandanadi taila and mahanarayani taila are used to cure migraine attacks in clinical practice.

Diet & Lifestyle²⁶

According to Ayurveda, maintaining a good diet and Lifestyle are essential to restore stability and balance in the body. Depending on the symptoms, frequency and intensity of the attack, a healthy diet can manage migraine headache includes:

- A. Avoid hot, spicy foods, fermented foods, white sugar, white flour products, and sour or citrus fruits, because they aggravate the Pitta in your body.
- B. Drink more water and eat more fiber, fruits and vegetables, and whole grains.
- C. Avoid excessive sugar or salt, refined foods, animal products (meats and dairy), caffeine, tea and alcohol as they may lead to aggravation of Pitta.
- D. Avoid direct exposure to the sun, as migraine headaches are predominantly a Pitta disorder and can be triggered by the hot sun.
- E. Head massage with Manjisthadi taila and Balaaswgandhadi taila is also beneficial. This massage gives a calming effect to nervous system.
- F. Stress Management:
 - Simple yoga and meditation practices can rectify the imbalances that cause the onset of migraine attacks.
 - Maintaining regular sleep timing and sleep for enough time (7-8 hours).
 - Regular morning walk for 10 minutes in fresh air increase oxygen supply to the brain and reduce the chances of migraine attacks.
 - A well-disciplined lifestyle can help you keep away from this severe situation
- G. Headaches caused due to tension and worry can be alleviated through deep breathing and relaxation,

especially in a lying down position in a quiet place.

Conclusion

Migraine is an episodic neurovascular disabling disorder which is closely related to ardhavbhedak in Ayurveda and characterized by its cardinal feature half sided headache, stomach upset, nausea, photophobia and phonophobia. The nidanas mentioned in Ayurveda are aharaaja, viharaja and manasika factors which trigger the migraine attack and also play vital role in diagnosis and treatment of the disease. Migraine sufferers are seeking Alternative (nonpharmacologic) therapies to alleviate migraine headaches. Ayurveda opens new doors for treatment of migraine through holistic approaches. Ayurveda believes in cleansing the body and pacifying the Doshas from the roots by using different modalities such as nutrition, lifestyle modifications, herbs, Panchakarma, Kriyakalpa, yoga, pranayama, meditation, relaxation techniques and marma therapy to treat migraine. These treatment approaches create a balanced physiology which brings healing the body and mind. This helps to achieve complete treatment as well as control of migraine through Ayurveda.

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