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Sleep, an imperative core of life - an ayurvedic approach

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Abstract

Ayurveda "Science of life" is a unique blend of science and philosophy that balances the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual components necessary for holistic health. Ayurved is becoming more and more acceptable globally as it is eco-friendly, toxicity free and cost effective due to its holistic approach. Its aim is to promote and preserve physical and mental health and cure of disease too. Ayurved has recognized *Nidra* as one of the most important dimensions of health associated with happiness and good health and is an outcome of relax mental state. The disturbance in *Nidra* might be related to the life style, environmental influence, mental tension, changed food habits and day to day stress which ultimately disturb the psychoneuro-biological rhythm of sleep. The aim of this conceptual article is to compile and re-evaluate the various principles related to different aspects of sleep (*Nidra*).

Keywords: Ayurveda, Sleep, *Nidra*, *Anidra*

1. Introduction

Ayurveda "Science of life" is a unique blend of science and philosophy that balances the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual components necessary for holistic health. Ayurveda was introduced to the earth so that man could enjoy a long and healthy lifespan.^[1] Ayurveda considers all the states, which are not pleasant in nature, to be disease: they cause suffering to mankind and any suffering is termed as a disease. For the living beings, it is an essential phenomenon for maintenance and restoration of both - body & mind. Thus, *Nidra* is a harmonious gift of nature. Man of this techno-world is trying to get overcome such harmonious features by elaborating his mental dimensions. But the biological clock which is mandatory for the well-being of human life's rhythm is not ready to recognize these upsetting created by him. Once this harmony is violated his sleep as well as total health is hampered, because sleep exactly runs according to biological clock. The importance of sleep is well accepted by modern science also because of its restorative, recuperative and resting actions to the living organisms.

Several types of principles have been described in Ayurveda.

Aahara (food), *Nidra* (Sleep) and *Bramhacharya* (Abstinence) are described to be the *Trayopastambas*^[2] (Three supportive pillars). Inclusion of *Nidra* in the three *Upastambha* proves its importance. While discussing about *Nidra*, the ancient Acharyas have stated that happiness and sorrow, growth and wasting, strength and weakness, virility and impotence and the knowledge and ignorance as well as the existence of life and its cessation depend on the sleep, a detailed description regarding the prevention, maintenance and treatment has been given. Some of the measures that have been advised can be followed in our day to day activities.

To re-evaluate, discuss, and elaborate the various Ayurvedic concepts and principles related to sleep and understand the health-related problems of the *Anidra*. This article is based on a review of Ayurvedic texts. Materials related to sleep (*Nidra*) *Anidra*, and other relevant topics have been collected. The main Ayurvedic texts used in this study are *Charak Samhita*, *Sushrut Samhita*, *Ashtang Samgraha*, *Ashtang Hridaya*, *Bhava Prakash* and *Sharangdhar Samhita*, and available commentaries on these. We have also referred to the modern texts and searched various websites to collect information on the relevant topics.

2. *Nidra*

Inclusion of *Nidra* in the three *Upastambha* (pillars) proves its importance. While discussing about *Nidra*, the ancient Acharyas have stated that happiness and sorrow, growth and wasting, strength and weakness, virility and impotence and the knowledge and ignorance as well as the existence of life and its cessation depend on the sleep (*Nidra*).

2.1 Etymological derivation of *Nidra*

The word *Nidra* is feminine formed by the prefix ni+dra+rak+ta. This is a state of nature which causes encapsulation to the consciousness of a person^[3].

2.2 Definition

Ever since modern people are unable to define it accurately from the time it is a question in every mind that what is sleep, how it occurs and what is its role in health. But the great sages of India had the perfect knowledge regarding the sleep.

The definitions are as follows –

Sleep is the mental operation having the absence of cognition for its grasp, Vyas while commenting *Patanjali Yoga Darshana* made a statement as “Sleep is a state of unconsciousness, but the consciousness remains about his own unconsciousness^[4].”

Charak affirmed that when the mind (as well as soul) gets exhausted or becomes inactive and the sensory and motor organs become inactive then the individual gets sleep^[5]. *Sushrut* described the sleep occurs when the *Hridaya* the seat of *Chetana* is covered by *Tamas*^[6] *Astanga Sangraha*, *Vagbhata* stated that - the *Manovaha Srotas* become accumulated with *Shleshma* and mind is devoid of sense organs because of fatigue, when individual falls asleep^[7].

2.3 Types of *Nidra*

Ayurveda has different opinions regarding the types of sleep. Basically *Nidra* can be classified into type's viz. *Svabhavika* (natural) and *Asvabhavika* (abnormal). Out of the former *Svabhavika Nidra* is regular every night, which offers beneficial effects for the living beings, whereas the later *Asvabhavika* is one can be due to different causes of pathological in origin.

Charak classifies the sleep condition into seven folds.

