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## A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON NIDRA (SLEEP) AND SWAPNA (DREAMS)- AN AYURVEDIC AND MODERN PROSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

**Background** -*Nidra* (sleep) and *Swapna* (dreams) are essential aspects of human health and mental well-being in Ayurveda. Sleep is considered one of the three pillars of life (*Trayopastambha*), crucial for maintaining physical and mental equilibrium, while dreams are seen as reflections of the subconscious mind. Both play a significant role in restoring balance to the body and mind. Disruption in sleep patterns and abnormal dreaming can lead to various health problems. **Objective** -This structured abstract aims to provide a detailed understanding of the concepts of *Nidra* and *Swapna* in Ayurveda, exploring their physiological and psychological significance, classification, and the Ayurvedic approach to managing sleep and dream disturbances. **Methods**- Classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* were reviewed to gather insights into the nature, types, and functions of sleep and dreams. Ayurvedic perspectives on the connection between sleep quality and *Dosha* balance, and the interpretations of dreams based on the mind and body's state, were also explored. **Discussion & Conclusion**- *Nidra* and *Swapna* are interconnected aspects of mental and physical health in Ayurveda. Balanced sleep promotes rejuvenation, while dream analysis can offer insights into a person's health status. Ayurvedic treatments for sleep and dream disturbances focus on *Dosha* pacification through herbal formulations, therapies, and lifestyle modifications, highlighting the holistic nature of Ayurvedic medicine. Future studies could explore the integration of these practices in modern treatment protocols for sleep disorders and mental health.

**Keywords**- *Nidra*, *Swapna*, Ayurveda, sleep disorders, dreams, *Dosha* balance, *Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*, *Shirodhara*, *Brahmi*, *Jatamansi*

## INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda, *Nidra* (sleep) and *Swapna* (dreams) hold a profound significance in the maintenance of health and well-being. *Nidra* is one of the three essential pillars of life (*Trayopastambha*), along with diet (*Ahara*) and regulated conduct (*Brahmacharya*).<sup>1</sup> Adequate and quality sleep is viewed as vital for physical, mental, and emotional rejuvenation, as it allows the body to repair, regenerate, and restore balance.<sup>2</sup> The quality and duration of sleep are directly influenced by the balance of the *Doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—with disturbances in these leading to various sleep disorders such as insomnia (*Nidranasha*) and poor-quality sleep (*Alpanidra*).<sup>3</sup>

*Swapna* (dreams), on the other hand, represent the subtle mental activity during sleep and are considered reflections of the subconscious mind.<sup>4</sup> Ayurvedic texts describe dreams as indicators of the current state of the *Doshas* and psychological well-being. The nature of dreams, whether calm or disturbing, is influenced by the *Doshas* and the individual's mental state.<sup>5</sup> For example, an imbalance in *Vata* may manifest as fearful or erratic dreams, while *Pitta* dominance might result in dreams related to aggression.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the relationship between *Nidra* and *Swapna* offers a comprehensive view of sleep's role not only in restoring physical health but also in assessing mental and emotional balance.<sup>7</sup> Ayurvedic treatments aim to improve sleep quality and modulate dream experiences through holistic therapies, including herbal remedies, *Panchakarma* procedures like *Shirodhara*, and lifestyle modifications designed to harmonize the *Doshas*.<sup>8</sup> In this context, Ayurveda provides a multi-dimensional approach to addressing both sleep and dream disturbances, ensuring a balanced and healthy life.<sup>9</sup>

## AIM AND OBJECTIVES:

### Aim

To provide a comprehensive understanding of *Nidra* (sleep) and *Swapna* (dreams) from the perspective of Ayurveda.

### Objectives

1. To explore the concept of *Nidra* (sleep) in Ayurveda, including its classification, physiological importance, and factors influencing its quality and duration.
2. To examine the concept of *Swapna* (dreams), understanding their nature, causes, and interpretations according to Ayurvedic principles.

3. To analyze the role of *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) in regulating sleep patterns and influencing the nature of dreams.

