

**EXPLORING THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF NIDRA: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO
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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a holistic health system that emphasizes the balance between body, mind, and spirit. Sleep, or Nidra, is central to this philosophy, serving as a gateway to physical rejuvenation, spiritual awakening, and holistic healing. The three pillars of life are Ahara (diet), Nidra (sleep), and Brahmacharya (celibacy), forming the foundation of holistic well-being. This study explores the concept of "Nidra" (sleep) from various perspectives, focusing on its significance in Ayurveda and spiritual discourse. It delves into its derivation, definition, physiological mechanisms, types, classifications, and spiritual implications from ancient texts, classical Ayurvedic literature and contemporary research. Nidra, derived from Sanskrit roots, is a state of rest, sleep, and detachment from desires. Ayurvedic luminaries like Acharya Charak and Acharya Sushruta explain Nidra as a disengagement from sensory perceptions, often influenced by Dosha imbalances, fatigue, or external factors. Nidra, a concept influenced by Dosha imbalances, tiredness, external factors, diseases, and night, is crucial for spiritual growth, self-realization, and transcendence. Its spiritual dimensions are explored, resembling states of consciousness in Upanishads. The study also explores Yoga Nidra, a Yogic relaxation technique known for its benefits on stress reduction, sleep quality, focus, and emotional healing. It uses systematic exercises, guided visualizations, and mindfulness techniques to promote deep relaxation. The study highlights the connection between Nidra, physical health, mental well-being, and spiritual evolution, providing insights for therapeutic interventions and personal transformation. The study's complexities are based on Ayurvedic and spiritual perspectives.

KEYWORDS: Nidra, Sleep, Ayurveda, Spiritual health, Holistic rejuvenation, Dosha.**INTRODUCTION**

In Vedic and Puranic literature, "Nidra" or sleep is frequently mentioned, often symbolically. It is sometimes personified as a deity or described as a state necessary for rejuvenation in the Vedas, where hymns invoke sleep's healing powers. Puranic texts often use sleep metaphorically to depict ignorance or delusion, clouding spiritual knowledge. Characters experiencing deep sleep during their spiritual quests symbolize inner reflection or transformation. Additionally, tales of divine beings transcending sleep highlight their spiritual superiority and freedom from worldly constraints. Although not extensively detailed in these texts, sleep's symbolic role in narratives and philosophical discussions underscores its significance in both physical and spiritual dimensions. In ancient times, Yogis such as Arjuna and Lakshmana mastered the control of sleep, achieving their objectives without apparent health repercussions. Today, the practice of Yoga Nidra has gained popularity for its profound benefits on human health. Understanding the concept of Nidra, the factors influencing it, and its role in

maintaining health is essential for harnessing its full potential.

The verse "Nidra Santushti Sukham," which translates to "Contentment is happiness in sleep," illustrates that true happiness and contentment stem from peaceful, restful sleep, essential for physical and mental satisfaction. Another principle emphasizes balanced living: adequate sleep at night combined with active, disciplined days leads to good health, whereas excessive daytime sleep can result in poor health. This highlights the importance of a proper sleep-wake cycle for overall well-being.

In the Bhagavad Gita, sleep is not a primary focus, but it is discussed in the context of maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Lord Krishna advises moderation in sleep, eating, and recreation as part of the path to spiritual equilibrium. He also describes sleep as a symbol of detachment: while most people are engaged in daily activities, spiritually awakened individuals find true awareness during the night, using it as a time for

detachment from worldly distractions. Though not extensively covered, these excerpts from Vedic and Ayurveda scriptures reflect a broader understanding of sleep's crucial role in sustaining health and fostering spiritual growth.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Study the fundamentals of Nidra.
2. To explore the spiritual dimensions of Nidra as elucidated in ancient scriptures and spiritual traditions.
3. To investigate the role of Nidra in promoting physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.
4. To explore traditional and contemporary techniques for cultivating a deeper and more meaningful experience of Nidra for spiritual growth and self-realization.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Materials Primary resources

Keeping in the view of the functionality and utility of

Nidra on human body, Brihatrayee along with their commentaries and other classical literatures had been included under primary sources.

Secondary Resources

Articles, Peer reviews, previous thesis papers and internet sources had been considered under secondary resources. The key word "Nidra" was used in online search.

