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Dr. Mridusmita Devi

Assistant Professor,

Department of Sanskrit,

Jhanji Hemnath Sarma College,

Sivasagar, Assam, India

Vedic concept of dream and remedies for nightmare with special reference to the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*

Dr. Mridusmita Devi

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Abstract

Sleep is a biological requirement and vital component of our daily routine. Whether one remembers or not, dreams do appear in specific phases of sleep of every person. According to some scientist, dreams are essential for maintaining mental health.

In Sanskrit, the synonymous word of dream is “*swapna*”. The Hindu scriptures are the most ancient source of supernatural powers of human mind. Sometimes Dream changes our life in an unexpected way. In such situations we cannot ignore the result of dream and we have to believe in dream without any reason. The subject of dream has been discussed in detail in *Atharvaveda*, *Brahma sūtra*, *Katha Upaniṣad* (2/1/4), *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* (4/3/9), *Praśna upaniṣad* (4/5) and other Upaniṣads. Moreover, a number of stanzas both in the *Rgveda* and in the *Atharvaveda* speak about an evil dream as a misfortune comparable with sin, disease, witchcraft and also speak about expiation of evil dream by performing ritual. Rgvedic hymns I.89.8-9, 99.1, 114.1; 120.12; II.28.10; V.82.4-5; VIII.47.14-18; X.36.4, 37.4, 127.1 and Atharvavedic hymns IV. 17.5; VI.45.1, 46.1; VI.100, 1; 108.1-2; IX.2.2-3; X.3.6; XVI.5.1 are mainly connected with dream along with the remedies against nightmare. Atharvavedic hymns are listed in the *Kauśika Sūtra* (46.9-13) under *Duspnāśanagaṇa* or in the *gaṇamālā* of *Atharvaveda pariśista*.

Keyword: Dream, nightmare, *Rgveda*, *Atharvaveda*

Introduction

Concept of Dream: Dreams are called “*Swapna*” in Sanskrit. The literal meaning of the word conveys “seeing (experiencing) that as real which is not experienced in the real (perceivable) world.” Dreams have been the focus of curiosity and enquiry since the beginning of human civilization. Haphazard or vague dreams are experienced during the ‘subconscious’ (*swapna nidrā*) or ‘disturbed’ sleep due to sickness, stress etc. Such dreams are often short-lived, confusing and meaningless. In a state of deep sleep ‘*susupti*’ dreams either do not appear or they appear with sharp impressions and are of longer duration. Dreams are successions of images, ideas, emotions and sensations that occur involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep. The length of a dream can be very short. It may last for a few seconds or approximately 20-30 minutes.

In modern times, dreams have been seen as a connection to the unconscious mind. Dreams can have varying in natures, such as frightening, exciting, magical, melancholic, adventures or sexual. The events in dreams are generally out of control of the dreamer, though the dreamer is self conscious. Dreams can, at times, occur some a creative thought to the person or give a sense of inspiration. Sometimes dream provides knowledge of the future.

Numerous investigations have been directed about dreams and such examinations go under the subject of oneirology. It is presently settled that mammals dream at the same time, maybe, reptiles and flying creatures don't. Human dream a lot and a dream can last from a few seconds to as long as forty minutes. One may have upto six or seven dreams which will in general be longer as the night advances. However, these are, for the most part, overlooked and the sleeper may not know about the fantasies by any stretch of the imagination.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Mridusmita Devi

Assistant Professor,

Department of Sanskrit,

Jhanji Hemnath Sarma College,

Sivasagar, Assam, India

In Vedic age, Dreams are believed to be the voice of the God. It is differentiated in two types in nature, good and bad dreams. It is believed that good dreams are created by god and bad dreams are by evil. Actually, dreams reflect the dreamer's feelings about events and relationship.

Dream is a much freighted phenomenon in the *Atharvaveda*. *Atharvaveda* describes the birth place of dream. It is said that dream is the son of *Gābhī* and agent of *Yama* ^[1].

vidma te swapna janitram grāhāḥ putrosi Yamasya karanah/

(we know your place of birth (*janitra*), O sleep ; you are son of seizure (*grāhī*) agent of *Yama*)

Dream itself is ender and death ^[2] and also said that sleep is the son of *Abhūti*, *Nirṛti*, *Parābhūti*, *Nirbhūti* and wife of the Gods, and the sacrificer prays the god *Dusvapnāśana* to protect from evil dream ^[3]. *Atharvaveda* 6.46.1 describes the characteristics of *Swapna*. *Swapna* is described as the immortal embryo of the gods, who is not alive, not dead.

Remedies for Nightmare as described in the Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda

Ṛgveda 5.82.4-5 pray the god *Savitar* for giving a good day with prosperity and progeny by driving away evil dream and also pray him to wash away all sorrows and calamities and to send us only good one. *Ṛgveda* 8.7.14-18 hymn is also identical with bad dreams. The daughter of heaven (*Uṣas*) or the Lady of Light and also *Trita Āptya* are prayed to ward away the bad effect of evil dream. *Ṛgveda* 10.36.4 the priest prays *Ādityas* and *Maruts* to give shelter from *Nirṛiti* (death or destruction) and ill dream etc. *Ṛgveda* 10. 37.4 prays the god *Sūrya* to drive away every evil dream and all disease. *Ṛgveda* 10.127.1 prays the Goddess Night looks forth approaching many a spot with all her eyes. *Ṛgveda* 8.47.14 *Uṣas* (Dawn) is prayed by the prayer to transfer the evil dream to *Trita-Āpta*, the scape-goat of the gods.

