



Review Article

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AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON *NIDRA* AS A PILLAR OF LIFE (*TRAYOPASTAMBHA*)

*Dr. Zalak Patel¹, Dr. Jil Patel²

¹Associate Professor, Department of *Kriya Sharira*, Shree Swaminarayan Ayurvedic College, Kalol, Gujarat

²Assistant professor, Department of *Kriya Sharira*, Shree Swaminarayan Ayurvedic College, Kalol, Gujarat

*Corresponding author: Dr. Zalak Patel, Associate Professor, Department of *Kriya Sharira*, Shree Swaminarayan Ayurvedic College, Kalol, Gujarat

Email id: zalupatel1824@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background In *Ayurveda*, *Nidra* (sleep) is described as one of the *Trayopastambha*—the three pillars of life—along with *Ahara* (food) and *Brahmacharya* (regulated conduct). It plays a vital role in maintaining physical, mental, and emotional equilibrium. Adequate and timely *Nidra* is essential for *Dhatu Pushti* (tissue nourishment), *Sharira Bala* (body strength), *Varna* (complexion), and *Sukha* (happiness). Disturbance in *Nidra* leads to various psychosomatic disorders such as *Anidra* (insomnia), *Tandra*, and *Jadya*. **Aim** To analyze the Ayurvedic concept of *Nidra* as a pillar of life and correlate its physiological and pathological aspects with modern sleep science. **Objectives** To review classical Ayurvedic references on *Nidra* from *Brihatrayi* and *Laghutrayi*. To understand the types, causes, and effects of *Nidra* as per *Ayurveda*. To correlate the Ayurvedic understanding of *Nidra* with modern physiological and neurobiological concepts of sleep. To explore the therapeutic and preventive significance of proper *Nidra* in health maintenance and disease prevention. **Materials and Methods** This study is a literary and analytical review based on classical

Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with relevant commentaries. Modern scientific literature, journal articles, and research studies related to sleep physiology and disorders were also reviewed to establish cross-disciplinary correlations. **Results** Ayurvedic literature emphasizes *Nidra* as a natural, restorative process governed by *Tamasika Avastha* of *Manas* and *Kapha Dosha*. The analysis revealed that *Nidra* contributes significantly to anabolic processes, cognitive stability, hormonal balance, and immunity. Modern sleep science supports these findings, identifying sleep as crucial for neuroendocrine regulation, memory consolidation, and cellular repair. **Conclusion** *Nidra* is not merely a resting state but a vital physiological function integral to holistic well-being. Maintaining proper sleep hygiene in accordance with Ayurvedic principles can prevent lifestyle disorders, improve longevity, and promote mental and physical health.

Keywords: *Nidra*, *Trayopastambha*, *Kapha Dosha*, Sleep Physiology, *Anidra*, Health Maintenance

INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda*, life is sustained by three fundamental supports known as *Trayopastambha* — *Ahara* (food), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (regulated conduct). Among these, *Nidra* holds immense importance for maintaining both physical and psychological balance. Acharya Charaka described *Nidra* as a natural physiological state that provides *Sukha* (happiness), *Pushti* (nourishment), *Bala* (strength), *Vrishata* (virility), *Jnana* (knowledge), and *Jivita* (longevity). It is not merely a passive condition of rest but an active process essential for the rejuvenation of body tissues and the restoration of mental harmony. Proper *Nidra* contributes to homeostasis, whereas its derangement (*Anidra* or *Ati Nidra*) leads to various somatic and psychosomatic disorders.¹

According to classical Ayurvedic scholars, *Nidra* originates when the *Manas* (mind) and the *Indriyas* (sense organs) withdraw from their respective objects, resulting in a state of rest. The process is predominantly influenced by the *Tamasika Avastha* of *Manas* and the predominance of *Kapha Dosha*. Acharya Sushruta mentions *Nidra* as one of the natural urges (*Adharaniya Vega*), signifying its inevitability and necessity for survival. The quality and quantity of sleep depend on multiple factors such as *Dosha Prakriti*, *Rutu* (season), *Ahara*

(diet), and *Vihara* (lifestyle). Balanced *Nidra* ensures *Dhatu Samya* (tissue equilibrium), while its imbalance disturbs *Agni*, *Dosha*, and *Manas*, leading to disease manifestation.²

From a modern scientific perspective, sleep is a complex neurophysiological process governed by the hypothalamus, brainstem, and reticular activating system. It consists of two main phases — Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) and Rapid Eye Movement (REM) — which cyclically alternate to maintain mental and physical restoration. Sleep plays a vital role in memory consolidation, hormonal regulation, metabolic balance, and immune defense. The circadian rhythm, regulated by the suprachiasmatic nucleus, aligns sleep with environmental light-dark cycles. These modern findings resonate deeply with Ayurvedic descriptions, which emphasize the rhythmic and restorative nature of *Nidra*.³