Derivation of Nidra

1. The word "Nidra" is derived from the Sanskrit root "Nidi kutsyaayaam" by adding "rak" which means to lie down, rest or sleep. It is a state of sleep or slumber.^[1]
2. Nidra is derived from the root "Dra" with a prefix "N". The root "Dra" means undesired. Therefore, Nidra is considered as state in which there will be no desire.^[2]
3. The term Nidra origin as-nindyate iti Nidra. (Shabdakalpadrum)

Definition of Nidra and its physiology according to Ayurveda

Table 1: Definition of Nidra and its physiology according to Ayurveda.

1. Acharya Charak	According to Acharya Charak, Nidra is a unique mental state in which there are no Indriyas connected to the intellect. Both physical and mental exhaustion contribute to the disengagement from "Bahya Vishaya." ^[3]
2. Acharya Sushruta	According to Acharya Sushruta, when Tamoguna invades Hridaya, Chetana has his seat there and receives Nidra. The story of Nidra is illustrated by the illustration of a lotus flowering and shutting its petal around itself. Nidra occurs when Tamas and Shleshma enter the heart, forcing the heart to slow down its operations. ^[4]
3. Ashtanga Samgraha	When a person falls asleep, the Manovaha Srotas combine with Shleshma, and the mind becomes bereft of sensory organs due to weariness. ^[5]
4. Bhel Samhita	Nidra occurs when Shleshma and Tamas enter the ears and eyes. During sleep, only prana, mind, and Agni are active. Indriyas may also be active depending on the sleep cycle. ^[4]
5. Sharangdhar Samhita	Mentions that aggravation of Kapha Dosha and Tamoguna lead to Nidra. ^[5]
6. Acharya Chakrapani Datta and Gangadhara	Exhaustion or inactivity of mind (together with Aatma) and the sensory and motor organs causes the individual to sleep. ^[6]
7. Kaidev Nighantu	An increase in Kapha Dosha results in strotorodha, which leads to Nidra. Klama to Indriya and Mana causes Indriya to resign from their "Vishaya", resulting in Nidra. ^[7]
7. Mandokya Upanishad	The condition of Nidra is characterised by Susupti, or the absence of dreams and desires in the "Atma." ^[5]
8. Yogasutra	"Abhavpratyayavalambana vrittir Nidra". Sleep is a mental condition in which a person has lost all experience with anything. ^[8]

Synonyms of Nidra^[9]

Table 2: Synonyms of Nidra.

S.No.	Name of books	Synonyms of Nidra
1.	Amarkosha-	Shayanam, svapah, svapnah, samvesh.
2.	Vaidyak shabd sindhu-	Sambhashah, suptih, swapanam.
3.	Acharya Charak	Bhutadhatri
4.	Acharya Sushruta	Vaishnavi Maya.

Types of Nidra

Various Acharyas classified Nidra on the basis of their causes. These are.

Table 3: Types of Nidra.

1. According to Acharya Charak (7 Types)^[1]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tamobhava-Due to Tama 2. Shleshma samudbhava-Due to Kapha Dosha 3. Manah shramasambhava-Due to tiredness of mind 4. Sharira shramasambhava-Due to tiredness of body 5. Agantuki-Due to external factors. 6. Vyadhyanuvaritani-Due to diseases 7. Raatrisvabhavaprabhava--Due to nature of night.
2. According to Acharya Sushruta (3 Types)^[5]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vaishanavi Nidra- This particular kind of Nidra is typical and is divine energy that supports human life. 2. Vaikariki Nidra- Occurs as a result of Dosha and aggravated Vata Dosha, or additional ailments that impact the body and mind together. 3. Tamasi Nidra- appears as a result of Tamoguna's influence and causes unconsciousness at the moment of death.
3. According to Laghu Vagbhata (4 Types)^[5]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mithyayogaroopa-Untimely sleep 2. Atiyogaroopa-Sleep with more duration 3. Hina yogaroopa-improper sleep 4. Samyak yogaroopa-timely with concern duration
4. According to Vriddha Vagbhata (7 Types)^[1]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kala svabhava-Naturally occurring Nidra 2. Amaya-Due to diseases 3. Chittakheda-Due to tiredness of mind 4. Dehakheda-Due to tiredness of body 5. Kaphaja-Due to Kapha Dosha 6. Agantuja-Due to external factors 7. Tamobhava-Due to predominance of Tamas
5. According to Dalhana-(3 Types)^[6]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tamasi-When Sangyavaha Strotas become filled with Shleshma dominated by Tamoguna, Tamasi Nidra produced 2. Svabhaviki-Occuring daily for every person 3. Vaikariki-Occuring due to troubles of body & mind
6. Different Acharya have classified Nidra based on different criterias. However, two broad types can be defined as follows.^[6]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Swabhavika (Natural)-Occurs regularly at night 2. Aswabhavika (Abnormal)-Caused due to different diseases

Types of Nidra based on Spiritual Science and its effect on Body and Mind.^[1]

The Ancient Ayurveda Texts and various Acharyas describes types of Nidra based on the effect of Sharirika and Mansika Dosha on Nidra which further effects the body and Mind. These can be understood as follows.

