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A Review on Nidra: Understanding It Through the Lens of Vega

Dr. Sandeep S. Achar* Dr. Abhinesh* Dr. Surekha Kamath** Dr. Vidyadhish Kashikar***

*Presently, P.G.Scholars, Department of Ayurveda Samhita & Maulik Siddhant, NIA (DU), Jaipur

**Presently, P.G.Scholar, Department of Roganidana & Vikritivijnana, NIA (DU), Jaipur

***Presently, Asst. Professor, Department of Ayurveda Samhita & Maulik Siddhant, NIA (DU), Jaipur

Abstract

Introduction:

Sleep is a crucial biological function, occupying nearly one-third of a human's life. It is essential for physical, mental, and emotional well-being, offering the body an opportunity to rejuvenate. Modern lifestyles often neglect sleep, despite its importance, posing risks to health.

Materials & Methods:

This review explores the concept of nidrā in Ayurveda, specifically in the context of Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya. Ayurveda texts were examined for references to sleep's role in balancing the tridoṣa, focusing on conditions like anidrā and jāgaraṇa.

Results:

In Ayurveda, nidrā is regarded as one of the three pillars of health alongside food and celibacy. Improper sleep patterns lead to the vitiation of doshas, with vāta aggravated by anidrā, and kapha and pitta imbalanced by divāsvapna. Treatments for sleep disorders, such as nasya and dhūmapāna, are suggested at specific times to enhance efficacy.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Both ancient Ayurveda and modern scientific perspectives emphasize sleep's essential role in health maintenance. Improper sleep patterns are linked to various health disorders, and balancing sleep is critical for overall well-being and disease prevention. Ayurveda's comprehensive understanding of nidrā complements modern health principles, highlighting the importance of restoring proper sleep habits to maintain physical, mental, and emotional health.

Keywords: Nidra, jāgaraṇa, divāsvapna, vegadhāraṇa, udīraṇa

Address for Correspondence:

Dr. Sandeep S. Achar., PG Scholar, Department of Ayurveda Samhita & Maulik Siddhant, NIA (DU), Jaipur **Email id:** 007.sssandeepachar@gmail.com.

Introduction

Considering that a person sleeps 7-8 hours a day, in full lifespan he would be spending about 26 years for sleeping and 7 years trying to sleep. This takes up almost one—third of our lives. Sleep is defined as unconsciousness from which the person can be aroused by sensory or other stimuli. [1] It is well known that sleep is much required to sustain physical, mental and emotional well-being. After all, it is during the period of sleep that our body replenishes itself. Even culturally and historically, sleep has been acknowledged as an important part of life. The current generation neglecting sleep for education, career, entertainment and other reasons are putting their health at great risk.

In Āyurveda, sleep has been discussed at great lengths with different terms including, but not limited to, nidrā, śayana or svapna. Nidrā is considered among non-suppressible urges or the adhāraṇīya vega. [2] It is also a part of the trayopastambha, along with āhāra and brahmacarya. [3] The discussion of nidrā vegadhāraṇa is seen briefly in the dedicated chapter; but it is not limited to the said chapters. The mentions of the same can be seen repeatedly throughout the texts in

various diseases, some of the procedures and even as a treatment. It becomes necessary to review all these references together, and related it with nidrāvega, so that it can be clinically applied with ease. Hence, a review of nidrā is done, from the text Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya, taking into account its role as a hetu, a lakṣaṇa and even as cikitsā.

Review of Nidrāvega

The concept of vegadhāraṇa is explored in Rogānutpādaniya adhyāya, the fourth chapter of Sūtrasthāna in Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya. The features of suppression of sleep are described as follows: moha (confusion), mūrdhākṣigaurava (heaviness of head and eyes), ālasya (sluggishness), jṛmbhikā (excessive yawning) and aṅgamarda (bodyache). The only treatments mentioned are Svapna (inducing sleep) and saṃvāhana (gentle massage).

Nidrā as a Hetu

Other than the diseases mentioned above, there are few more diseases that may occur due to suppression of the urge to sleep. The following are the instances from Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya where either suppression of nidrā or its induction/ excess sleep are mentioned as nidāna of a disease.

Table 1.1. References of nidrā as nidāna in various diseases.

Sl. No .	Reference in AH	Term related to Nidrā	Dhāraṇa/ Udīraṇa	Hetu of
1.	Su. 29/32	Divāsvapno	Udīraṇa	Vraṇe kaṇḍū-rāga-ruk-śopha-pūya
2.	Su. 29/33(1)	Jāgarāt	Dhāraṇa	Vraṇe raga
3.	Sha. 1/44	Akālaajāgarasvapna	Both	Garbhasrāva, garbhaśoṣa
4.	Ni. 1/14	Niśājāgara	Dhāraṇa	Vātaprakopa
5.	Ni. 1/17	Divāsvapna	Udīraṇa	Kaphaprakopa
6.	Ni. 10/3	Śayanam vidhivarjitam	Both	Prameha
7.	Ni. 13/26	Svapnajāgarām	Both	Śopha
8.	Ni. 15/47	Svapnajāgaraiḥ	Both	Ūrustambha
9.	Ni. 16/1	Vidhihīnam svapnajāgara	Both	Vātarakta
10.	Ni. 16/21	Nidrā-vidhāraṇaiḥ	Dhāraṇa	Udāna prakopa
11.	Ni. 16/26	Akālaśayanajāgara	Both	Samāna prakopa
12.	Ut. 2/44	Atyahaṣvapna	Udīraṇa	Arocaka-pratiśyāya-jvara-kāsa-śoṣa (bālaroge)
13.	Ut. 19/1	Atisvapnajāgaraiḥ	Both	Pratiśyāya
14.	Ut. 23/1	Atisvapna-prajāgaraiḥ	Both	Śiroroga
15.	Ut. 25/21	Divāsvapnād, rātrijāgarāt	Both	Vraṇa asādhyatva