In today's fast-paced lifestyle, irregular sleep patterns, stress, and digital exposure have disrupted natural sleep cycles, giving rise to disorders like insomnia, anxiety, and metabolic syndrome. Ayurveda offers holistic guidelines for achieving sound sleep through *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasa Chikitsa* (psychological management). By reinterpreting classical concepts of *Nidra* in light of modern physiology, a comprehensive understanding can be developed for preventive and therapeutic applications. Thus, an analytical study on *Nidra* as one of the *Trayopastambha* is essential to highlight its indispensable role in health maintenance and disease prevention.⁴

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To analyze the Ayurvedic concept of *Nidra* as a pillar of life and correlate its physiological and pathological aspects with modern sleep science.

Objectives

1. To review classical Ayurvedic references on *Nidra* from *Brihatrayi* and *Laghutrayi*.
2. To understand the types, causes, and effects of *Nidra* as per *Ayurveda*.
3. To correlate the Ayurvedic understanding of *Nidra* with modern physiological and neurobiological concepts of sleep.
4. To explore the therapeutic and preventive significance of proper *Nidra* in health maintenance and disease prevention.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

NIDRA

The concept of *Nidra* (sleep) occupies a central place in Ayurvedic physiology (*Sharira Kriya*). It is one of the *Trayopastambha*—the three fundamental supports of life—along with *Ahara* (food) and *Brahmacharya* (regulated lifestyle). Acharya Charaka emphasizes that proper *Nidra* brings *Sukha* (happiness), *Pushti* (nourishment), *Bala* (strength), *Vrishata* (virility), *Jnana* (knowledge), and *Jivita* (longevity), whereas its absence leads to *Dukha* (misery), *Karsya* (emaciation), *Abala* (weakness), *Ajnana* (ignorance), and *Ayu Hani* (loss of life). This clearly indicates that sleep is not only a resting phase but an essential biological need contributing to growth, repair, and mental stability.⁵

Definition and Nature of *Nidra*

Acharya Charaka defines *Nidra* as a state that occurs naturally when the *Manas* (mind) and *Indriyas* (sense organs) withdraw from their respective objects (*Vishayas*). It is governed by the dominance of *Tamasika Guna* of *Manas* and *Kapha Dosha*. Acharya Sushruta considers *Nidra* as one among the natural urges (*Adharaniya Vega*), the suppression of which causes various disorders. Acharya Vagbhata also mentions *Nidra* as a *Sharira-Mana Avastha* (state of body and mind) essential for normal functioning. This shows that *Nidra* is both a physiological and psychological phenomenon, occurring due to temporary cessation of sensory and mental activity, allowing the body to restore energy and mental calmness.⁶

Types of *Nidra*

Ayurvedic texts classify *Nidra* based on its cause and quality, *Nidra* is of six types:

1. *Tamobhava Nidra* – due to the predominance of *Tamasika Guna*.
 2. *Shleshmasamudbhava Nidra* – due to *Kapha* dominance.
 3. *Manah Sharira Shrama Sambhava Nidra* – caused by physical or mental exhaustion.
 4. *Agantuki Nidra* – induced by external factors such as trauma or injury.
 5. *Vyadhi Anuvartini Nidra* – associated with certain diseases.
 6. *Ratri Svabhava Prabhava Nidra* – natural sleep occurring at night.
- Among these, the last type (*Ratri Svabhava Prabhava Nidra*) is considered physiological and essential, while the others are pathological or secondary

manifestations. The *Ahara* (diet), *Ritu* (season), and *Sharira Prakriti* also influence the quality and duration of *Nidra*.

Physiological Importance of *Nidra*

Nidra acts as a restorative process that rejuvenates the body, replenishes energy, and balances *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Agni*. During sleep, *Kapha Dosha* predominates, allowing anabolic processes like tissue repair and nourishment (*Dhatu Pushti*). Adequate *Nidra* maintains *Sharira Bala* (body strength), *Varna* (complexion), and *Ojas* (vital essence). It promotes mental clarity, emotional stability, and proper sensory perception. Conversely, improper *Nidra* causes *Vata Prakopa*, leading to symptoms such as dryness, fatigue, anxiety, tremors, and insomnia (*Anidra*). Excessive sleep (*Ati Nidra*) leads to *Kapha Vriddhi*, sluggishness, heaviness, and metabolic disorders. Thus, *Nidra* maintains a delicate equilibrium between *Vata* and *Kapha* for physiological harmony.⁷

Role of *Nidra* as a Pillar of Life (*Trayopastambha*)

