



International Journal of Research in Academic World



Received: 03/March/2026

IJRAW: 2026; 5(4):128-131

Accepted: 11/April/2026

A Conceptual Study: Ayurvedic Perspective of Ardhavabhedaka with Special Reference to Migraine

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Abstract

Ayurveda classifies migraine under Shiroroga, specifically Ardhavabhedaka, primarily driven by Vata and Pitta Dosha. Classical Ayurvedic texts provide detailed explanations of the causes and management strategies for such conditions. This paper presents a case of migraine that was effectively managed with Ayurvedic treatments, including Shodhana Chikitsa, Shamana Aushadhi, and Pathya–Apathya. Significant improvements were observed in the frequency, duration, and intensity of migraine attacks. This indicates that Ayurveda presents a safe and effective method for managing migraines.

Migraine is a chronic neurological disorder marked by recurring episodes of moderate to severe headaches, usually on one side, and often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, and sensitivity to sound. It greatly affects the quality of life and work productivity of those who suffer from it. Traditional medical treatment mainly offers symptomatic relief, but patients often experience recurrence and side effects with long-term use.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Ardhavabhedaka, Shiroroga, Nasya, Shirodhara, Migraine.

Introduction

Ayurveda looks at disease holistically, focusing on balancing Doshas, Agni, Dhatus, and Manas. Headache disorders fall under Shiroroga, and Ardhavabhedaka closely resembles migraine in its symptoms. Ayurvedic treatment aims not only to relieve symptoms but also to tackle the root cause, prevent recurrences, and enhance overall quality of life.

Ardhavabhedaka is one of the eleven types of Shiroroga. The term means pain that affects half of the head. Classical texts describe it as a severe, stabbing, one-sided headache that occurs periodically. It is often associated with nausea, dizziness, intolerance to light and sound, and mental disturbances.

According to Ashtanga Hridaya, if Ardhavabhedaka is left untreated, it may result in complications like vision and hearing loss, highlighting the serious and chronic nature of the disorder.

Migraine is one of the most common headache disorders and a significant cause of disability around the world. It impacts people during their most productive years and affects their personal, social, and work life. Global health statistics rank migraine among the top causes of years lived with disability, particularly in women.

Clinically, migraines involve repeated headaches, typically on one side, pulsating in character, moderate to severe in

intensity, and worsened by everyday physical activities. These episodes often come with nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, noise sensitivity, and sometimes visual or sensory auras. The chronic nature of migraines leads to frequent absenteeism, reduced work efficiency, and psychological stress.

In modern medicine, migraine is viewed as a complex neurovascular disorder linked to genetic factors, neuron overactivity, and problems in pain signaling pathways. Despite the availability of various abortive and preventive medications, a complete cure is rare, and recurrences are common. Long-term use of pain relievers and preventive drugs can also lead to negative side effects and medication overuse headaches.

Sharir (Ayurvedic Anatomical and Physiological Perspective)

1. Shir Sharir

- Kapalasthi – 6
- Sevani – 5
- Asthisanghat – 1
- Asthisimant – 1

2. Sandhi Prakar

- Tunnasevani Sandhi Pruthu snayu – 34 Peshi – Latat – 4

- Shir – 1
- Mastishkache Praman – Ardhanjali (Charak)

In Bhel Samhita, it is stated that the mind (manas) and soul (atma) are situated between the head (sira) and the palate (talū).

3. Shirstha marma

- Neela and Manyā – 2+2
- Krukatika – 2
- Vidhur – 2
- Phana – 2
- Apang – 2
- Aavarta – 2
- Shankh – 2
- Utkshap – 2
- Sthapani – 1
- Seemant – 5
- Adhipati – 1
- Shringataka – 4
- Matruka – 8

4. Shirstha Dosh

i). Vata – Prana Vayu

Prana Vayu is situated in the head (Sira) and functions as the chief regulator of sensory–motor coordination. It collects sensory inputs from all the sense organs, transmits them to the mind (Manas) and soul (Atma), and thereafter initiates appropriate responses through the motor organs (Karmendriyas). In addition, Prana Vayu is responsible for vital activities such as nourishment and filling of bodily channels (Purana), preservation of sensory perception (Indriyadharana), stabilization of mental functions (Chittadharana), and maintenance of intellectual faculties (Buddhidharana).

ii). Pitta – Bhrajaka Pitta

Bhrajaka Pitta is primarily located in the cutaneous layer of the head. It plays a key role in maintaining skin complexion and radiance, regulating thermal balance, and facilitating the metabolic processing and absorption of externally applied therapies, including snehana, massage, and medicinal pastes. Through these actions, Bhrajaka Pitta contributes to both protective and therapeutic skin functions.