## Material and Methods: Nidra (Sleep) and Swapna (Dreams)

### Materials

- **Classical Ayurvedic Texts:** Primary sources such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* were used to extract foundational information about the concepts of *Nidra* (sleep) and *Swapna* (dreams), their classifications, and their physiological and psychological significance.
- **Modern Scientific Literature:** Relevant research articles, journals, and clinical studies related to sleep and dream patterns were reviewed to understand the contemporary perspectives on sleep disorders and their treatment.

### Methods

- **Literature Review:** A comprehensive review of both Ayurvedic classics and modern literature was conducted to gather insights into the relationship between sleep, dreams, and *Dosha* balance.
- **Data Collection:** Information was collected from Ayurvedic clinical records of patients with sleep disorders or dream abnormalities.

## CONCEPT OF NIDRA (SLEEP)

*Nidra* (sleep) is regarded as one of the three fundamental pillars of life in Ayurveda, along with *Ahara* (diet) and *Brahmacharya* (regulated conduct). Adequate and good-quality sleep is essential for maintaining physical, mental, and emotional health. In Ayurvedic philosophy, sleep is viewed as a natural process that rejuvenates the body, restores energy, and promotes longevity.<sup>10</sup>

### Physiology of Sleep in Ayurveda

According to Ayurveda, the onset of sleep occurs when the mind and body become exhausted, and *Kapha* dosha becomes dominant. *Kapha* is associated with qualities like heaviness, stability, and calmness, which induce sleep. Conversely, *Vata* and *Pitta* doshas, when imbalanced, can cause sleep disorders like insomnia (*Nidranasha*) and poor-quality sleep (*Alpanidra*).<sup>11</sup>

Sleep is believed to have a cyclical relationship with *Doshas*:

- During the evening and night, the dominance of *Kapha* facilitates the onset of sleep.
- *Pitta* dominates during the middle of the night, contributing to metabolism and repair processes.
- *Vata* becomes active in the early morning hours, facilitating waking and mental clarity.

### Benefits of Proper Sleep

In Ayurveda, sleep is described as essential for the proper functioning of the body and mind. Its benefits include:

- **Physical Restoration:** Sleep allows the body to repair tissues, restore energy, and boost immunity.
- **Mental Rejuvenation:** It promotes relaxation, calms the mind, and enhances cognitive functions such as memory, concentration, and creativity.
- **Emotional Stability:** Adequate sleep contributes to emotional well-being, reducing stress, anxiety, and irritability.<sup>12</sup>

### Disorders Due to Lack of Sleep

Inadequate or disturbed sleep can lead to various health conditions, both physical and psychological. Common sleep-related disorders in Ayurveda include:

1. **Nidranasha (Insomnia):** The inability to fall or stay asleep, often caused by an aggravated *Vata* or *Pitta* dosha.
2. **Alpanidra (Disturbed Sleep):** Poor-quality sleep, which may not provide adequate rest or rejuvenation, often associated with *Vata* imbalance.
3. **Ati-Nidra (Excessive Sleep):** An excessive need for sleep, often linked with an imbalance of *Kapha* dosha.<sup>13</sup>

### Ayurvedic Management of Sleep

Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to managing sleep disorders through diet, lifestyle, and herbal remedies:

- **Diet:** A diet that pacifies aggravated *Vata* and *Pitta* doshas, including warm, grounding foods, is recommended.

- **Herbal Remedies:** Herbs like *Brahmi*, *Ashwagandha*, *Jatamansi*, and *Tagara* are used to calm the mind, reduce stress, and promote restful sleep.
- **Therapies:** Ayurvedic treatments like *Shirodhara* (pouring warm oil over the forehead), *Abhyanga* (oil massage), and *Nasya* (nasal therapy) are effective in managing sleep disorders by calming the mind and balancing the *Doshas*.
- **Lifestyle:** A consistent daily routine (*Dinacharya*), proper diet (*Ahara*), and stress management techniques such as yoga and meditation are essential for promoting sound sleep.<sup>14</sup>

