



## Review Article

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### A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF NIDRA IN AYURVEDA

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#### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda recognizes Nidra (sleep) as one of the three foundational pillars of life, along with Ahara and Brahmacharya. It is described as a Tamas-dominant state important for facilitating physical and mental restoration. Nidra plays a crucial role in maintaining an individual's Swasthya (health) by promoting mental balance, nourishment, immunity, cognitive function, reproductive health, and longevity. Disturbances in sleep, including Ratrijagarana (night wakefulness), Diwaswapna (daytime sleep), and Anidra (insomnia), disrupt the balance of Doshas and predispose individuals to Sharirika (physical) and Manasika (mental) disorders. Ayurveda outlines preventive and therapeutic measures, such as Abhyanga (oil massage), Snana (bathing), appropriate diet, comfortable sleeping arrangements, and attention to emotional well-being, to restore and maintain healthy sleep patterns. The objective of this review is to systematically compile and analyze Ayurvedic concepts of Nidra, highlighting its definitions, Utpatti (genesis), types, functions, circadian rhythm, and pathological conditions. A comprehensive assessment of classical texts, including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, and Ashtanga Sangraha, along with relevant peer-reviewed articles and modern research on sleep, was conducted. This provides an integrative understanding of Nidra, highlighting its role in health promotion and disease prevention.

**Keywords:** Nidra, Ayurveda, Sleep, Doshas, insomnia

#### INTRODUCTION

Sleep is an essential biological need for sustaining life and maintaining health. Ayurveda recognizes Nidra (sleep) as one of the three foundational pillars of life, along with Ahara and Brahmacharya. Nidra is described as a Tamas-predominant state in which the mind (Manas) and sensory organs (Indriya) withdraw from their respective objects and unite with the heart (Hridaya), the seat of consciousness. This withdrawal results in the cessation of pleasure-pain perception and allows physiological and psychological restoration in the form of Nidra. Ayurveda emphasize that proper Nidra ensures happiness, nourishment, strength, virility, intellect, and longevity, while its disturbance leads to multiple physical and mental disorders <sup>1</sup>. Due to many reasons, insomnia and other sleep disorders are recognized as major public health concerns worldwide. Clinically relevant insomnia affects approximately 16.2% of adults globally, with severe insomnia present in about 7.9%, i.e. over 850 million affected individuals worldwide <sup>2</sup>. Given the increasing prevalence of sleep disorders in modern society, studying the Ayurvedic concept of Nidra is highly relevant to understand its importance and its impact on our body. This review aims to systematically compile and analyze the Ayurvedic concepts of Nidra.

Ayurvedic texts like Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, Ashtanga Sangraha, relevant peer reviewed articles and journals on Nidra were assessed. In addition to this modern textbooks and research articles regarding sleep were studied.

#### Nidra

The term Nidra is derived from the root Dra with the prefix Ni. The root Dra denotes desire, and Nidra represents a state devoid

of desire <sup>3</sup>. Thus, Nidra signifies a condition where sensory and mental desires are withdrawn. Nidra is described using various synonyms across texts such as Shayana, Swapna, Svapah, Sushupti, Bhutadhatri, and Vaishnavi Maya/Vishnu Maya, reflecting its nourishing and sustaining nature. <sup>4,5</sup>

Various definitions of Nidra are mentioned in Ayurveda. Acharya Charaka defines Nidra as a state occurring when the intellect, mind, and sensory organs become inactive due to exhaustion <sup>6</sup>. Acharya Sushruta describes Nidra as the covering of Hridaya by Tamas Guna, leading to loss of awareness <sup>7</sup>. Patanjali considers Nidra a distinct mental state characterized by absence of cognition or a stage of unconsciousness <sup>8</sup>. Acharya Vagbhata says Nidra occurs when the mind is deprived of sense organs and the Manovaha Strotas are filled with Shleshma. <sup>9</sup>

**Nidra Utpatti** - Nidra occurs when the Mana and Indriya become fatigued and withdraw from their Vishaya <sup>10</sup>. The dominance of Tamas Guna and Kapha Dosha plays a central role in sleep initiation. According to Chakrapani, fatigue leads to temporary inactivity of the mind (Manas) and soul (Atma), resulting in the initiation of sleep. Although the senses remain inactive, the mind continues subtle activity, giving rise to dreams (Swapna). This temporary withdrawal allows rest, rejuvenation, and essential mental processing necessary for overall well-being.

