

# **Nazla – A Well Understood Phenomenon of Arabs, Misinterpreted by Successors**

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## **Summary**

Sinusitis is a major health care issue that affects a large proportion. Many studies regarding sinusitis have been undergone all over the world. The incidence of chronic sinusitis in Southern Asian countries like India is 136,657,953 out of 1,065,070,607. No drug is available to completely cure the sinusitis and all allergic condition. All available drugs are used for their long term benefit. Continuous use of antiallergic and anti inflammatory drugs (steroidal and non steroid) for longer duration are always leads to number of hazardous side effects.

Nazla is well defined and understood phenomenon of Unani system. Great ancient physicians of Unani System like Ibn Sina, Zakariya Razi, Ibn Rushd have described the role of intrinsic as well as extrinsic factor in the development of the disease. Unani system of medicine promises the cure of Nazla wa Zukam and removes the root cause of the disease. Unani drugs can be used for longer duration. These drugs do not produce any significant side effect to the body. As Unani concept believe in treating the root cause of disease and approaches holistically. Holistic approach of Unani system may be much more beneficial in the cure of Nazla.

**Keywords:** Al-Asbab-al-kharija, extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, prime stimulus, Temperament

## **Introduction**

Sinusitis is a major health care issue that affects a large proportion. Many studies regarding sinusitis have been undergone all over the world.

In 2004 a survey conducted by United States Census Bureau on prevalence of sinusitis worldwide reported country wise statistics on the sinusitis prevalence.

The prevalence of sinusitis in Southern countries like India is 134, 198,900 out of 1,065,070,607, Afghanistan is 3,592,723 out of 28,513,677, Bangladesh is 17,808,900 out of 141,340,476, Bhutan is 2,75, 381 out of 2,185,569, Pakistan is 20,058,738 out of 159,196,336 and Srilanka is 2,508,050 out of 19,905,165 population. This study also reported the country wise incidence of chronic sinusitis. The incidence of chronic sinusitis in Southern Asian countries like India is 136,657,953 out of 1,065,070,607, Afghanistan is 3,658,556 out of 28,513,677, Bangladesh is 18,135,229 out of 141,340,476, Bhutan is 2,80,427 out of 2,185,569, Pakistan is 20,426,294 out

of 159,196,336 and Srilanka is, 2,554,008 out of 19,905,165 population (US Census Bureau, 2004)

## **Groups at Higher-than-Average Risk for Sinusitis**

Studies suggest that the following population groups have higher risks for sinusitis:

Women appear to be at higher risk than men.

People living in the Midwest and South have a higher incidence of sinusitis than those in the Northeast and West.

People in higher income and educational groups appear to have a greater risk than those in lower groups.

## **Nazla-a well under stood phenomenon described by Arabs**

Unani system of medicine promises the cure of Nazla wa Zukam and removes the root cause of the disease. Unani drugs can be used for longer duration.

These drugs do not produce any significant side effect in the body.

Nazla is well defined and understood phenomenon of Arabs. Great ancient physicians like Ibn Sina, Zakariya Razi, Ibn Rushd have described the role of intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors in the development of the disease. They have also hypothesized the role of homoeostatic system in providing the stimulus for the production of excessive phlegm. In this regard, they have mentioned that exposure to cold conditions in which homeostatic system is completely involved leads to excessive production of phlegm. They defined the sinusitis in term of Nazla wa Zukam. Nazla is an Arabic word originated from Nuzool, which literally means stimulus in some other higher part produces its effect on another lower local part for the production of phlegm. It was later misinterpreted by the explanation stating that the phlegm is produced in the brain and it drains into the nasal cavity through some channels and gets accumulated inside the nasal cavities. There are no such channels which provide such a large drainage for phlegmatic humours which get accumulated inside the nasal cavities. Sometimes this collection of fluids is so much that it cannot be drained through small channels, and even our ancient physicians have not used the term Nutool for it which means falling of fluids from higher to lower part. This Nazla is the indirect drainage which is the result of prime stimulus (phlegmatic) which is produced inside the higher part and shows their effect at the lower part.

Our Unani physicians have also mentioned the role of local irritants like pollens, cotton, fur, feathers, dust grit and soil of different temperament from various countries, and involvement of gastro intestinal tract in the development of Nazla [4,5]. This makes the concept very much clear that Nazla is the result of many changes held inside the body and not only due to the change inside the nasal cavity. There is no stimulus intrinsic or extrinsic, which produces its changes inside the nasal cavity only, but it involves the whole body.

## Historical Background

Arastu (Aristotle) was the first ancient Unani physician who had described the "Pituitary Gland" as Infundibulum, which literally means funnel shaped

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organ. He stated that this funnel shaped organ drains one of the four cardinal humours i.e. the phlegmatic humour, which comes from the higher brain. Some part of this phlegmatic humour also drains in to nose [6]. Most of the Unani physicians say that the phlegm dripping into the throat is known as Nazla and to the nose is known as Zukam [3,14,11,4,9]

Several Unani physicians have described Nazla in lieu of the signs and symptoms of Warm Tajaweef-e-Anaf (sinusitis), with its types haad and muzmin [8,11,12].

