



Review Article

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AN OBSERVATIONAL ANALYSIS ON NIDRA AND ITS APPLIED ASPECT

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, as a holistic science, places great emphasis on lifestyle modification through *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (daily regimen), and *Aushadha* (medicine) – the triad essential for the prevention and treatment of diseases. Among these, *Vihara* identifies *Nidra* (sleep) as a critical influencing factor, recognized in Ayurvedic classics as one of the three sub-pillars (*Trayopasthambha*), alongside *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*. While *Ahara* nourishes the body and *Brahmacharya* nurtures the mind, *Nidra* sustains both the body and mind, underscoring its comprehensive role in maintaining health. Sleep is pivotal in maintaining bodily functions through homeostasis. Contemporary science correlates *Nidra* with the processes of repair and rejuvenation in the brain, particularly during NREM (non-rapid eye movement) sleep, which involves increased cerebral protein synthesis and the reprogramming of the brain for optimal assimilation of information acquired during wakefulness. Ayurveda parallels this understanding by conceptualizing *Nidra* as *Bhut-Dhatri* – the universal nurturer that sustains all living beings. This integrated perspective highlights the fundamental importance of sleep in promoting physical and mental well-being, aligning Ayurvedic principles with modern scientific insights.

KEY WORDS - Sleep, Physiological, Tamoguna, Ayurveda, Classics.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda emphasizes the prevention of diseases over their cure, advocating a proactive approach to health through lifestyle modifications. This ancient science has laid down detailed regimens like *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) and *Dincharya* (daily routine regimen), which aim to harmonize human physiology with nature's cycles. By adhering to these principles, one can achieve both physical and mental well-being, fostering a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

In the context of modern living, stress and anxiety have become pervasive issues, significantly impacting mental health. One of the primary causes of these conditions is insufficient sleep. Ayurveda identifies *Nidra* (sleep) as a cornerstone of health and recognizes it as one of the three sub-pillars (*Trayopasthambha*), alongside *Ahara* (diet) and *Brahmacharya* (celibacy or discipline). While *Ahara* sustains the physical body and *Brahmacharya* nurtures the mind, *Nidra* nourishes and rejuvenates both the body and mind, emphasizing its indispensable role in holistic health.

The importance of sleep extends beyond its restorative effects; it has deep roots in Indian philosophical and spiritual texts. The *Upanishads* describe four psychosomatic stages of consciousness:

1. **Jagradavastha** (Awakening): The active state of consciousness in wakefulness.
2. **Swapnavastha** (Dream/Sleep): The state where dreams occur, reflecting subconscious mental activity.
3. **Sushuptavastha** (Hibernation): A state of deep, dreamless sleep characterized by profound rest and regeneration.
4. **Turiyavastha** (Superconscious State): A transcendental state of heightened spiritual awareness, achieved by advanced practitioners during meditation or spiritual practices.

These stages demonstrate the interplay between mind and body in different states of consciousness, with *Nidra* playing a central role in rejuvenation and mental peace.

According to *Maharishi Patanjali* in the *Yoga Sutras*, *Nidra* is described as a modification of the mind (*vritti*) characterized by the absence of mental content or awareness. Sleep, as per *Yoga Shastra*, is a mental state dominated by *Tamoguna* (the inertial quality of nature).

While *Tamoguna* is often considered a cause of inertia, it is essential in promoting rest and recovery when balanced with *Sattva* (purity) and *Rajas* (activity). Thus, *Nidra* is not merely an act of rest but a dynamic and integral process for maintaining mental and physical equilibrium.

This comprehensive understanding of sleep in Ayurveda and Yoga underscores its significance in combating modern-day stress and anxiety, offering timeless wisdom for achieving harmony and well-being.

Nidra (Sleep):

In Ayurveda, *Nidra* is considered one of the most vital components of health and well-being. It is one of the three sub-pillars (*Trayopasthambha*), alongside *Ahara* (diet) and *Brahmacharya* (celibacy or discipline). *Nidra* plays a pivotal role in maintaining both physical and mental equilibrium, as it is essential for the rejuvenation of the body and mind. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe *Nidra* not only as a physiological necessity but also as a natural phenomenon influenced by doshas, seasons, and mental states.

Definitions and Synonyms of Nidra

- *Charaka Samhita* defines *Nidra* as a state of mental and physical rest that occurs when the mind and sensory organs withdraw due to the dominance of *Tamoguna* and *Kapha dosha*.
- *Sushruta Samhita* refers to *Nidra* as *Bhutadhatri* (the nurturer of all beings), emphasizing its nourishing and restorative properties.
- Synonyms of *Nidra* include *Swapna*, *Shayana*, and *Sushupti*.

Types of Nidra in Ayurveda

Acharya Charaka categorizes sleep into six types based on their causative factors:

1. **Tamobhava (Tamasic Sleep):** Induced by an increase in *Tamoguna*.
2. **Shleshmabhava (Kapha Sleep):** Resulting from an aggravation of *Kapha dosha*.
3. **Manah-sharir-shramasambhava (Fatigue-induced Sleep):** Caused by physical and mental exhaustion.

4. **Agantuki (Occasional Sleep):** Sleep influenced by external factors like stress or overwork.
5. **Vyadhyanuvartini (Disease-induced Sleep):** Associated with specific diseases or conditions.
6. **Ratri-svabhava-prabhava (Natural Sleep):** Occurring due to the body's natural rhythm, following *dinacharya* and *ritucharya*.

Physiological and Psychological Importance of Nidra

1. Physical Health:

- *Nidra* provides rest and repair to the body by supporting anabolic processes, such as tissue regeneration and immune function.
- It enhances *ojas*, the essence of vitality, by balancing the body's doshas.
- Deep sleep promotes digestion and assimilation, aiding *Agni* (digestive fire).

