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Role of 'Nidra-Vaishamya' (sleep disturbances) on 'Atyartava' (excessive menstrual bleeding) - A literature review

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Abstract

In the present era, lifestyle modifications such as night-shift work, excessive use of digital devices, social media engagement, and irregular sleep patterns have led to a significant rise in sleep disturbances, collectively described as *Nidra-Vaishamya*. Sleep plays a crucial role in maintaining physical, mental, and reproductive health. Disturbance in sleep rhythm adversely affects the neuro-endocrine system, particularly the hypothalamic–pituitary–ovarian (HPO) axis, resulting in hormonal imbalance.

Atyartava (excessive menstrual bleeding), described in Ayurveda as *Asrigdara* or *Rakta pradara*, is a common yet often neglected gynaecological disorder affecting women of reproductive age. It not only compromises physical health but also impacts psychological well-being and quality of life. Modern research indicates that exposure to artificial blue light during nighttime suppresses melatonin secretion, disrupts circadian rhythm, elevates cortisol levels, and alters reproductive hormone secretion, such as estrogen, progesterone, LH, and FSH, thereby contributing to menstrual irregularities, including excessive bleeding.

Ayurvedic classics emphasise *Nidra* as one of the *Trayopastambha* essentials for sustaining life. *Nidra-Vaishamya* predominantly leads to *Vata* vitiation, particularly affecting *Apana Vayu*, which governs menstruation. Classical texts describe *Atyartava* as a condition resulting from the vitiation of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*, with *Rakta Dhatu* as the *Dushya*. This review critically analyses classical Ayurvedic references along with relevant modern scientific literature to establish the role of sleep disturbances in the etiopathogenesis of *Atyartava*. The study highlights *Nidra-Vaishamya* as a significant yet overlooked causative factor in menstrual disorders and emphasises the importance of sleep regulation in preventive and therapeutic approaches.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Nidra in Ayurveda: -

In Ayurveda, according to different acharyas like *Sushruta*, *Charaka*, *Vaghbhata*, emphasises that health depends on the equilibrium of *Ahara* (diet), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacharya*—the *Trayopastambha* (supporting pillar of life).

❖ Acharya *Vaghbhata* stated that -

- *Nidra* is an essential component of *Dincharya*. Getting enough sleep at night is beneficial for the maintenance of physical and mental health.
- It has been mentioned that proper *Nidra* ensures a happy state of mind, sustenance and strength of the body, provides virility, knowledge, and gives a long, healthy life.
- Improper sleep can cause severe disease conditions that will affect physical and mental health.
- *Nidra* is mentioned under *Adharaniya Vega* (insuppressible urges), and suppression of *Nidra Vega* leads to headaches, body aches, heaviness of the eye, etc.
- ❖ *Acharya Charaka* describes that proper sleep promotes strength, complexion, fertility, happiness and longevity.
- ❖ *NidraVaishamya* includes: *Alpanidra*(insufficient sleep), *Atinidra*(excessive sleep), *Vishamanidra* (irregular sleep patterns), *Ratri-jagarana*(staying awake at night), *Divaswpana* – (daytime sleep). These conditions of *NidraVaishamya* cause primarily *Vata* vitiation, which affects all body systems.

1.2 Aartava

- *Artava* is the functional unit of *artavavahasrotas*, and the moola of *artavavahasrotas* is *garbhashaya* and *artavavahanidhamanis*. *Artava* is the *upadhatu* of *rasadhatu*, where *dhatu* help in nourishing the body, whereas *upadathus* support the body in various ways.
- *Artava* is *agneya*, has characteristics of *rakta*, hence *acharya Dalhana* says that *artava* has *karma- "jeevanam"* which is similar to *rakta* and has predominance of *tejomahabhutha* and also responsible for the formation of *garbha*.
- As normalcy in the female reproductive system is reflected in the functions of *Artava*. The functions of *Artava* can get disturbed when there is *doshaprakopa* and manifest conditions like *artavadushti*.

1.3 Atyartava (Asrigdara / Pradara)

❖ Nirukti (Derivation)

The derivation of word 'Asrigdara' is derived from two words, that is –

Asrik - Menstrual blood

Dara - Excessive excretion

Asrik + Dara → *Asrigdara*

- *Asrika* is an essential *Dhatu* that is present in the heart, gets accumulated there and spreads all over the body.