**Functions of Nidra** - Nidra performs several vital functions essential for maintaining overall health and well-being <sup>11</sup>. It promotes Sukha, enhancing mental happiness and emotional balance, and supports Pushti and Bala, which improve nourishment, strength, and immunity. Nidra also maintains Vrishata, ensuring reproductive health and hormonal balance, while enhancing Jyana, which improves cognitive functions,

learning, and memory. Furthermore, it sustains life and Jeevana (longevity). Acharya Sushruta further highlights that Nidra contributes to improved Varna (complexion), increased enthusiasm Utsaha (enthusiasm), effective tissue Dhatu Poshan (nourishment), and overall Dhatu equilibrium<sup>12</sup>.

#### Types of Nidra- Comparative Correlation According to Different Acharyas

Different Acharyas have classified Nidra. Although the terminologies differ, they have conceptual correlation among the classifications proposed by Acharya Charaka, Acharya Sushruta, and Acharya Vagbhata. Understanding these correlations helps in differentiating physiological sleep from pathological forms.

**Physiological/ Swabhavika Nidra-** Acharya Charaka describes Ratri Svabhava Prabhava Nidra as the natural sleep occurring at night due to the influence of time (Kala) and Kapha dominance. Acharya Sushruta correlates this with Vaishnavi Nidra, which is Satva-dominant and nourishing<sup>13</sup>. Acharya Vagbhata terms this physiological sleep as Kalasvabhavaja Nidra, emphasizing its occurrence according to the natural circadian rhythm. All three Acharyas unanimously consider this type of Nidra as Bhutadhatri, meaning life-sustaining and nourishing. It promotes Dhatu Samya, Bala, Varna, Ojas, and longevity, and is considered essential for maintenance of health.

**Kapha and Tamas Predominant Nidra -** Acharya Charaka's Shleshma Samudbhava Nidra arises due to Kapha Vriddhi, producing Guru, Snigdha, Shita, and Sthira Gunas, resulting in excessive sleep and lethargy<sup>14</sup>. Acharya Vagbhata describes a similar condition as Kapha Prabhava Nidra, while Acharya Sushruta includes this under Tamasi Nidra.

When Kapha predominance is associated with its increased Tamas Guna, Acharya Charaka classifies it as Tamobhava Nidra, Acharya Vagbhata also uses the same term, and Acharya Sushruta also recognizes it under Tamasi Nidra. These types are pathological in nature.

**Nidra Due to Physical and Mental Exhaustion -** Acharya Charaka's Mana-Sharira Shrama Sambhava Nidra results from exhaustion of the mind and body. Acharya Vagbhata correlates this with Dehakheda Prabhava Nidra (physical fatigue-induced sleep) and Chittakheda Prabhava Nidra (mental fatigue-induced sleep). Acharya Sushruta considers such Nidra under Vaikariki Nidra, which occurs due to Vata aggravation and Kapha depletion.

**Nidra Associated with Disease Conditions -** Acharya Charaka describes Vyadhyanuvaritini Nidra as sleep occurring secondary to disease. Acharya Vagbhata correlates this with Aamaya Kheda Prabhava Nidra, where Nidra arises due to systemic illness and Ama accumulation. Acharya Sushruta includes disease-related sleep disturbances under Vaikariki Nidra. This form of Nidra is considered an adaptive response of the body to illness, however, its quality and duration are dependent on disease severity and Dosha involvement.

**Agantuki Nidra -** All three Acharyas acknowledge Agantuki Nidra, which arises due to external causes such as trauma, injury, poisoning, intoxication, or sudden shock. Acharya Charaka and Acharya Vagbhata clearly use the term Agantuki, while Acharya Sushruta considers it under Vaikariki Nidra. This type of Nidra is pathological and often regarded as Arishta Lakshana, especially when associated with loss of consciousness.

Acharya Charaka describes Aagantuki Nidra and Tamobhava Nidra as Arishta Bhuta, indicating death. Acharya Sushruta's

Tamasi Nidra and Acharya Vagbhata's Tamobhava Nidra represent deep unconsciousness occurring in terminal conditions where Tamas Guna overpowers Satva and Rajas completely. Such Nidra reflects severe obstruction of consciousness and Strotorodha, and is considered life-threatening.

