



The study of Nidra in Ayurvedic perspective and its importance

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ABSTRACT:

Ayurveda is the science of life and its main aim is to maintain healthy status of living being. Prevention and treatment of disease is the essence of Ayurveda. As per ayurvedic science, *Nidra* is one among most essential factors responsible for a healthy life. It is one of the *Trayopstambha*. The lifestyle changes of this era have led to various disorders. The article lays emphasis on the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda about the importance of *Nidra*-physiological and critical review on study of *Nidra*. It also overviews and lights up the main study of *Nidra* already given in different ayurvedic texts. The ancient ayurvedic classics describes the 3 main milestones of life *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya*. The entire study of *Nidra* and its classification is given in *samhitas*. The lifestyle changes have led to disorders like hypertension, obesity, diabetes mellitus and others. Good sleep is essential and advantageous to the quality of life. A number of vital physiological changes occur during sleep and help people stay healthy and function at their best.

Keywords - *Nidra*, *Trayopstambha*, *Ahara*, *Brahmacharya*

INTRODUCTION

The word *Nidra* derived from the prefix “Ni” is the Sanskrit root of our English word “Nether” or down as in “Nether world” (under world) While suffix “dra”

may be cognate with the English “drowsy” to be half asleep, to be inactive or present an appearance of peaceful inactivity or isolation. According to Ayurveda, one should wake up at ‘*Brahma muhurta*’ sleep is an important phenomenon in our life as a part of normal physiology. Sleep is naturally occurring periodic state of rest of both body and mind, in which the eyes usually close and consciousness is completely or partially lost, with decreased bodily movement and decreased responsiveness to external stimuli. Sleep determines many aspects of our life like mood, cognitive functions such as attention and working memory, homeostasis etc. In metaphoric language it is called ‘*Vaishnavi maya*’ indicating that *Nidra* provides nutrition to maintain good health like Lord Vishnu (the sustaining god), who nourishes and sustains this world. Concept of sleep when the mind along with soul gets exhausted, or becomes stationary, and the sensory and motor organs also becomes inactive, the individual sleeps. Sleep occurs when the seat of *Chetana* (consciousness) is covered by *Tamo guna* (one among the the three main qualities of mind which is responsible for ignorance) which predominates along with *Kapha*. Sleep is another form of *Tamas* (mental darkness). Sleep manifests when *Tamas* naturally predominates at night and the mind and intellect are in deep rest. Sleep occurs when bodily channels become accumulated with *Kapha* and when the mind is devoid of contact with the sense

organs because of fatigue. Types of sleep in general, classified into two types: *Svabhavika* (natural sleep) and *Asvabhavika* (abnormal sleep).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To understand *Nidra* as explained in Ayurveda.
- To study the importance of ideal *Nidra* in maintaining healthy lifestyle.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials related to *Nidra* and sleep physiology have been collected from different journals, Ayurvedic text books, authentic websites.

Definition of *Nidra* according to various Acharyas:

Acharya Charak- The mind and soul gets exhausted or becomes inactive and the sensory and motor organs become inactive then the individual gets sleep^[1]

Acharya Sushrut- Sleep occurs when the *Hridaya*, the seat of *Chetana* by *Tamas*^[2]

Acharya Dalhana, the commentator of *Sushrut* states- *Nidra* is the state of combination of mind and intellectual in which the person feels happy^[3]

Ashtang Sangrah- The *Manovaha srotas* become accumulated with *Sleshma* and mind is devoid of sense organs because of fatigue, when individual fell asleep^[4]

CLASSIFICATION OF *NIDRA* ACCORDING TO *ACHARYAS*^[5]