## Cause for its misinterpretation

Literal meaning of Nazla, as described by Arab physicians, is to descend. This leads to misinterpretation that any fluid which descends into nasal cavity gets accumulated in it. So when we correlate these findings, collection of viscous phlegmatic humour in to the sinuses leads to sinusitis. But as our knowledge has increased and we can understand easily that there is no such channel which provides the direct drainage of phlegmatic humour from higher brain to the nasal cavity. The things which can come from the higher brain to the whole body and nasal cavity are the various type of stimuli or chemical messengers. These chemical messengers (cytokines, chemokines, cell mediators, hormones, various enzymatic channels, fibrin clotting system etc.) convey their relevant message to the specific cell and produces various conditions. As the phlegmatic humour which originated from the higher brain drains into infundibulum provides the prime stimulus for the excessive nasal secretion inside the nasal cavity. This leads to excessive collection of tenacious and thick fluid in the nasal cavity.

## Role of extrinsic factors in the development of Nazla

According to Shaikhurrais Abu Ali Ibn Sina, hot temperament people are much more prone to develop Nazla due to variation in environmental conditions and other extrinsic factors in comparison to the cold temperament people, who are more likely to develop Nazla due to intrinsic changes inside the body. [3,7]

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) was the only physician who had brilliantly lit the torch on extrinsic factors (Al-Asbab-al-Kharija) as true causative factors for the de-

velopment of Nazla. He stated that the external causes are more prone to develop Nazla in hot temperament people [Ibn Sina]. Hot temperament people are those persons who have moderately adopted themselves to the hot climatic conditions. They have developed such homeostatic changes which make them physically, mentally and socially acclimatized to the relevant geographical condition.

Extrinsic factors make the list of stimulus like exposure to cold and humid environment, excessive hot and wet conditions, excessive hot and dry conditions, excessive cold and dry conditions, certain diets which are not available in their countries or the diets that may further increase their temperament from moderate to imbalance condition (eggs and specific proteins) or the diet that may further decrease their temperament from normal to unequilibrium state. As we all know that homeostatic changes and temperature regulation takes place in hypothalamus and it is the centre of nervous, endocrine and limbic system and plays an important role in controlling the various system of the body. All bacteria, viruses, funguses etc. comes under the heading of extrinsic factors. As the science and technology was not as advanced as of present days, so, our Unani physicians had not used such terms. They have broadly discussed about extrinsic factors (Asbab-al-Kharija).

### **Role of local irritant**

Some extrinsic factors may also produce local change in temperament of nasal cavity (Nasal irritants like pollens, cotton, fur, feathers, dust, grit and soil of different temperament from other countries) [3,4,2].

### **Role of intrinsic factors**

A large number of Arab physicians including Ibn Sina has also hypothesized about the role of intrinsic temperament in the development of Nazla. They have stated that when the cause lies inside the body and Nazla is not due to the effect of extrinsic factors, then the phlegmatic population is more prone to develop the disease [3,8].

They gave explanation in this regard that the diet which goes into the brain of cold temperament people could not completely get Nuzuj (Internal process

of the body which makes the diet suitable for the specific organ and utilization of calories occurs in it) [3,11] and diet does not become suitable for brain. And this may lead to the beginning of changes including hormonal, homeostatic, enzymatic, inflammatory etc. These provide the prime drive and stimulus to the brain, endocrine system and enzymatic changes. The consequence of changes varies according to the type of stimulus.

If the stimulus is irritant and catalyst for the excessive production of phlegm, it may produce allergic like condition and especially involves nasal mucosa, skin near elbow, intestine, joints, heart and may leads to respective condition like nasal discharge, eczema, allergic changes in GIT, inflammatory conditions of joints and heart etc.

### **Other factors described by Arabs**

When the stimulus irritates nasal mucosa it may lead to nasal discharge which may be of any type in nature physically i.e, thick, thin, putrified, scanty and profuse [8,10]

Ibn Sina also stated that weak digestive power of stomach and intestine may also lead to the same changes which occur in case of changing temperamental and geographical extrinsic factors [3].

He also advised in the text of Hamam that the person should enter the room of Hamam gradually and not suddenly because the four rooms of Hamam represent four seasons. Sudden entry to all rooms may expose the person to all four seasons within limited duration. So the person could not get acclimatized to atmospheric condition all of sudden and this may produce harmful effect on health.

Aboobakar Mohammad Bin Zakariya Razi had also put stress on extrinsic factors after Ibn Sina in Kitab-ul-Mansoori and stated in the text of Hamam, that if the head remains uncovered just after completion of exercise and Hamam, it may cause irritation in nose and may also leads to sneezing, for this very reason, he prescribed khurfa to attain sukhoot(khushki) [1].

### **Conclusion**

As Unani (GreekoArab&Roman) concept believes in treating the root cause of disease and appro-

aches holistically and as no known disease in this world is caused by a single agent or cause but the diseases are produced as a result of interaction between the multiple causes (agent host and environmental factors or some times due to web of causation).

No drug is available to completely cure the sinusitis and all allergic conditions. All recently available drugs are used for their long term benefits. Continuous use of anti allergic and anti inflammatory drugs (steroidal and non steroidal) used for a longer duration always lead to number of hazardous side effects.

Holistic approach of Unani system may be much more beneficial in the cure of Nazla. These drugs may be used for longer duration. Unani system provides abundance of single and compound drugs which can be given to different temperament population. So, clinical trials on 1 Unani drugs which are used for the treatment of Nazla in different temperament groups are required.

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