In *Ayurveda*, the concept of *Trayopastambha*—*Ahara* (food), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (regulated conduct)—is the foundation for maintaining life and promoting health. Among these, *Nidra* holds a unique place as it directly influences both the body (*Sharira*) and the mind (*Manas*). Acharya Charaka explains that *Nidra* is a natural physiological requirement essential for the restoration of energy, maintenance of *Dhatu Samyata* (tissue equilibrium), and preservation of *Ojas* (vital essence). When *Nidra* is adequate and timely, it leads to happiness, nourishment, strength, and longevity. Conversely, disturbances in sleep pattern manifest as fatigue, irritability, loss of strength, cognitive decline, and premature aging.⁸

The function of *Nidra* as a *Sharira Dharaka Bhava* (life-sustaining factor) is similar to that of food and reproduction. While *Ahara* provides nourishment and *Brahmacharya* ensures regeneration, *Nidra* restores vitality and mental calmness by giving adequate rest to the *Indriyas* (sense organs) and *Manas*. Acharya Vagbhata mentions that *Nidra* is indispensable for maintaining the harmony between *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Agni*. During sleep, the dominance of *Kapha Dosha* and *Tamas Guna* facilitates anabolic processes, enhancing physical stability and emotional balance. Thus, *Nidra* is not merely a passive state but an active biological process necessary for maintaining the dynamic equilibrium of the organism.⁹

Physiologically, *Nidra* allows the body to repair and rejuvenate tissues, regulate metabolism, and stabilize the neuroendocrine system. It strengthens *Sharira Bala* (physical strength), improves complexion (*Varna*), and enhances memory and mental functions. Inadequate *Nidra* (*Anidra*) disturbs *Vata Dosha*, leading to anxiety, restlessness, tremors, and insomnia, whereas excessive sleep (*Ati Nidra*) increases *Kapha Dosha*, resulting in heaviness, sluggishness, and metabolic disorders. Hence, moderation in sleep—both in duration and quality—is a vital aspect of *Swasthavritta* (health maintenance). Proper *Nidra* acts as a natural rejuvenator that supports immunity, emotional well-being, and longevity.¹⁰

From the modern standpoint, the role of sleep parallels the Ayurvedic understanding of *Nidra*. Sleep regulates immune function, hormonal secretion, cognitive performance, and emotional processing. Lack of adequate sleep has been linked to cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, and mental health disorders. These modern observations affirm the timeless wisdom of *Ayurveda*, which recognized thousands of years ago that sleep is not a luxury but a necessity of life. Therefore, maintaining regular, qualitative, and appropriate *Nidra* is essential to uphold the triad of life—body, mind, and consciousness—making it a true *Upastambha* of health and longevity.¹¹

MODERN REVIEW

SLEEP

In modern medical science, sleep is defined as a reversible physiological state of reduced consciousness and sensory responsiveness, accompanied by decreased motor activity and metabolic rate. It is an essential biological process for maintaining homeostasis, cognitive performance, and overall health. The regulation of sleep and wakefulness is primarily governed by the central nervous system, particularly the hypothalamus, brainstem, and the reticular activating system. The suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) of the hypothalamus acts as the body's circadian pacemaker, synchronizing the sleep–wake rhythm with environmental light and dark cycles. The pineal gland plays a key role by secreting melatonin, which promotes sleep onset and regulates the timing of sleep.¹²

Sleep is divided into two distinct physiological states: Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) sleep and Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. NREM sleep consists of three stages ranging from light to deep sleep, during which tissue repair, immune strengthening, and energy restoration occur. REM sleep is associated with dreaming, memory consolidation, and

emotional regulation. A typical adult undergoes four to six cycles of NREM and REM sleep each night, each cycle lasting about 90 minutes. This cyclic pattern ensures both physical and mental restoration, aligning closely with the Ayurvedic understanding of *Nidra* as a rhythmic, restorative phenomenon essential for well-being.¹³

At the neurochemical level, sleep is regulated by a complex interaction of neurotransmitters and hormones. Sleep-promoting agents include gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), adenosine, and melatonin, while serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine, and acetylcholine maintain wakefulness. The homeostatic sleep drive increases with prolonged wakefulness due to adenosine accumulation, and dissipates after adequate sleep. Disruption of these mechanisms leads to common sleep disorders such as insomnia, hypersomnia, parasomnia, and sleep apnea. Chronic sleep deprivation negatively impacts multiple organ systems, contributing to hypertension, diabetes mellitus, obesity, depression, and cognitive decline.¹⁴

Recent research highlights the vital role of sleep in brain detoxification through the glymphatic system, which clears neurotoxic waste products during deep sleep. Sleep also supports immune function, metabolic regulation, and cardiovascular health. Lack of adequate sleep impairs attention, learning, and decision-making abilities, while also increasing oxidative stress and inflammation. Thus, modern physiology confirms that sleep is not a passive resting state but an active, restorative, and regulatory process fundamental to survival. The growing body of evidence underscores the timeless truth that sound sleep is indispensable for health maintenance, longevity, and emotional stability—correlating directly with the Ayurvedic view of *Nidra* as a pillar of life.¹⁵