	<i>Charak</i>	<i>Sushrut</i>	<i>Vagbhat</i>
1	<i>Tamobhava</i>	<i>Vaishnvi</i>	<i>Tamobhava</i>
2	<i>Sleshma sambhava</i>	<i>Vaikariki</i>	<i>Aamayakledaprabhavaja</i>
3	<i>Manasharira shrama</i>	<i>Tamsi</i>	<i>Chittakledaprabhavaja</i>
4	<i>Agantuki</i>		<i>Agantuki</i>
5	<i>Vyadhayanuvartini</i>		<i>Kaphaprabhavaja</i>
6	<i>Ratriswabhavaprabhava</i>		<i>Dekledaprabhavaja</i>
7			<i>Kalavabhavaja</i>

PHENOMENON OF *NIDRA* ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT THEORIES:

1. Theories of *Upanishad*
2. Theories of *Yoga*
3. Theories of *Ayurveda*
4. *Tamoprabhava* theory
5. *Klama* (Fatigue) theory
6. *Swabhava nidra* theory
7. *Kapha dosha* theory

SLEEP ACCORDING TO EACH *DOSHAS*:

Each individual is different and can experience similar yet non-identical type of sleep.

Vata prakriti person will experience light, irregular and short duration of sleep. However *Vata* person would benefit with more rest. Symptoms of teeth grinding, sleep walking and sleep talking are common. Dreams tend to be airy in nature,

he will see that he's flying in air etc. Since *Vata* types are light sleepers, they can easily wake during the night, without being able to fall back asleep. Dominant individuals often need 6-7 hrs of sleep.

Pitta prakriti person will experience sound sleep but also light. Generally, the amount of sleep is moderate, but they often forego sleep when preoccupied. Dreams tend to be wild, fiery and vivid. Falling back asleep after waking at night is troublesome because mind is overactive. Difficult to fall back asleep. *Pitta* dominant individuals often need 7-8 hrs of sleep to feel refresh.

Kapha prakriti person will experience deep and sound sleep, heavy, stubborn. Meaning they are not easily disturbed or woken. They have a tendency to oversleep even though they don't need to sleep for long periods. *Kapha* dominant individuals need 8-9 hrs of sleep.

REQUIREMENT OF SLEEP IN SATVIK, RAJASIK, TAMASIK PERSONS^[6]

Satvik person – 4-6 hrs of sleep

Rajasik person – 8 hrs of sleep

Tamasik person- 10-12 hrs of sleep

IMPORTANCE OF NIDRA

Acharya Sushruta in *Chikitsa sthan* said that “wholesome and timely sleep brings about homeostasis in bodily tissue.” A person spends 1/3rd of his life in sleep. So it is important to see that one gets a sound sleep at night^[7] When the mind(as well as the soul) gets exhausted and the sensory and motor organs become inactive then the individual gets sleep. So when mind dissociates itself from some object, the person also dissociates from it. The sensory and motor organs are not active because of the inaction of individuals^[8] Here, ‘*Manas*’ denote ‘Internal senses’ (*Antahkarana*) or self accompanied by *manas*. ‘*Karmatmanah*’ means senses or it may denote worldly souls^[9] Happiness, misery, nourishment, emaciation, weakness, strength, virility, sterility, knowledge, ignorance, life and death all these occur depending on the proper or improper sleep. Like the night of destructions, untimely and excessive sleep and prolonged vigil take away both happiness and longevity^[10] Sleep if properly enjoyed brings about happiness and longevity in human beings as the real knowledge brings about *Siddhi*(spiritual power) in a *Yogi*. During the summer in the day time one should sleep in an air cooled apartment. In the night, after having besmeared the body with sandal paste, one should sleep on the open airy roof of the house which is cooled by the rays of the moon. Those who take proper sleep in proper time will not suffer from disease, the mind of them will be peaceful, they gain strength and good complexion, good virility. Sleep used in the management of emaciation. Excessive, improper and sleeplessness leads to misery and finally to death. Proper sleep will make for happiness and long life just as the mind of

the sages became clear from the knowledge of the soul.