iii). Kapha – Tarpaka Kapha

The brain (Mastishka) is predominantly composed of Majja Dhatu, which supports the subtle sensory and cognitive structures. Tarpaka Kapha, owing to its nourishing and unctuous properties, sustains the Majja Dhatu and ensures optimal functioning of sensory and mental faculties. It also plays a regulatory role in balancing Prana Vayu, thereby promoting neurological stability and mental clarity.

iv). Dushya

- Rasa Dhatu – Improper Nourishment of sira.
- Rakta Dhatu – Rakta dushti causes Tikshna, bhedana shula.
- Majja Dhatu – Involvement leads to severe, deep-seated pain.

v). Srotas

- Rasavaha srotas – Raktavaha srotas
- Manovaha srotas (due to stress, emotional factors)
- Pranavaha srotas

vi). Adhithana (Site of Manifestation)

- Sira
- Pain may involve Bhru, Akshi, Karna, Lalata, Shankh Pradesh

vii). Agni and Ama Sambandh

- Mandagni – Ama Utpatti
- Ama causes srotorodha, leading to vata prakop in sira.

c) Manasika bhava (Psychological factors)

- Chinta, shoka, krodha, bhaya.
- Directly affects Prana vata and sadhaka pitta, worsening the condition.

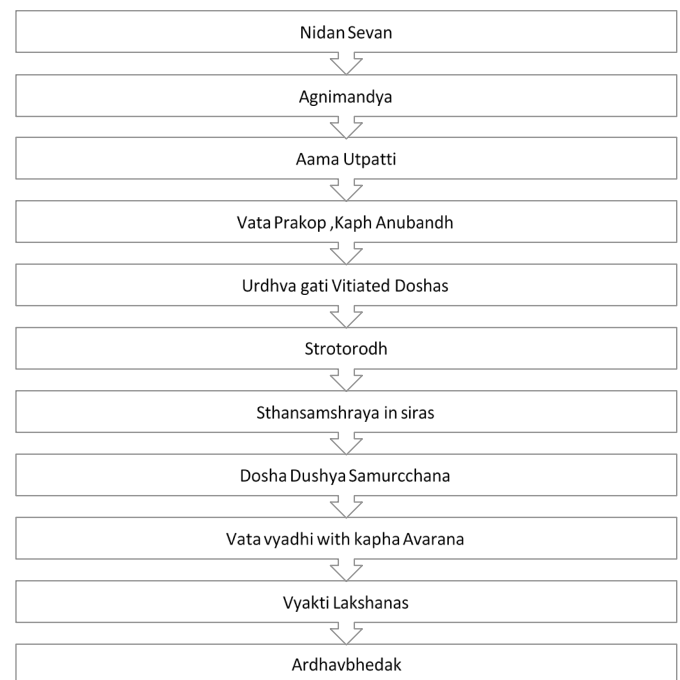
Nidana (Etiological Factors)

The causes identified in Ayurvedic texts include holding in urges, excessive fasting, irregular eating habits, eating too much dry, sharp, or hot food, mental stress, and excessive exposure to sunlight, wind, and cold. These factors lead to the aggravation of Vata and Pitta Dosha.

- Ruksha bhojan
- Ati bhojan
- Adhyashan
- Purvavat
- Maithun
- Vegavrodh
- Kshram
- Vyayam

Samprapti (Pathogenesis)

Continued exposure to these causes results in Agnimandya and the formation of Ama. The disturbed Vata and Pitta Dosha circulate and settle in the head area due to Kha Vaigunya, leading to intense one-sided headache. Blockage of channels (Srotorodha) worsens the condition.



Lakshana (Clinical Features)

- Ardha shirshula (Severe pain affecting one half of the head)
- Bhedan, Toda (Splitting, piercing, Pricking type of pain)
- Tivra Vedana (Intense, Unbearable pain)
- 10th, 15th, 1 Month recurrent or episodic attacks

Bhrama (Giddiness)

Chikitsa Siddhanta

Treating Ardhavabhedaka focuses on removing its causes, employing Shodhana Chikitsa (especially Nasya), Shamana Chikitsa, and using Medhya Rasayana. Panchakarma therapies are vital for eliminating harmful Doshas and preventing recurrences.

a) Nidana Parivarjana

Avoidance of causative factors is the important step of management. Dietary, lifestyle, and psychological triggers responsible for aggravating Ardhavabhedaka should be strictly avoided.

b) Shodhana Chikitsa (Purificatory Therapies)