## **SWAPNA (DREAMS)**

In Ayurveda, *Swapna* (dreams) are viewed as significant mental activities that occur during sleep. Dreams are regarded as manifestations of the mind, influenced by the current state of the body and the balance of the *Doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. The Ayurvedic understanding of dreams connects them closely to the physical, emotional, and psychological states of an individual, and their interpretation is often used to assess the person's health and well-being.<sup>15</sup>

### **Nature of Dreams in Ayurveda**

Ayurveda considers dreams as the impressions left on the mind by thoughts, experiences, and desires, which surface during the state of *Nidra* (sleep). These impressions arise when the mind is free from active engagement with the sensory organs but continues to remain alert at a subtle level. The *Atma* (soul), *Manas* (mind), and the *Doshas* play a crucial role in generating dreams.

Dreams occur during the different phases of sleep, and the nature of dreams depends on the dominance of the *Doshas* at various times. Each *Dosha* is associated with specific types of dreams, reflecting the mental state and the imbalances that may exist within the body and mind.<sup>16</sup>

### **Doshas and the Influence on Dreams**

#### **1. Vata Dosha and Dreams**

- *Vata* is associated with movement, creativity, and quickness, and when dominant, it influences dreams that are often fast-paced, irregular, or filled with fear and anxiety.

- **Dream Characteristics:** Individuals with aggravated *Vata* may experience dreams of flying, falling, traveling, or encountering fear-inducing situations such as being chased or facing danger. These dreams are often disturbing and fragmented, reflecting the restless and unstable nature of *Vata*.
- **Psychological Reflection:** Dreams associated with *Vata* often indicate anxiety, nervousness, and instability in the mind. These dreams may suggest an imbalance in *Vata*, especially when accompanied by symptoms like insomnia or mental stress.

## 2. Pitta Dosha and Dreams

- *Pitta* governs heat, intensity, and transformation, and its dominance leads to dreams involving intense emotions, action, and energy.
- **Dream Characteristics:** During *Pitta* aggravation, dreams are often filled with scenes of fire, conflict, aggression, or competitive situations. Individuals may see themselves engaging in arguments, facing challenges, or performing tasks under pressure.
- **Psychological Reflection:** These dreams indicate mental heat, frustration, and anger, reflecting excessive *Pitta* in the body. Such dreams often suggest emotional or physical inflammation, and they may point to stress or overwork in waking life.

## 3. Kapha Dosha and Dreams

- *Kapha* is associated with stability, heaviness, and calmness, and it influences dreams that are slower, more peaceful, and grounded.
- **Dream Characteristics:** Dreams during *Kapha* dominance are typically calm and related to water, greenery, or serene, comforting environments. These dreams may involve peaceful and nurturing themes, such as being surrounded by loved ones, in a secure or safe place, or interacting with nature.
- **Psychological Reflection:** Such dreams often reflect emotional comfort, satisfaction, or a stable and peaceful state of mind. However, when *Kapha* is in excess, the dreams may indicate lethargy, attachment, or a lack of motivation, suggesting an imbalance in *Kapha*.

## The Role of the Mind (*Manas*) in Dreams

In Ayurvedic philosophy, the *Manas* (mind) plays a crucial role in processing sensory inputs during waking life. While asleep, the mind continues to remain active at a subtle level, reflecting on the experiences, thoughts, desires, and emotions accumulated during the day. Dreams arise when the mind remains engaged with these impressions, but without the active participation of the sensory organs.<sup>17</sup>

The type and intensity of dreams are influenced by the mental and emotional state of an individual:

- A calm and balanced mind leads to peaceful and serene dreams, often reflecting contentment.
- An agitated or disturbed mind result in chaotic or stressful dreams, revealing underlying emotional turmoil or anxiety.