In *Atharvaveda*, we find the prayers in many verses warding away evil dream. AV.16.6.1 prays *Uṣas*, who is concord with *Vācaspati* to far away evil dream makes us afraid and carries away it, to him who hates and curses us. And prays *Uṣas* and *Agni* to carry away to his enemy the ill named ones the niggards, the *sadanvās*, the *kumbhikās*, the *dūṣikās*, walking evil dream and sleeping evil dream, boons that will not come again, plans of non- acquisition, fetters of hatred that does not release. And so that they cannot be impotent (*vadhri*), faltering, not good, i.e., *sadhu* ^[4]. *Atharvaveda* 16.1.11 describes that dreams occur on account of our sin and prays water to carry forth our evil dream with our sin. The bad dreaming being the effect of sin, is wiped away like this sin, on the enemy, and born in such and such family and the son of such and such mother ^[5]. *Atharvaveda* 16.7.8 stated as:

idamaha māmuṣyāyaṇe'muṣyāḥ putre duṣvapnyam mrje//
The plant *Apāmārga* or *Sahadevī* is mentioned in the *Atharvaveda* 4.17.7 as a protector of evil dream. *Atharvaveda* 6.45 and 46 hymns are directed against bad dreams. The practice of both this hymns mentioned at the *Kausika Sūtra* ^[6] as follows: "With 6.45 and 46 the person that has an (evil) dream rinses his face. If he has had an excessively frightful

dream he offers a cake of mixed gain, and deposits a second in the territory of an enemy." The *Rsi* of this *sūkta* prays god *duḥsvapnanāśana*, *Indra*, *Brahmanaspati*, *Agni* and *Āṅgīrasa* to protect them from difficulty and distress ^[7]. There offer prayer to sleep as a true god, born of death is a recurrent theme in the Vedas, as it is in many other religious traditions, dwelling between and beyond the opposition of life and death, the deity sleep is believed to have the power of protecting nightmares. People during the vulnerable hours of their sleep ^[8] *Atharvaveda* 6.46.3 bad dreams or nightmares are compared to walking enemies of our day to day life. *Varuṇānī* is his mother and *Yama* is his father. *Svapna* is also known by the name *Araaru*. The verse is as follows:

*yo na jīvo'si na mṛto devānāmamṛtagarbho'si svapna/
varuṇānī te mātā yamaḥ pitārarūnārmāsi//* (AV. 6.46.1)

Atharvaveda 7.100.1 also one may be recited for warding off bad dream. In this verse the priest prays the god *duḥsvapnanāśana* as:

"I turn away from evil-dreaming, from bad-dreaming, from ill-success (*abhūti*); I make *brahmana* my inner [defense]; [I put] away the pains having the aspect of dreams" ^[9].

According to *Kauś.*, 46.12 *Atharvaveda* 7.101.hymn is used in a rite against ill effect from food eaten in dreams. It is described there that what food the dreamer eaten in dream so that, that food is not found in the morning and that all be propitious to him i.e., all ill event will be good for the dreamer ^[10]. *Atharvaveda* 9.2.2-3 are also used against nightmare according to *Kauśika sūtra* 46.9 along with some other hymns. The second verse of this *sūkta* prays the god *Kāma* to ward away evil dream from the dreamer which is offensive to his mind and eye, which annoyed and does not pleased him, and take away to his enemy. In the third stanza of this hymn it is also prayed to god *Kāma* to take away nightmare to his enemy who tries to lose upon him. According to *Atharvaveda* 10.3.6 an amulet of *Varaṇa* is tied against evil dream. *Atharvaveda* 6.121.1 prays the god *Nirṛti* to remove sins which occur from evil dreaming. This mantra is repeated again in the *Atharvaveda* 7.83.4, but there the god *Varuṇa* is prayed for removing the sin of nightmare. *Atharvaveda* 19.56 describes that the sleep comes from the world of *Yama*, the ruler of the departed, resolute, affected men with rapture, and created the *Asura's* dwelling, ghost, well-knowing, with the solitary and there also found prayers related to remedy of nightmare. *Atharvaveda* 6.46 and 19.56 are associated with *Yama*. *Atharvaveda* 19.57 prays for removing evil dreaming of one who is offensive (*apriya*). There the god *Dusvpa* is prayed for warding off our evil dream and dividing off to him who hates us.

Conclusion

From the above, it may be concluded that the proper prayers and rituals not only protect us from bad dreams but also they can redirect these dreams against our enemies. The rituals which are performed to protect us from discomfort of nightmare but these rituals cannot secure us from evil dream. Actually, dreams are the result of our sleeping time when soul leaves the body and actually undergoes the experiences which the walking mind remembers.

1 AV.16.5.1

2 Ibid., 16.5.2

3 Ibid., 16.5.3-10

4 Ibid., 16.6.2-11

5 Ibid.,16.7.8

6 Kaus., 46.9-10

7 AV., 6.45.1-3

8 Ibid., 6.46.1-2

9 Atharvaveda Saṁhitā, Edited and revised by K.L. Joshi, 2009, Delhi

10 Ibid.7.101.1

In Vedic era the sacrificer or other primitive men try to remove the actual impurity of nightmare naturally through given oblation to some specific god and transferring the burden to another. The second process is found in the *Atharvaveda*. It is seen that auspicious dreams naturally appear much less frequently in the ritual.

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