#### Summary of Correlation of Nidra according to different Acharyas

Acharya Charaka	Acharya Sushruta	Acharya Vagbhata
Ratri Svabhava Prabhava	Vaishnavi	Kalasvabhavaja
Shleshma Samudbhava	Tamasi	Kapha Prabhava
Tamobhava	Tamasi	Tamobhava
Mana-Sharira Shrama Sambhava	Vaikariki	DehaKheda ,Chitta Kheda
Vyadhyanuvaritini	Vaikariki	Aamaya Kheda
Aagantuki	Vaikariki	Agantuki

This comparative understanding highlights that despite terminological variations, all Acharyas describe Nidra through a unified framework of Dosha and Gunas and etiological factor.

**Circadian rhythm and Nidra-** Ayurveda visualises circadian rhythm through the principles of Dosha Kala, Dinacharya, and Ritucharya. The 24-hour day is divided into Kapha, Pitta, and Vata dominant Kaal, each influencing the physiology of body. Nidra is initiated during Kapha dominance Kaal i.e. in the early part of the night, which facilitates heaviness, mental calmness, and sensory withdrawal necessary to induce Nidra. Modern circadian cycle similarly explains that sleep onset is regulated by the suprachiasmatic nucleus and melatonin secretion<sup>15</sup>. Misalignment with these natural rhythms, such as late-night wakefulness or irregular sleep pattern, results in Dosha imbalance and circadian rhythm disorders.

**Nidra and Dosha Sambandha -** The three Doshas, Vata, Pitta, and Kapha significantly influence the quality, duration, and timing of Nidra. Kapha Dosha, with Guru, Snigdha, Shita, and Sthira Gunas, naturally promotes sound and deep sleep. However, Kapha Vriddhi results in Ati-Nidra, lethargy, heaviness of body, and excessive daytime sleep<sup>16</sup>. The intensity and control of metabolic and cognitive processes are influenced by Pitta Dosha, which is dominated by Agni Mahabhut and Tikshna (sharpness). Pitta predominance frequently results in light and intermittent sleep, trouble falling asleep because of an active mind, or nighttime awakenings. Pitta Vriddhi also leads to Alpanidra<sup>17</sup>. Vata Dosha controls movement and nerve system function. When aggravated, Vata results in erratic, inadequate, or disrupted sleep, frequently accompanied by anxiety, restlessness, and vivid dreams<sup>18</sup>. Thus, insomnia or fragmented sleep are more common in people with a Vata dominant Prakriti. Vata vriddhi leads to Nidranasha.

**Nidra, Diwaswapna and Ratrijagarana -** Acharya Sushruta highlights that Nidra should ideally be taken at night (Ratri Nidra), while Diwaswapna (daytime sleep) should generally be avoided due to its Tridosha-prakopaka nature. However, he allows Diwaswapna in Ardhmatra (half the duration of nighttime wakefulness) empty stomach for individuals who have undergone Ratrijagarana. Diwaswapna causes Kapha aggravation leading to Snigdhatva, while sleeping in sitting postures do not produce excessive Rukshata or Abhishtyandata.

Despite its general contraindication, classical texts permit Diwaswapna in specific physiological and pathological conditions such as in singers, students engaged in continuous study, those carrying heavy loads, travellers, persons with

injuries, the aged, children, women, and patients suffering from Trishna, Atisara, Shula, and Hikka. These conditions are broadly characterized by Vata Doshha aggravation, where Diwaswapna helps restore balance by producing Snigdghata. During Grishma Ritu, due to excessive dryness and Vata aggravation, daytime sleep is permitted to counteract the Ruksh Guna. Prolonged Ratrijagarana diminishes Kapha Doshha and leads to aggravation of Vata and Pitta Doshhas, resulting in disturbed sleep patterns. From a modern physiological perspective, the early part of nocturnal sleep is dominated by deep NREM sleep, especially slow-wave sleep, which is essential for tissue repair, immune regulation, hormonal balance, and metabolic restoration. Chronic Ratrijagarana reduces slow-wave sleep, increases sympathetic nervous system activity, and disrupts circadian cycle, closely aligning with the concept of Vata-Pitta Prakopa as described in Ayurveda.