▪ The Terms

Asrigdara is given by *Sushruta*

Pradara by *Charaka*

Raktapradara by - *Sharangadhara*

- Excessive excretion of *Rajah* is named "Pradara".
- *Acharya Charaka* defined that *Pradirana* (excessive excretion) of *Raja* (menstrual blood) is named as "Pradara", and since there is *Dirana* (excessive excretion) of *Asrik* (menstrual blood), it is known as "Asrgdara".
- *Acharya Dalhana* has described the clinical features of *Asrgdara*, i.e., Excessive or prolonged blood loss during menstruation or even scanty blood loss during the intermenstrual period is 'Asrgdara'
- *Raktapradara* is a disease presented as excessive bleeding per vagina. This disease has been known to mankind since the age of the *Veda* and the *Purana*.
- Description in *Charaka Samhita* stated that *Pradara* is a separate disease with its management in *Yoni Vyapada Chikitsa*. He has also explained it as one of the *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara* and also under *Pittavrutta Apana Vayu*.
- *Acharya Sushruta* explained it as a separate disease entity in *Shukra Shonita Adhyaya* in *Sharirasthana*. He also mentioned it under *Pitta Samyukta Apana*. He also mentioned it in *Rakta Pradoshaja Vyadhi*.
- *Ashtanga Sangraha* explained *Raktayoni* and said *Asrgdara* and *Pradara* as its synonyms.
- *Ashtanga Hridaya* described *Raktayoni*, but nothing is mentioned about *Asrgdara* or *Pradara*. Yet it is explained under the synonym of *Raktapradara* in some places.

❖ Causes according to Ayurveda:

- *Acharya Charaka* says that the woman who consumes excessive salty, sour, heavy, *katu* (hot), *vidahi* (producing burning sensation) and unctuous substances, meat of domestic, aquatic and fatty animals, *krsara* (oil made with rice and pulses), *payasa* (rice cooked with milk and sweetened), curd, *shukta* (vinegar), *mastu* (curd water) and wine.

Then aggravated *vayu* and the *rakta* (blood) vitiated due to the above causes increases its amount and then reaching *raja* carrying vessels (branches of ovarian and uterine arteries) of the uterus and immediately increase the amount of *raja* (*artava* or menstrual blood).

In other words, this increase in menstrual blood is due to relative more increase of *rasa* (plasma contents). Because of the increase in the amount of blood, it is named *Asrgdara*. Since in this condition, excessive blood is discharged, it is also known as *Pradara*.

- *Bhela* stated that if the body's blood goes to an abnormal passage, the woman suffers from *pradara*.
- *Madhava Nidana*, *Bhavaprakasha* and *Yogaratnakara* have mentioned that the use of incompatible diet and wine, eating before the previous meal is digested, indigestion, abortion, excessive coitus, riding, walking, grief, emaciation, weight lifting, trauma and day sleeping are the causes of *Asrigdara*.

- This is also said to be one of the *Rakta Pradoshaja Vikara*, symptoms of *Pittavrita apana vayu*, *Rakta Atipravratti* and complications of *Yonirogas*.

1.2 Nidravaishamya and Reproductive Health

❖ Nidravaishamya increases:

• Stress hormones (cortisol) -

- Disturbed sleep significantly increases cortisol levels (the body's primary stress hormone) because sleep deprivation acts as a physiological stressor.
- It disrupts the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis, making it harder for the body to regulate this hormone, leading to higher concentrations of cortisol, especially in the evening and at night.

• Disturbance of circadian rhythm -

- Poor sleep directly causes circadian rhythm disruption, creating a vicious cycle where inconsistent sleep hinders the internal clock, leading to hormonal imbalances (like less melatonin, more cortisol).
- Also affects mood, metabolism, and focus, and increases risks for chronic diseases; even short-term issues like inconsistent bedtimes or shift work can throw off the body's natural sleep-wake cycle.

• Altered secretion of GnRH, LH, FSH -

- Sleep disturbances reduce GnRH pulsatility and disrupted LH and FSH secretion, leading to defective follicular maturation and absence or delay of the ovulatory LH surge.
- Altered estrogen and progesterone levels cause endometrial instability, resulting in anovulation and menstrual irregularities such as oligomenorrhea, amenorrhea, or abnormal uterine bleeding.

1.5 Summary

- A critical observation of the causes of *Asrgdara* described by Charaka indicates that the majority of these, i.e., use of sour, saltish, heavy and unctuous, etc., cause suppression of *vayu* rather than its aggravation, while *Asrgdara* disease is said to be due to aggravation of *vayu*.
- In *Asrgdara*, vitiated *dosha* is *vayu*, and vitiated *dhatu* or *dushya* is *rakta* (blood).
- Almost all the causes mentioned by Charaka vitiate *rakta* (blood). As *rakta* and *pitta* both are quite similar in their properties, naturally, the causes that vitiate *rakta* would also aggravate *pitta* also. The vitiated *pitta* covering *vayu* aggravates it.
- Charaka further explains that *Asrgdara* occurs due to the disturbance of *Rakta* and *Apama Vayu* along with *Pitta*, and therefore recommends managing it according to the principles of *Rakta pitta* treatment. It is also possible that Charaka mentioned only the causes for the vitiation of *rakta*, but did not make reference to the causes for the aggravation of *vayu*.
- Poor or inadequate sleep leads to aggravation of *Vata dosha*, particularly affecting *Apama Vayu*, which is responsible for the regulation of menstruation and other

reproductive functions. Disturbance of the circadian rhythm further contributes to hormonal dysregulation by impairing the normal functioning of the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis.

- Additionally, psychological stress associated with sleep deprivation causes hypothalamic suppression, resulting in altered gonadotropin release and ultimately leading to menstrual irregularities.

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