1. Satvika Nidra: Calm, purity, and clarity are its distinguishing characteristics. Typically represents a balanced state of the Doshas. It is distinguished by a harmonious balance of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha, resulting in superior sleep quality, deep relaxation, rejuvenation, a sensation of well-being upon awakening, and spiritual well-being.

2. Rajasika Nidra: Symptoms include restlessness, excitement, and active dreaming. Often related with a Pitta Dosha imbalance, which results in increased mental activity, restlessness, and difficulties falling asleep. Pitta dominance can cause agitation in the mind as well as an increased proclivity for vivid or horror dreams.

3. Tamasika Nidra: Characterized by extreme sleepiness, heaviness, and lethargy, all of which indicate an intensified Kapha Dosha. Imbalances in Kapha can cause longer periods of sleep, difficulties and lack of energy in waking up, and a sense of lethargy or dullness throughout the day.

Characteristics of Nidra according to Mansika Dosha.

Table 4: Characteristics of Nidra according to Mansika Dosha.

Manasika Prakriti	Characteristic features
Satvika Prakriti	Sleep occurs in midnight as there is slight reduction in Satva Guna and increases in Tamoguna. (4-6 hours of sleep)
Rajasika Prakriti	Animittav (without any cause), Aniyat kala (untimely sleep) (8 hours of sleep)
Tamasika Prakriti	Although, Nidra occurs due to Tamoguna, but here due to excessive accumulation of Tamas leads to Tamasika Nidra. (10-12 hours of sleep)

Effect of Satvik, Rajasik, and Tamasik Foods on Sleep and Body^{[10][11]}

Bhagvata Gita classifies food into three main categories

called Satvika Ahara, Rajasika Ahara, and Tamasika Ahara on the basis of their effect on Triguna of mind as they influence sleep, physical and mental health also

spiritual well-being.

1. Satvika Foods

Satvika foods, including fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, and dairy, are light, pure, and conducive to spiritual practices. They promote mental clarity, tranquility, and harmony, are easily digestible, and provide sustained energy. Satvik foods also promote restful sleep by reducing stress and anxiety, supporting the body's natural healing processes during sleep.

2. Rajasika Foods

Foods classified as Rajasika, such as those that are spicy, greasy, processed, contain caffeine or alcohol, and can disrupt sleep cycles and agitate people. When consumed right before bed, it might cause heartburn, indigestion, and discomfort, which can exacerbate sleep difficulties. An imbalance in the body-mind complex and persistent sleep problems could be caused by a diet high in

Rajasika.

3. Tamasika Foods

Tamasika foods, including processed and stale foods, are heavy, dull, and lacking in vitality. They induce lethargy, inertia, and fatigue, making it difficult to maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle. Consumption before bedtime can cause nightmares, disturbed sleep, and unease upon waking. These foods are believed to cloud the mind and inhibit spiritual growth and awareness. Long-term consumption can lead to chronic health issues like obesity, digestive disorders, and mental health imbalances.

Prakriti and their Influence on Sleep Patterns^[12]

Ayurveda categorizes individuals into three primary body types, known as Dosha s: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Each Dosha has distinct characteristics that influence various aspects of life, including sleep patterns.

Table 5: Prakriti and their Influence on Sleep Patterns.

Shareerika Dosha	Swabhavika Avastha	Vridhhi Avastha	Kshaya Avastha
Vata Prakriti	Less and disturbed sleep (6-7 hours of sleep)	Loss of sleep (Nidra Nasha)	
Pitta Prakriti	Moderate sleep (7-8 hours of sleep)	Less sleep (Alpa Nidra)	
Kapha Prakriti	Sound sleep (8-9 hours of sleep)	Excess sleep (Atindira/Tandra)	Prajagarana

By adopting lifestyle practices and dietary habits that align with their Dosha, individuals can cultivate restful and rejuvenating sleep experiences tailored to their unique constitution.

Mandukya Upanishads and States of Consciousness^[13]

Upanishads are the store house of Psychological material. In the Mandukya Upanishad, Nidra is intricately linked with various states of consciousness. The texts outline four primary states.

1. Jagrat (Waking State): People in this situation are completely conscious of and involved in their everyday environment.