- i). **Shirovirecana (Nasya Karma):** Administration of medicated oils, powders, or decoctions through the nasal route is considered highly effective, as the nose acts as the gateway to the head (Shiraso dvaram). Commonly used preparations include Anu Taila
- ii). **Virecana Karma:** Therapeutic purgation helps eliminate excess Pitta, regulate Vata, purify blood, and enhance digestion, thereby providing relief in Ardhavabhedaka.
- iii). **Basti Karma:** Both Anuvasana Basti and Niruha Basti are effective in pacifying aggravated Vata doṣa, which plays a central role in the pathogenesis of Ardhavabhedaka.
- iv). **Shirobasti:** Retention of medicated oil on the scalp for a specific duration (approximately one muhurta) using preparations like Dashamula Taila or Vata-pacifying oils helps reduce headache severity.
- v). **Upnaha:** Application of warm poultices prepared from Vata-shamaka drugs such as Dashamula, mustard seed, cottonseed, and milk wrapped and applied over the head alleviates pain and improves circulation.

Local Applications

- i). Shirolepa
- ii). Shiro-Abhyanga

Shamana Chikitsa

- i). Pathyadi Kwatha – 40 ml twice daily
- ii). Godanti Bhasma – 250 mg twice daily
- iii). Sutashekharā Rasa – 125 mg twice daily
- iv). Brahmi Vati – 1 tablet at bedtime

Migraine is divided into migraine without aura, migraine with aura, and chronic migraine. Diagnosis relies mainly on clinical evaluation and follows the criteria set by the International Classification of Headache Disorders (ICHD-3). Epidemiological research shows a higher occurrence in women, indicating a hormonal impact on migraine development.

Several theories attempt to explain the mechanisms behind migraines. The vascular theory attributes migraine pain to changes in blood vessel size in the brain, but this theory alone cannot account for all clinical symptoms. The neurovascular theory has gained more acceptance, explaining migraines as a result of trigeminovascular system activation, which triggers the release of inflammatory neuropeptides like CGRP, substance P, and neurokinin A.

Cortical spreading depression refers to a slow wave of neuron activation followed by reduced activity. This phenomenon is thought to cause migraine aura and trigger pain-sensitive

areas in the meninges. Neuroimaging supports the idea that the central nervous system plays a role in migraines.

Common triggers include stress, insufficient sleep, fasting, hormonal changes, bright lights, loud noises, and certain foods. Despite progress in medication, modern treatment is primarily symptomatic, and recurrences continue to pose a problem.

Aim and Objectives Aim

To assess how effective Ayurvedic management is for migraine (Ardhavabhedaka).

Objectives

- i). To understand migraine in light of Ayurvedic concepts.
- ii). To evaluate the impact of Shodhana and Shamana therapy.
- iii). To measure clinical improvements in migraine symptoms.

Diagnosis

Based on clinical features, the condition was diagnosed as Ardhavabhedaka (Migraine).

Pathya–Apathya

Pathya: Regular meals, light diet, sufficient sleep, yoga, and pranayama.

Apathya: Fasting, spicy and oily food, prolonged screen time, daytime sleeping.

Yoga:

- i). Shavasana – Relieves stress, calms nervous system
- ii). Vajrasana – Improves digestion, reduce ama
- iii). Nādishodhana Prāṇāyama – Balances Prāṇa & Apana Vayu
- iv). Bhramari Prāṇāyama – Very effective in headache, stress, insomnia
- v). Ujjayi (mild) – Calms nervous system

Assessment Criteria

- Frequency of headaches
- Duration of headaches
- Intensity of pain
- Associated symptoms

Results

After treatment, there was a noticeable reduction in the frequency, duration, and intensity of migraine attacks. Related symptoms like nausea and light sensitivity decreased significantly. No side effects were reported.

Discussion

Migraine primarily involves Vata-Pitta issues. Irregular lifestyles and stress lead to Agnimandya and Ama formation, causing channel blockages and Dosha buildup in the head.

Nasya is the main treatment for upper body ailments. Shirodhara helps soothe the nervous system and lower stress. The medicines used have pain-relieving, Dosha-balancing, and mind-enhancing properties.

Conclusion

This clinical study shows that Ayurvedic management effectively reduces the frequency, duration, and intensity of migraine attacks. By addressing the underlying Dosha imbalances, enhancing Agni, and modifying lifestyle factors, Ayurveda offers a thorough and sustainable solution for

migraine management. Panchakarma treatments like Nasya and Shirodhara are crucial for treating upper body disorders. Ayurveda's holistic approach not only relieves symptoms but also enhances the patient's overall quality of life. Therefore, Ayurvedic management can be regarded as a safe and effective alternative or complementary therapy for migraine

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