1. *Tamobhava Nidra*
2. *SleshmaSamudbhava Nidra*
3. *Manah Shrama Sambhava Nidra*
4. *Sharira Shrama Sambhava Nidra*
5. *Agantuki Nidra*
6. *Vyadhyanuvaritini Nidra*
7. *RatriSvabhava Prabhava Nidra*

2.4 Physiology of sleep (*Nidra*)

When *Manas* is exhausted then sleep occurs this phenomenon can be understood in this manner. According to Howell, sleep is due to cerebral ischemia. Cerebral cortex is the seat of higher centers like pre and post central gyres, association area etc., which have the correlation with mental activities described in Ayurveda. So due to the reduction in cerebral blood supply *Manas* becomes *Klanta* that causes sleep (*Nidra*)^[8]. Further, during sleep, *Indriyas* (both *Jnanendriya* and *Karmendriya*) become inactive by the detachment from their sense organs or from their work.

3. *Anidra*

By going through the previous description, it is quite evident that *Nidra* is not only an important but an essential phenomenon of life, which affects the body and mind equally in a favorable way when it is enjoyed in a rightful manner. Otherwise the inadequate *Nidra* leads to various problems like *Dukha*, *Karshya*, *Abala*, *Klibata*, *Ajnana* at last leads to death also^[9].

3.1 Pathophysiology –*Nidana Panchaka*

Nidana:

Charak mentions the causes for *Anidra* as *Eva eva cha vignevo Nidranashasyahetavaha*^[10] the factors are *Atiyoga* of *Vamana*, *Atiyoga* of *Virechana*, *Atiyoga* of *Nasyakarma*, *Atiyoga* of *Raktamokshana* and *Atiyoga* of *Dhoomapana*. Due to the excess use of these factors makes the *Vata* vitiation and *Anidra* is induced. *Ati Vyayama*, *Ati Upavasa* and *Asukha Shayaa* are the causatives of *Vata* vitiation, thus the *Anidra* is induced. *Atichinta*, *Atikrodha* and *Atibhaya* are the *Manasikakarana* leading to *Tama Kshaya* and *Rajo Vruddi* induces the *Anidra*.

Along with these, *Charak* considers, some others *Chikitsa* procedures of *Atinidra* as causative factors for *Anidra*, which are as follows - *Satvaudarya* (increased *Satwa*), *Tamojaye* (conqueror of *tama*), *Karya* (engaged in work), *Kala* (old age), *Vikara* (disease), *Prakriti* (personalities such as *Vata*) and *Vayu* (*Vata Dosha*) are the causes of *Anidra*.^[11] Further *Sushruta* has mentioned some extra *Nidana* factors which may cause *Anidra*; these factors are *Vata Vridhi*, *Pita Vridhi*, *Manastapa*, *Kshaya* and *Abhighata*.

Purvarupa:

Purvarupa is not mentioned for *Anidra* in any Ayurvedic classics.

Rupa:

In Ayurvedic classics some symptoms are mentioned due to holding up of sleep schedule. They are in the following table.

Table 1: Symptoms of *Anidra*

<i>Rupa</i>	<i>Charak</i>	<i>Sushrut</i>	<i>A. Hrudy</i>	<i>A. Samgraha</i>
<i>Jrumbha</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Angamarda</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Tandra</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Shiroroga</i>	+	-	-	-
<i>Shirogaurava</i>	-	+	+	+
<i>Akshigaurav</i>	+	+	-	-
<i>Jadya</i>	-	-	+	+
<i>Glani</i>	-	-	+	+
<i>Bhrama</i>	-	-	+	+
<i>Apakti</i>	-	-	+	+
<i>Vataroga</i>	-	-	+	+

Samprapti of Anidra

The schematic diagram of Samprapti of Nidranasha can be represented as follows:

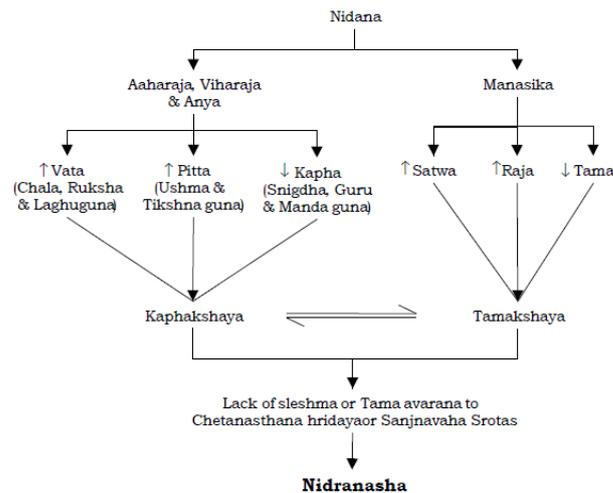


Fig 1: Samprapti of Nidranash

There are various theories regarding the pathophysiology of sleep in modern medicine, but we will limit ourselves to the Ayurvedic point of view. Growth, development, and maintenance of the anatomy and physiology of the body is completely dependent on four factors: *Kala* (time), *Swabhava* (nature), diet (which should be excellent in the terms of nutrients), and absence of obstructive factors in the growth and development of the body^[12].