SLEEPING PATTERN

After taking dinner, one should walk for 100 steps before going to sleep, then one should lie down in recumbent posture up bed taking 8 times breath and should change the posture to right lateral till taking 16 times breath and thereafter to left lateral taking 32 times breath and then can sleep in any posture. But it is always advisable to sleep in left lateral because the *Agni*(digestive fire) lies in the left side of the body above the *Nabhi*(umbilicus) which is responsible for the digestion^[11]

TIME SUITABLE TO WAKE^[11]

Though the duration of sleep is not directly mentioned in the Ayurvedic classics but indirectly it can be understood by the verse given by *Acharya Vagbhata*, one should wake up in the *Brahmamuhurta* which is 48 minutes before sunrise following the proper digestion of food taken at night.

SUITABLE PLACE TO SLEEP

Effect of different kinds of beds used for sleeping on health has been described in details as follows:

1. **Anukula shayya (Comfortable bed)** : It is considered good for proper sleep, nourishment, pleasure, relieves tiredness, pacifies the vitiated *Vata* and aphrodisiac.
2. **Bhumishayya (On ground)** : it can pacify the vitiated *Vata*, nourishes human body gives strength and aphrodisiac.
3. **Khatva (Cot)** : Causes vitiation of *Vata*.
4. **Darupatta (Wooden planks)** : it is unctuous and highly vitiates *Vata*.
5. **Andolika (Hanging bed)** : It relieves tiredness, leads to long life, plumpness, aphrodisiac, alleviates vitiated *Vata*, decreases sweating, pleasing to mind.
6. **Talpa** : It helps to decrease weight. It is good for health of skin.

ABNORMAL SLEEPING PATTERN

(A) *DIWASWAPNA*: Sleep during the day time increases unctuousness in the body.

(B) *RATRAU JAGRANA*: Remaining vigil during night causes roughness in the body.

INDICATION OF DAY SLEEP:

Sleeping during the day time in all seasons is prescribed for those who are exhausted by singing, study, alcoholic drinks, sexual acts, elimination therapy, carrying heavy weight, walking long distance, those suffering from phthisis, wasting, thirst, diarrhea, colic pain, dyspnea, hiccup, insanity, those who are too old, too young, weak and emaciated; those injured by fall and assault, those exhausted by journey by a vehicle, vigil, anger and fear and those who are accustomed to day sleep. By this equilibrium of dhatus and strength are maintained and the *Kapha* nourishes the organs and ensures longevity. In summer season nights become shorter and *Vata* gets aggravated in the body due to *Adana kala*. Therefore, during this season, day time sleep is prescribed for all^[12]

CONTRA-INDICATIONS OF DAY SLEEP^[13]

Sleeping during the day time in the seasons other than summer is not advisable as it causes vitiation of *Kapha* and *Pitta*. Persons with excessive fat, those who are addicted to taking unctuous (flattering, oily, groveling, creepy) substance, those with *Slaishmika* constitution, those suffering from diseases due to the vitiation of *Kapha* and those suffering from *Dushi visha* (artificial poisoning) should never sleep during daytime. If one violates the prescription regarding day sleep, he should subject himself to *Halimaka* (serious type of jaundice), headache, timidness, heaviness of the body, malaise, loss of digestive power, *Hridayoplepa* (a feeling as if phlegm adhered to the heart), oedema, anorexia, nausea, rhinitis, hemicrania,

urticarial, eruption, abscess, pruritis, drowsiness, coughing, diseases of the throat, impairment of the memory and intelligence, obstruction of the circulating channels of the body, fever, weakness of sensory and motor organs and enhancement of the toxic effects of artificial poisons. So one should keep in view, merits and demerits of sleep in various seasons and situations, in order that it may bring happiness to him.

EFFECT OF *RATRI JAGRAN* (STAYING AWAKE AT NIGHT)

If a person keeps himself awake at night it causes roughness in the body. Keeping awake at night increases *Vata*, *Pitta*. This causes complaints like-

- Constipation
- Weakness
- Giddiness
- Lack of concentration
- Hyperacidity
- Burning of eyes, hands and feet

If due to unavoidable reasons person has to keep awake at night, he should sleep next morning, 4-5 hrs before having food.