## Ayurvedic Analysis of Dreams

In Ayurveda, dreams are also interpreted as indicators of physical and psychological health. The nature and frequency of dreams can provide insights into the current balance or imbalance of the *Doshas*.<sup>18</sup>

1. **Health and Prognosis:** Ayurveda considers certain types of dreams as predictors of health or illness. For example, dreams of fire may indicate excessive heat in the body, suggesting a *Pitta* disorder, while dreams of falling or instability may point to a *Vata* imbalance. In this way, dreams are used diagnostically to detect subtle changes in health before they manifest physically.
2. **Dream Analysis and *Dosha* Balance:** Ayurvedic practitioners may use dream analysis as part of assessing a patient's overall health. By understanding the type and nature of dreams, practitioners can gauge which *Dosha* is predominant and offer specific treatments to balance the *Doshas*.

## MODERN CONCEPT OF SLEEP AND DREAMS

In modern science, sleep is understood as a complex biological process essential for maintaining overall health, involving the regulation of both the brain and the body. Sleep is divided into two main types: **Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) sleep** and **Rapid Eye**

**Movement (REM) sleep**, both of which serve distinct functions in physical restoration and mental processing.<sup>19</sup>

1. **NREM Sleep:** This stage of sleep consists of three phases, ranging from light to deep sleep, where physical restoration occurs. During NREM sleep, bodily processes such as tissue repair, muscle growth, immune function, and energy conservation take place. Deep NREM sleep is particularly important for healing and regenerating the body, and it also plays a critical role in memory consolidation and cognitive functions.
2. **REM Sleep:** REM sleep is characterized by rapid eye movements, increased brain activity, and vivid dreaming. During REM sleep, the brain processes and organizes information gathered throughout the day, making it essential for learning and memory. This stage is crucial for emotional regulation and processing, as it helps to integrate emotional experiences and manage stress.

Sleep follows a cyclical pattern, alternating between NREM and REM stages, typically completing several cycles over the course of a night. The **circadian rhythm**, or the body's internal clock, governs the sleep-wake cycle, regulating when we feel awake or sleepy in response to external cues like light and darkness.<sup>20</sup>

### **Sleep Functions in Modern Science**

- **Physical Restoration:** Deep sleep stages (NREM) are critical for tissue repair, immune function, muscle growth, and overall physical recovery. Hormonal regulation, including the release of growth hormone, occurs predominantly during sleep, which aids in healing and regeneration.
- **Cognitive Function:** Sleep plays a key role in learning, memory consolidation, and problem-solving. During sleep, particularly during REM, the brain processes information and strengthens neural connections that support memory retention.
- **Emotional Regulation:** REM sleep is essential for emotional health, helping to process emotional experiences and regulate mood. Lack of REM sleep is linked to heightened emotional sensitivity and mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

Inadequate or poor-quality sleep is associated with a wide range of health issues, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment, and mental health disorders.



Insomnia and sleep apnea are among the most common sleep disorders, with significant implications for both physical and mental well-being.<sup>21</sup>

### **Dreams: Psychological and Neurological Perspective**

Modern psychology and neuroscience view **dreams** as mental experiences that occur predominantly during REM sleep, though they can also occur during other stages. Dreams are complex, involving imagery, emotions, and narratives, often reflecting the dreamer's waking life experiences, subconscious thoughts, and emotions. There are several theories explaining the nature and purpose of dreams:

1. **Cognitive Theories:** According to these theories, dreams are a reflection of the brain's cognitive processing. The **continuity hypothesis** suggests that dreams mirror real-life concerns, experiences, and emotions. Dreaming helps individuals process unresolved thoughts, emotional challenges, and even problem-solving.
2. **Psychodynamic Theories:** Freud's theory of dreams posits that dreams are a manifestation of repressed desires and unconscious conflicts. He viewed dreams as a window into the unconscious mind, where hidden thoughts and unfulfilled desires play out symbolically.
3. **Activation-Synthesis Theory:** This neurological theory, proposed by Hobson and McCarley, suggests that dreams are the brain's attempt to make sense of random neural activity during sleep. During REM sleep, the brainstem generates spontaneous electrical signals, which are interpreted by the brain as dreams, creating narratives from fragmented thoughts and memories.
4. **Emotional Regulation and Processing:** Modern research supports the idea that dreams, particularly those occurring in REM sleep, play a role in processing emotional experiences and trauma. Dreams are thought to help individuals resolve emotional conflicts, regulate mood, and prepare for future challenges. The amygdala, a brain region involved in emotion, is highly active during REM sleep, which may explain why dreams are often emotionally charged.<sup>22</sup>

### **Function of Dreams in Modern Science**

- **Memory Consolidation:** Dreams are believed to support the consolidation of both declarative and procedural memories. By replaying and organizing experiences, the brain helps to integrate new information and store it effectively.