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- *Nidra* is one of the three *Trayopastambha*, essential for maintaining life and health.
- Proper *Nidra* supports *Dhatu Pushti*, *Ojas*, and *Sharira Bala*.
- *Anidra* (loss of sleep) causes *Vata Prakopa*, fatigue, anxiety, and weakness.
- *Ati Nidra* (excess sleep) increases *Kapha*, producing heaviness and lethargy.
- Balanced *Nidra* enhances digestion, complexion, memory, and longevity.
- Sleep occurs naturally due to *Kapha* predominance and *Tamasika Avastha* of mind.
- Six types of *Nidra* are described, of which *Ratri Svabhava Prabhava Nidra* is physiological.

- Modern science identifies NREM and REM phases responsible for restoration and cognition.
- Neurochemicals like melatonin, GABA, and serotonin regulate the sleep–wake cycle.
- Sound sleep improves immunity, metabolism, and mental stability; disturbed sleep leads to systemic disorders.

DISCUSSION

The present analytical study highlights that *Nidra* is one of the *Trayopastambha*, fundamental to sustaining life and health. Acharya Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata unanimously describe *Nidra* as essential for *Sharira Bala* (physical strength), *Pushti* (nourishment), and *Ayu* (longevity). The physiological process of *Nidra* occurs naturally when the *Indriyas* (sense organs) and *Manas* (mind) withdraw from their objects, leading to a state of rest and rejuvenation. This state, influenced by the dominance of *Kapha Dosha* and *Tamas Guna*, facilitates anabolic functions, emotional balance, and mental tranquility. Thus, *Nidra* serves as a natural restorative mechanism, essential for maintaining equilibrium of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Agni*.¹⁶

Ayurvedic texts classify *Nidra* into six types based on causation, emphasizing that only *Ratri Svabhava Prabhava Nidra*—the natural sleep occurring at night—is physiological and beneficial. Other types such as *Tamobhava Nidra* or *Vyadhi Anuvartini Nidra* are pathological and need correction through *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasika Chikitsa*. The observation that *Anidra* (sleeplessness) increases *Vata* and causes dryness, anxiety, and fatigue, while *Ati Nidra* (excessive sleep) provokes *Kapha* leading to sluggishness and heaviness, demonstrates Ayurveda's fine understanding of sleep imbalance and its systemic consequences. These findings align with modern knowledge linking sleep deprivation to stress, hypertension, obesity, and neuroendocrine disturbances.¹⁷

Modern physiology provides detailed insight into the mechanism of sleep. It identifies the hypothalamus, brainstem, and pineal gland as central regulators of the sleep–wake cycle through neurochemicals like melatonin, serotonin, GABA, and adenosine. The cyclic alternation between NREM and REM stages parallels the Ayurvedic understanding of *Nidra* as a rhythmic, restorative process. During deep NREM sleep, the body undergoes tissue repair, hormonal regulation, and energy restoration, while REM sleep supports memory

consolidation and emotional stability. These functions correspond closely with the Ayurvedic attributes of *Nidra* that promote *Pushti*, *Smriti*, and *Manas Prasannata*.¹⁸

Overall, both Ayurvedic and modern perspectives converge on the view that sleep is not a passive or optional phenomenon but an active, regulatory process vital for maintaining homeostasis. Proper *Nidra* ensures physical, mental, and emotional well-being, whereas disturbed or irregular sleep leads to psychosomatic disorders. Ayurveda, through its holistic approach, emphasizes prevention by maintaining balanced daily routines (*Dinacharya*) and mental calmness. Integrating Ayurvedic wisdom with modern sleep hygiene practices can provide a comprehensive framework for preventing and managing lifestyle disorders, reaffirming *Nidra* as a true pillar of life.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Nidra plays a fundamental role in sustaining life as one of the *Trayopastambha*. It is essential for maintaining physical strength, mental stability, emotional balance, and overall health. The analytical study reveals that proper *Nidra* rejuvenates the body, restores *Dosha* equilibrium, enhances *Agni*, and promotes *Ojas*, leading to longevity and vitality. Conversely, disturbed or inadequate sleep causes *Vata* and *Kapha* imbalance, resulting in various psychosomatic disorders. Modern research supports these classical views by establishing the physiological importance of sleep in metabolism, immunity, cognition, and emotional regulation. Therefore, maintaining balanced and timely *Nidra* through proper *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasika Shamana* is indispensable for holistic well-being and disease prevention.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST –NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT –NONE

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