Prevention of *Anidra* only the basic principles are described here. As previously stated, the process of sleep (*Nidra*) is totally dependent on diet and lifestyle.

Anidra can be prevented by including some important principles of *Dincharya* (daily regimen) in the daily routine, for example, *Anjana* (a type of eye treatment); *Abhayanga* (body massage),^[13] especially *Shiro-Abhayanga* (head massage);^[14] *Nasya* (oily nasal drops);^[15] *Sneha-Gandusha* (retaining of oil in the mouth);^[16] cleansing of feet and external orifices;^[17] exercise;^[18] and so on.

By following the other principles of *Swasthavritta* such as utilization of *Tryopastambha* (diet, sleep, and coitus) according to the rules;^[19] to bear suppressible urges (i.e., mental fluctuations) and to expel insuppressible urges (i.e., natural urges);^[20, 21] regular removal of aggravated *Dosha* according to *Ritu* (season) by *Panchakarma*;^[22] regular utilization of *Rasayana* (rejuvenating treatment) and *Vajikarana* (aphrodisiacs);^[23] following the principles of *Sadvritta* (social and personal ethics) and *Achara Rasayana* (ethics having effects of *Rasayana*), and so on^[24]. Taking a diet strictly in accordance with the prescribed rules^[25].

3.2 Management of sleep

It is a natural and *Yapya* (palliative) condition; it occupies the prime place among the *Yapya* diseases in the context of *Agryadravya* (foremost) described in *Charak sutrasthana* chapter 25^[26]. The following principles can be considered in this context:

- Keep the lifestyle as close as possible to the ideal prescribed by Ayurveda.
- Avoid the provocative causes of *Kshaya* (degeneration) and *Vata*, for example, excessive physical and mental work, vigorous exercise, tolerance of insuppressible urges,

intolerance of suppressible urges, and so on.

- Follow, as far as possible, all the rules regarding diet; take a *Laghu* (light) and *Santarpaka* (nutritive) diet.
- Follow the principles of *Sadvritta* and *Achara Rasayana*.^[27] Involve oneself in the Supreme Power (God) or the eternal truth by any means as it increases the level of *Satva* in mind. Thus all these things improve mental immunity.
- If any disease persists or manifests, take treatment promptly.

3.3 Treatment of Anidra

Some measures, which can be advised to the patient of *Anidra* or *Nidranasha*, are mentioned in Ayurvedic texts, are as follows:

- Maintaining regular time for going to bed.
- Avoid seeing excited pictures at night.
- Avoid smoking, tea, coffee or alcohol at night before going to sleep.
- Not indulge in any type of work or reading till late night.
- Should devoid of thoughts tensions before going to bed.
- Hearing soft music or favorite songs also induces sleep.
- 5-10 minutes meditation before going for sleep
- Offering prayer before sleep.
- Washing of hand, feet and face before goes to sleep.
- Avoid of excess coitus.
- Avoid of day sleep.
- Proper evacuation of stool and urine.
- Avoid mosquito bites.
- Maintenance of adequate privacy and free from disturbances.

There is no specific line of treatment mentioned for *Anidra* in our texts. Depending upon the *Chikitsa* mentioned is in different contexts, However, the methods described are practical and can be followed in this era, are either available or are effective, the lifestyle of the people is fast and busy, there is a low level of *Satva* or defective mental constitution, and so on.

As *Nidra* is said to be *Kapha* dominant process, it also maintains the equilibrium between three humors. In Ayurvedic

classics, it is mentioned that in the *Kaphajavikaras*, *Nidra* and *Tandra* are commonly seen and in *Vatajavikaras* sleeplessness occurs and in *Pittajavikaras* lack of sleep is one of the symptoms. The equilibrium of the *Dhatus* also depends upon the sleep. Proper sleep achieves the *Dhatusamyā*, the nourishment of the body, the increase of strength and the stability of life. When the decrease of *Rasa Dhatu* occurs, the sleep is diminished and the *Dhatus* get proper nourishment again only when the proper sleep is enjoyed. By the proper sleep the digestion power is properly mentioned and the *Agni* functions remain normal. The evacuation of the bowel and the emptying of the urinary bladder take place properly, if a person has slept well. The bad habits of waking at night and sleeping at day time have been stated to provoke all the three *Doshas*.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this conceptual article is to compile and re-evaluate the various principles related to different aspects of sleep (*Nidra*). Sleep is one of the basic instincts of life. Health and longevity is conquered by proper sleep. Ayurved has recognized *Nidra* as one of the most important dimensions of health associated with happiness and good health and is an outcome of relax mental state. The disturbance in *Nidra* might be related to the life style, environmental influence, mental tension, changed food habits and day to day stress which ultimately disturb the psychoneuro-biological rhythm of sleep. Various measures provided in Ayurveda can certainly help to overcome this situation. Avoiding causative factors is a must to tackle the condition more precisely with administration of herbs in single or compound form, having sedative activity.

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