INDICATIONS FOR KEEPING AWAKE AT NIGHT

1. Persons with *Kapha* constitution and *Kapha* disorders
2. Obese persons
3. Persons who are poisoned
4. Persons taking diet rich in fat

MODERN VIEW

Physiology of sleep

When mind is fatigued then sleep occurs. According to Howell, sleep is due to cerebral ischemia. Cerebral cortex is the seat of higher centres like pre and post central gyrus and associated area etc. which have the correlation with mental activities described in Ayurveda. So due to the reduction in cerebral blood supply mind becomes calm that causes sleep^[14]

Physiological effects of sleep:

Acharya Charak explains that in the night, *Hridaya* (Heart) gets contracted and the

Srotasa (the channels of circulation) as well as the *Koshtha* (the gastro-intestinal tract) are contracted, the body elements get softened^[15] According to modern view, sleep causes two major types of physiological effects,

- Effects on the Nervous System itself.
- Effects on the other structures of the body.

Regulation of sleep

During wakefulness, the brain is kept in an alert state by the interactions of two major systems of nerve cells, in the upper part of the pons and in the midbrain, which makes acetylcholine as their neurotransmitter (NT) sends inputs to the thalamus to activate it. It in turn activates the cerebral cortex and produces a waking Electroencephalography (EEG) pattern. However, during Random Eye Movement (REM) sleep, the cholinergic nerve cells, thalamus and the cortex are in a condition, similar to wakefulness but the brain is in Random Eye Movement (REM) sleep. The difference is supplied by three sets of nerve cells in the upper part of the brain stem: The brain stem cell groups that control arousal are in turn regulated by two groups of nerve cells in the hypothalamus. One group of nerve cells, in the ventrolateral pre-optic nucleus, contains inhibitory NT (neurotransmitter) and GABA. The major influence on sleep cycle is the body's circadian rhythm, the supra-chiasmatic nucleus. These nerve cells in the hypothalamus contain clock genes, which go through a biochemical cycle of almost exactly 24 hours sleep, hormones and other bodily functions^[16]

Depth of sleep

The depth of sleep is not constant during the sleeping period, but varies from hour to hour. In most adults, sleep deepens rapidly to the end of the first hour, after which it lessens sharply for a time, and then more slowly till the time of waking. Generally, sleep taken during the

daytime is lighter than that during the night^[17]

DISCUSSION:

The important observation made during the study – Sleep is directly connected with mental state. Ayurveda emphasized that *Sharira* and *Satva* both interact with one another in all sphere of life. Sleep is particularly relevant to psychiatric illness and frequently part of diagnostic criteria for specific disorders.

In today's era, people are not getting plenty hours of sleep because of busy life schedules and overload, as a result, work hours have engaged the time of sleep. Tension also contributed its share in reducing the sleeping time. If a healthy not getting proper sleep, he will become a patient. It is not a serious problem in the start. But later on it leads to number of health nuisance and ailments.

CONCLUSION:

All is well if someone sleeps well. To combat the lifestyle disorders and lead a healthy life, ideal *Nidra* plays an important role. Thus it is observed that the person have sufficient sleep according to the age, climatic, physical etc factor can attain positive energy and enthusiasm to perform work. And ultimately lead to a better and healthy life. Sleep is a chief nourisher at life's feast. It occurs due to increased *Tamoguna*. During sleep anabolism is active and catabolism relatively passive thus prevents body organs from damaged and repairs damage at cellular level. Thus sleep is essential for survival. Our *Acharyas* have already explained *Nidra*, its maintenance, also *Anidra*, its causes, diagnosis and treatment.

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Conflict of Interest: Non

Source of funding: Nil

Cite this article:

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Ayurlog: National Journal of Research in Ayurved Science- 2020; (8) (4):01- 06