**Asamyaka Nidra as a predisposing factor for Vyadhi -** Asamyaka Nidra, includes Ratrijagarana, Ati-Nidra, and Diwaswapna, which acts as a major Nidana for numerous Sharirika and Manasika Vyadhis. These disturbances arise due to Ayoga or Atiyoga of sleep thus disrupting Doshhas balance. Modern science also recognizes chronic sleep deprivation, circadian rhythm disruption, irregular sleep-wake cycles, and excessive daytime napping as significant risk factors for metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular diseases, impaired immunity, and cognitive dysfunction, thereby supporting the Ayurvedic view that Nidra plays a key role in health and disease. Ratrijagarana is a causative factor for Vatarakta, Shiroroga, Vata Vyadhi, Udavarta, and Shula<sup>19</sup>. Diwaswapna combined with Guru, Snigdgha, and Madhura Ahara leads to Atisthulata, Medoroga, Kustha, Arsha, Rakta Dushti, and Urustambha<sup>20</sup>. Nidra Vega Dharana results in Vata Prakopa. Anidra is described as one of the Vataja Nanatmaja Vyadhi. Both Sharirika factors (Ativyayama, Upavasa, Shodhana Atiyoga,) and Manasika factors (Chinta, Krodha, Bhaya, Shoka), all lead to Vata-Pitta vitiation and disturbed sleep.

**Measures promoting Nidra -** Ayurveda promotes Nidra-vega Dharana Chikitsa for a healthy sleep. Acharya Charaka recommends Abhyanga, Snana, Utsadana, intake of Mamsarasa, consumption of Shali rice with curd, milk, ghee, and wine<sup>21</sup>. Supportive measures include Savahana, Akshi Tarpana, Shiro Lepa, Vadana Lepa, and sleeping on a clean, comfortable bed. Acharya Sushruta advises similar measures for Nidranasha, emphasizing Shiroabhyanga, nourishing diets prepared from Shali rice, sugarcane derivatives, milk, Mamsarasa, Mamsa of Viskira and Bileshaya animal, and intake of grapes, sugar, or sugarcane products at night<sup>22</sup>. Acharya Vagbhata adds psychosocial and emotional factors in sleep promotion. He states that affectionate embrace, a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, adherence to ethical and religious conduct, and satisfaction with one's life contribute significantly to achieving sound sleep.

## DISCUSSION

The present review highlights the Ayurvedic perspective of Nidra as one of the Trayopastambha essential for sustaining life. Ayurveda describes Nidra as a Tamas-predominant state supported by Kapha Doshha, in which the Mana and Indriyas withdraw from their respective objects. There are multiple functions of Nidra, including Sukha, Pusthi, Bala, Jyana, and longevity, which aligns with the function of sleep according to Modern science related to tissue repair, immune regulation, hormonal balance, and memory consolidation during sleep. The classifications of Nidra described by Acharya Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata though expressed using different terminologies

demonstrate a strong conceptual similarity based on Doshha, Guna, and etiological factors.

The concepts of Doshha Kala and Dinacharya, provide a framework for understanding circadian rhythm regulation. Proper nocturnal sleep during Kapha-dominant hours is advised, while disturbances such as Ratrijagarana and inappropriate Diwaswapna are identified as causes of Doshha imbalance, particularly Vata-Pitta Prakopa. Modern research similarly associates chronic sleep deprivation and circadian rhythm disruption with metabolic, cardiovascular, and neuropsychological disorders. Nidra-promoting measures described in Ayurveda, including dietary regulation, lifestyle modifications, sensory comfort, and psychosocial well-being, offer a preventive and integrative approach, highlighting the importance of Nidra in overall health and disease prevention.

## CONCLUSION

Nidra is a physiological process essential for physical health, mental well-being, and longevity. Ayurvedic literature provides a comprehensive and systematic understanding of Nidra, its origin, functions, regulation, and disorders. Following Ayurvedic guidelines for proper sleep timing, avoiding improper sleep (Asamyaka Nidra), and maintaining healthy lifestyle and diet can prevent sleep disorders and support overall well-being.

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