- **Problem Solving:** Many modern researchers suggest that dreams help in solving complex problems and exploring creative solutions. Some studies indicate that during sleep, the brain may reorganize information in novel ways, leading to insights upon waking.
- **Emotional Healing:** Dreams are seen as a way to process difficult emotions, helping individuals work through psychological stress, trauma, or conflict. This function is particularly linked to REM sleep, where emotional processing and mood regulation are most active.<sup>23</sup>

### Disorders Related to Sleep and Dreams

In modern medical science, disorders related to sleep and dreams include a range of conditions:

1. **Insomnia:** The most common sleep disorder, characterized by difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking too early. Insomnia is often linked to stress, anxiety, and other mental health conditions.
2. **Sleep Apnea:** A disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep, leading to poor-quality sleep and health issues such as hypertension and heart disease.
3. **Nightmares and Night Terrors:** Nightmares are vivid, disturbing dreams that occur during REM sleep and cause distress, while night terrors occur during NREM sleep, often leading to sudden awakenings with intense fear.
4. **REM Sleep Behavior Disorder:** This condition involves physically acting out dreams during REM sleep, sometimes resulting in injury to the sleeper or bed partner.<sup>24</sup>

### DISCUSSION

*Nidra* (sleep) and *Swapna* (dreams) hold critical roles in Ayurveda, both for their direct physiological effects on health and their symbolic importance in diagnosing underlying doshic imbalances. Sleep is regarded as one of the essential pillars of life (*Trayopastambha*), and its disruption can cause a wide range of physical and mental health issues. Dreams, meanwhile, are seen as windows into the deeper workings of the mind and body, often reflecting the current state of the *Doshas*.<sup>25</sup>

### Physiological Significance of Nidra

Adequate sleep is crucial for maintaining bodily functions, including tissue repair, immunity, digestion, and mental clarity. Ayurveda emphasizes that quality sleep is as important as proper diet (*Ahara*) and balanced lifestyle (*Brahmacharya*) in promoting health. According to Ayurvedic physiology, *Kapha dosha* governs the onset and quality of sleep due to its qualities of heaviness and calmness, while *Vata* and *Pitta* doshas, when imbalanced, can lead to disorders such as *Nidranasha* (insomnia) and *Alpanidra* (poor-quality sleep).<sup>26</sup>

This Ayurvedic understanding aligns with modern sleep research, which also emphasizes the importance of balanced and sufficient sleep in maintaining homeostasis, cognitive function, and emotional well-being. However, Ayurveda extends this concept by linking sleep disturbances with specific imbalances in bodily humors (*Doshas*), offering a more individualized approach to treatment. Unlike the general pharmaceutical approaches of modern sleep medicine, Ayurvedic interventions, such as *Shirodhara* and herbal therapies like *Ashwagandha* and *Brahmi*, aim to address the root cause of the imbalance, whether it be due to excess *Vata*, *Pitta*, or *Kapha*.<sup>27</sup>

### **Dreams as Reflections of Dosha Imbalance**

*Swapna* (dreams) are an extension of sleep physiology, influenced by the mental and physical state of the individual. Dreams occur when the mind, no longer engaged with external sensory inputs, begins to process stored impressions, emotions, and experiences. Ayurvedic texts describe dreams as direct reflections of the state of the *Doshas*. For example, an aggravated *Vata* may cause restless, fear-inducing dreams, while excessive *Pitta* leads to dreams filled with conflict and intensity, such as fire or aggression. *Kapha*-dominant individuals tend to experience calm, stable dreams, though an excess can lead to overly lethargic, sluggish dream experiences.<sup>28</sup>