2. Swapna (Dreaming State): People are asleep and dreaming in this state, which is a reflection of their subconscious.

3. Sushupti (Deep Sleep State): The absence of dreams is the defining feature of this state. It is essential for the body's and mind's healing processes and is frequently linked to profound serenity.

4. Turiya (The Fourth State): Beyond the first three, this transcendent state is characterized by an awareness that exists outside of inward or outward emphasis, signifying pure existence and unity with the divine.

A thorough study of Nidra, is essential for self-awareness and spiritual awakening. Mastering Nidra means going above sleep patterns to be awake and conscious, like in the higher stage of Turiya, where ultimate reality and divine consciousness are realized, as exemplified by

characters like as Arjuna and Lakshmana.

Acharya Charaka on Nidra as Adharniya Vega^[14]

In Ayurveda, as detailed in the Charaka Samhita, Nidra is classified among the "Adharniya Vega" or essential urges that should not be suppressed. This classification highlights the essential role of sleep in maintaining both physiological and mental health. Charaka cautions that neglecting the natural urge to sleep can lead to a variety of health issues, disrupting both physical well-being and mental clarity.

Spiritual Enrichment through Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra, a state mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures, like the Upanishads and Mahabharata, is associated with Lord Vishnu's meditative sleep during the intervals between cosmic cycles. It evolved into a contemporary form in the 19th and 20th centuries, combining Western relaxation techniques. Dennis Boyes introduced the concept in 1973 with his book "The Yoga of Waking Sleep," focusing on attentive awareness of various body parts. Swami Satyananda Saraswati refined Yoga Nidra in the mid-20th century with guided meditation and relaxation methodologies.^[15]

Yoga Nidra, or Yogic sleep, is a deep relaxation technique rooted in ancient Yogic traditions. It involves guided exercises like body scans, breath awareness, visualization, and mindfulness to systematically relax the body, release tension, and calm the mind.^[16]

Yoga Nidra is a meditation technique that offers numerous benefits, including stress reduction, improved sleep quality, enhanced focus, self-awareness, and emotional healing. It is often used to manage mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and PTSD.^[17]

Importance of Nidra

1. Nidrayatam Sukham Dukham Pushti Karshya Balabalam.

Vrishta Klibata Gyanam Agyanam Jivitam Na Cha. (A. Hr. Su.7/53).^[18]

Nidra plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, including happiness, unhappiness, physical health, sexual strength, impotence, knowledge, ignorance, longevity, and mortality. Proper sleep enhances happiness, physical health, and lifespan, while inadequate sleep can lead to unhappiness, poor health, weakness, impotence, ignorance, and a shortened life. This shloka is essential for spiritual growth.

i. Understanding the Influence of Nidra

In order to promote general well-being and spiritual advancement, the verses emphasise the critical function that sleep plays in both the physical and spiritual facets of life.

ii. Sukha and Dukha

Proper sleep, or Samyak Nidra, is associated with happiness (Sukha), while insufficient sleep, or Asamyak Nidra, can result in misery (Dukha). From a spiritual point of view, a calm and happy mind, fostered by sound sleep, is favourable to inner happiness and emotional equilibrium, which promotes spiritual development.

iii. Physical Health and Vitality

Proper sleep supports physical health and spiritual growth, fostering vitality and enabling deeper engagement in practices like meditation and yoga.

iv. Cognitive Abilities and Spiritual Knowledge

Adequate sleep enhances cognitive abilities (Gyan) and mental clarity, facilitating deeper contemplation and spiritual insights crucial for spiritual evolution and enlightenment.

v. Ignorance and Spiritual Awakening

Inadequate sleep fosters ignorance, obstructing spiritual progress by clouding the mind and hindering awareness of reality, highlighting the need to prioritize rest for spiritual clarity.

vi. Longevity and Mortality

Proper sleep promotes longevity (Jivita), while insufficient sleep may shorten lifespan (Ajivita); a balanced lifestyle, including adequate rest, preserves vital energy (Praana) and allows more time for spiritual practice and self-realization.

2. Sleep in Spiritual Practice: Bhagavad gita Insights

nātyāśhnatastu yogo 'sti na chaikāntam anaśhnataḥ
na chāti-svapna-śhīlasya jāgrato naiva chārjuna (BG 6.16).^[19]

There is no possibility of one's becoming a Yogi, O Arjuna, if one eats too much or eats too little, sleeps too much or does not sleep enough.

yā niśhā sarva-bhūtānām tasyām jāgarti sanyamī yasyām
jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśhā paśhyato muneh(BG 2.69).^[20]

What all beings consider as day is the night of ignorance for the wise, and what all creatures see as night is the day for the introspective sage.