2. Mental Health:

- *Nidra* maintains cognitive functions, including memory, learning, and decision-making.
- It alleviates mental stress and anxiety, creating a balance in *Manas doshas* (*Rajas* and *Tamas*).
- Sound sleep enhances emotional stability and focus.

Factors Influencing Nidra

1. Dosha Predominance:

- **Kapha dosha:** Promotes deep and restorative sleep.
- **Pitta dosha:** Associated with disturbed or interrupted sleep when aggravated.
- **Vata dosha:** Leads to insomnia or restless sleep when imbalanced.

2. Seasons (*Ritu*):

- Sleep patterns vary with seasons; longer sleep durations in winter (due to *Kapha*) and shorter in summer (due to *Pitta*).

3. Time of Day:

- Night (*Ratri*) is the natural time for sleep, as indicated in the *dinacharya* guidelines.

4. Diet and Lifestyle:

- Heavy, unwholesome foods, stress, and irregular routines negatively impact sleep quality.

Nidra and Modern Science

Ayurveda's understanding of *Nidra* aligns with modern science, particularly in the context of the sleep cycle:

- **NREM Sleep (Non-Rapid Eye Movement):** Comparable to deep sleep described in Ayurveda, it is vital for physical repair and immune function.
- **REM Sleep (Rapid Eye Movement):** Represents dream states akin to the *Swapnavastha* in Ayurvedic philosophy, crucial for mental processing and memory consolidation.

Diseases Due to Nidra Imbalance

1. Insufficient Sleep (Anidra/Alpanidra):

- Leads to conditions like stress, anxiety, fatigue, digestive disorders, and weakened immunity.
- Aggravates *Vata* and *Pitta doshas*.

2. Excessive Sleep (Atinidra):

- Causes lethargy, obesity, and *Kapha*-related disorders like diabetes and depression.

3. Disturbed Sleep (Nidranasha):

- Results from lifestyle disorders, mental stress, or dosha imbalances, leading to cognitive and emotional disturbances.

Management of Nidra Disorders

1. Lifestyle Modifications:

- Following *Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya* to align the body with natural cycles.
- Avoiding stimulants, heavy meals, and screen time before bed.

2. Dietary Interventions:

- Consumption of *Vata* and *Pitta pacifying* diets, including warm milk with herbs like *Ashwagandha* or *Jatamansi*.

3. Herbal Remedies:

- **Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*):** Enhances restorative sleep.
- **Jatamansi (*Nardostachys jatamansi*):** Reduces stress and promotes mental calmness.
- **Tagara (*Valeriana wallichii*):** Alleviates insomnia.

4. Therapeutic Approaches:

- **Abhyanga (Oil Massage):** Using *Vata-pacifying* oils like *Bala taila* or *Ashwagandha taila*.
- **Shirodhara:** Pouring medicated oils on the forehead to calm the mind and induce sleep.
- **Nasya:** Administration of nasal drops with herbs to balance *Vata*.

Philosophical Perspective of Nidra

- *Maharishi Patanjali* describes sleep as a state where the mind is devoid of active cognition, dominated by *Tamoguna*.
- The *Upanishads* classify sleep into four states: *Jagrata* (wakefulness), *Swapna* (dream state), *Sushupti* (deep sleep), and *Turiya* (transcendental consciousness), highlighting its psychosomatic and spiritual dimensions.

Discussion

Nidra is a cornerstone of health in Ayurveda, deeply intertwined with the principles of *Trayopasthambha* (diet, celibacy, and sleep). It is essential for maintaining both physical and mental equilibrium by rejuvenating the body and mind. The Ayurvedic understanding of *Nidra* aligns remarkably well with modern scientific findings. Ayurveda identifies sleep as a process driven by *Tamoguna* and *Kapha dosha*, promoting tissue repair, immune

regulation, and mental clarity, while modern science highlights the roles of NREM and REM sleep in these functions. This alignment emphasizes the timeless relevance of Ayurvedic principles in addressing the multifaceted impacts of sleep on health.

Ayurveda's classification of sleep into types such as *Tamobhava* and *Shleshmabhava* highlights the influence of dosha dynamics on sleep patterns. Proper sleep nourishes *ojas* (vital energy) and balances the body's doshas, while disturbances in sleep lead to imbalances, manifesting as disorders like insomnia or excessive sleep. Ayurvedic therapies such as *Shirodhara* and *Nasya*, combined with herbal interventions like *Ashwagandha* and *Jatamansi*, offer practical solutions for managing sleep disturbances, aligning doshas, and enhancing overall well-being.

In today's era, where stress and anxiety are prevalent, the holistic approach of Ayurveda provides effective tools to manage sleep-related disorders. The incorporation of *Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya* ensures synchronization with nature's rhythms, fostering healthy sleep patterns. Ayurveda's integrative approach, which combines lifestyle modifications, dietary interventions, and therapeutic measures, provides a comprehensive framework for achieving optimal health. Thus, *Nidra* remains a vital aspect of Ayurveda, bridging ancient wisdom with modern healthcare needs.

Conclusion

Nidra is not merely a state of rest but a dynamic process essential for the restoration and rejuvenation of the body and mind. By balancing the doshas, following *dinacharya* and *ritucharya*, and integrating Ayurvedic interventions, one can maintain optimal sleep patterns. Proper management of *Nidra* enhances overall health, productivity, and emotional well-being, proving it to be a cornerstone of holistic living in Ayurveda.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST –NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT –NIL

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