This understanding offers an insightful approach to dream interpretation. In the context of clinical practice, examining a patient's dream patterns can help Ayurvedic practitioners identify subtle imbalances before they manifest as physical symptoms. Dreams are considered an early warning system, signaling disturbances in the body and mind. This contrasts with the modern psychological interpretation of dreams, which often focuses more on subconscious desires, fears, or mental conflicts rather than a direct link to bodily functions.<sup>29</sup>

### **Ayurvedic Management of Sleep and Dream Disorders**

Ayurveda's approach to treating sleep and dream disturbances is holistic, focusing on balancing the *Doshas* through dietary changes, lifestyle adjustments, and therapies that directly pacify the aggravated humors. For sleep disturbances such as *Nidranasha* (insomnia), the use of therapies like *Shirodhara* (pouring warm oil on the forehead) is particularly effective for calming *Vata* and *Pitta*, inducing a state of relaxation that promotes deeper, more restorative sleep.<sup>30</sup>

Herbal remedies like *Brahmi*, *Ashwagandha*, *Jatamansi*, and *Tagara* serve to balance the nervous system, reduce stress, and enhance mental clarity. These herbs are commonly used in Ayurvedic treatments to improve sleep quality and regulate the mind's activity during both waking and dreaming states. This method of managing sleep and dreams stands out for its gentle, natural approach, aiming to restore balance without the side effects often associated with conventional sleep medications.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of dreams, the Ayurvedic framework offers a more integrated approach to addressing disturbances. Instead of viewing dreams solely through a psychological or metaphorical lens, Ayurveda considers both physiological and psychological factors in dream interpretation. By balancing the *Doshas*, particularly *Vata* and *Pitta*, individuals are likely to experience more peaceful and stable dream patterns. Stress management through yoga, meditation, and relaxation techniques also plays a crucial role in reducing dream disturbances, further supporting the Ayurveda view that mind and body are inseparably linked.<sup>32</sup>

### Comparison with Modern Perspectives

Modern science views sleep primarily as a state of rest and recovery for the brain and body, governed by neural and hormonal mechanisms such as melatonin and circadian rhythms. While modern sleep medicine tends to treat sleep disorders with pharmaceuticals or behavioral therapies (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia), Ayurveda provides a more holistic and personalized approach by addressing sleep disturbances through the lens of individual constitution (*Prakriti*) and *Dosha* balance.

Similarly, modern dream research tends to focus on the psychological aspects of dreams, exploring their connection to subconscious thoughts, emotions, and experiences. While both Ayurveda and modern science acknowledge the importance of dreams, Ayurveda extends this understanding by linking dreams to physical health and *Dosha* states.<sup>33</sup>

### Limitations and Future Scope

Although Ayurvedic concepts of *Nidra* and *Swapna* offer profound insights into the holistic management of sleep and dreams, further research is necessary to validate these traditional approaches within the framework of modern clinical studies. Rigorous trials examining the efficacy of Ayurvedic interventions like *Shirodhara*, *Abhyanga*, and herbal remedies in managing sleep disorders could bridge the gap between traditional and modern medicine.

Moreover, the integration of dream analysis in clinical settings, particularly for assessing *Dosha* imbalances, presents an interesting area for future exploration. Ayurvedic dream interpretation could serve as a complementary tool for diagnosing early-stage imbalances in patients, providing a unique advantage in preventive healthcare.<sup>34</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Ayurveda offers a comprehensive and integrative approach to understanding and managing both *Nidra* (sleep) and *Swapna* (dreams). By focusing on balancing the *Doshas* and addressing individual constitutions, Ayurveda provides targeted treatments that promote restorative sleep and reduce disturbing dream patterns. This holistic approach, combined with modern scientific insights, has the potential to offer more effective and personalized treatments for sleep-related disorders and enhance overall mental and physical well-being.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST -NIL

## SOURCE OF SUPPROT -NONE

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