In the Bhagavad Gita, sleep is indeed not the primary focus of discussion, but it is addressed within the broader context of leading a balanced and spiritually fulfilling life. Lord Krishna's teachings encompass various aspects of human existence, including sleep, and offer guidance on how to integrate it into one's spiritual practice.

yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta-cheṣṭasya karmasu
yukta-svapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā (B.G. 6.17).

Those who are temperate in eating and recreation balanced in work, and regulated in sleep, can mitigate all sorrows by practicing yoga.

i. Moderation in Sleep and Lifestyle

Lord Krishna emphasizes moderation in life, including sleep, eating, and recreation. He warns Arjuna that excessive or inadequate sleep can hinder spiritual progress. Maintaining a balanced lifestyle, ensuring sleep is neither neglected nor excessively indulged in, is crucial.

ii. Symbolism of Sleep as Detachment

Sleep is used in the Bhagavad Gita to represent the detachment from worldly distractions that Lord Krishna speaks of in Bhagavad Gita 2.69. This highlights how important sleep is for spiritual development and introspection, in contrast to the daytime activities that are more focused on the material world.

iii. Broader Understanding of Sleep

The Bhagavad Gita's teachings align with Vedic and Ayurveda perspectives on sleep, acknowledging its importance in health and spiritual growth. Ayurveda, for instance, considers sleep as one of the three pillars of life, alongside diet and celibacy, highlighting its significance in overall well-being.

DISCUSSION

The topic of "Nidra" or sleep is fascinating as it touches upon various aspects of human existence, including physiological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

Let's delve deeper into some key points.

Physiological Understanding: Ayurveda offers a unique perspective on sleep, viewing it as a dynamic state influenced by the balance of Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and the quality of consciousness. Understanding the physiological mechanisms behind sleep can help us appreciate its role in maintaining overall health and vitality.

Psychological Insights: Sleep isn't just a physical phenomenon; it also profoundly affects our mental well-being. Different types of Nidra, such as Satvika, Rajasika, and Tamasika, reflect the state of mind and Dosha dominance. Exploring how sleep impacts cognitive functions, emotional regulation, and overall mental clarity is crucial for understanding its significance.

Spiritual Dimensions: In many ancient traditions, sleep is regarded as more than just a biological necessity; it's seen as a gateway to deeper states of consciousness and spiritual growth. The Mandukya Upanishad, for instance, outlines four states of consciousness, with Nidra representing a state of profound rest and rejuvenation. Understanding the spiritual aspects of sleep can offer insights into practices like meditation and mindfulness. Sleep is considered more than a mere physiological need; it is seen as an opportunity for inner exploration and communion with the divine. The Bhagavad Gita, for example, discusses the symbolism of sleep as a time for detachment from worldly distractions, emphasizing its importance in maintaining spiritual equilibrium.

Practical Applications: Integrating the wisdom of Ayurveda and ancient scriptures into our daily lives can enhance our understanding of sleep and its importance. Practices like Yoga Nidra, mindfulness meditation, and conscious relaxation techniques offer practical tools for improving sleep quality, reducing stress, and promoting holistic health.

Self-Awareness and Balance: The classification of Nidra based on Doshas and Gunas prompts self-reflection. Recognizing our predominant Doshas and mental tendencies can guide us in maintaining balance. For instance, if experiencing Rajasika Nidra characterized by restlessness, we can explore practices like meditation or calming rituals to restore equilibrium. This introspective aspect underscores the importance of self-awareness in promoting holistic health.

Challenges and Opportunities: While sleep offers immense opportunities for spiritual growth, it also presents challenges in today's fast-paced world. Factors such as stress, digital distractions, and sleep disorders can disrupt the quality of sleep and hinder spiritual practices. In addressing these challenges, spiritual seekers are encouraged to cultivate a conducive sleep environment, establish bedtime rituals, and prioritize

self-care practices that promote relaxation and inner peace.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of Nidra or sleep, from Ayurvedic and spiritual perspectives highlights its profound significance in promoting holistic well-being. Ayurveda recognizes sleep as fundamental for physical health, mental clarity, and spiritual harmony, considering its impact on bodily functions and mental states. Understanding Nidra in relation to Doshas, Gunas, and Prakriti allows for tailored lifestyle choices. Meanwhile, spiritual texts like the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita emphasize sleep's role in self-awareness and inner peace, with practices like Yoga Nidra showcasing its transformative power. Embracing the significance of sleep from both perspectives enables individuals to cultivate vitality, clarity, and inner peace in their lives.

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