Contraindications for divāsvapna and jāgaraṇa

As sleeping during the day is considered as the cause for many diseases, which has been depicted in the above table, it is also prohibited multiple times, along with waking during night hours. Such references are collected below.

Table 1.2. Contraindications related to sleep

Sl. No	Reference in AH	Term related to vega	Context
1.	Su. 2/1	Brāhme muhurta uttiṣṭhet	Dinacaryā
2.	Su. 2/14	Jāgarādhwāstrī...	Atisevana niśedha
3.	Su. 2/42	Sandhyāsu-abhyavahārastrī-svapna	Sadvṛtta-sandhyācaryā
4.	Su. 3/26	Divāsvapna	Vasanta-ṛtucaryā
5.	Su. 3/48	Ahaṣvapna	Varṣā-ṛtucaryā
6.	Su. 3/55	Divāsvapna	Śarad-ṛtucaryā

7.	Su. 7/60	Nāhani svapyuḥ	Grīṣme'pi bahumedaḥ- bahukapha-snehanitya
8.	Su. 16/27	Ahaḥsvapna	Snehaprayoge vihāraniyama
9.	Su. 22/17	Vivarjayeddivāsvapna	Mukhālepa-vihāraniyama
10.	Chi. 17/42	Svapnaṃ cārātrau	Śvayathu
11.	Ut. 16/65	Divāsvapnarātrijāgaraṇa	Netra-pathyam

Disrupted sleep in Lakṣaṇa

The pattern of sleep may vary because of underlying health conditions. Nonetheless, effects of sleep deprivation or excessive sleep will be reflected in the individual, on top of symptoms of the disease he is suffering from. Managing the issue of sleep disturbance is also important for social well-being of patients.

Table 1.3. Nidrā appearing as lakṣaṇa

Sl. No.	Reference in AH	Term related to Nidrā	Lakṣaṇa of
1.	Su. 11/ 6	Nidrendriya-bhraṃśa	Vātavṛddhi
2.	Su. 11/ 7	Alpanidratā	Pittavṛddhi
3.	Su. 11/ 8	Atinidratā	Kaphavṛddhi
4.	Su. 14/ 29	Nidrākṣayaḥ	Ati-laṅghana
5.	Su. 20/ 23	Sukha-svapna-prabodha	Snehanasya samyakyoga
6.	Sha. 5/ 68	Naiva nidrā	Nidrāviṣayaka riṣṭa
7.	Ni. 2/ 16	Jāgara	Vātajvara
8.	Ni. 2/ 24	Unnidratā	Vātapittajvara
9.	Ni. 2/ 27	Mahānidrā diva jāgaraṇaṃ niśi	Sannipātajvara
10.	Ni. 5/ 41	Śvāsarodho'lpa-nidratā	Vātajahṛdroga
11.	Ni. 5/ 43	Nidrā	Kaphajahṛdroga
12.	Ni. 5/ 50	Nidrākṣayaḥ	Vātajatṛṣṇā
13.	Ni. 5/ 53	Nidrā	Kaphajatṛṣṇā
14.	Ni. 6/ 16	Prajāgaraḥ	Madātyaya
15.	Ni. 6/ 18	Jāgara	Vātajamadātyaya
16.	Ni. 6/ 20	Nidrā	Kaphaja-madātyaya
17.	Ni. 6/ 22	Atinidratā	Dhvaṃsaka
18.	Ni. 6/ 29	Atinidrā	Viṣajamada
19.	Ni. 8/ 10	Nidrālu	Kaphaja-atīsāra
20.	Ni. 12/ 18	Nidrā	Śleṣmodara
21.	Ni. 13/ 35	Nidrā	Kaphajaśopha
22.	Ni. 13/ 54	Haret nidrām	Agnivisarpa

23.	Ni. 13/ 56	Duṣprabodho'śnute nidrām	Agnivisarpa
24.	Ni. 13/ 60	Nidrā	Kardamavisarpa
25.	Ut. 3/ 4	Prajāgarāḥ	Graharoga
26.	Ut. 3/ 11	Jāgara	Viśākhāgraha
27.	Ut. 3/ 13	Prajāgara	Naigameṣagraha
28.	Ut. 3/ 20	Rātrau prajāgarāḥ	Pūtanāgraha
29.	Ut. 3/ 23	Alpanidratā	Andhapūtanāgraha
30.	Ut. 4/ 14	Anidram	Devagraha
31.	Ut. 4/ 27	Naṣṭanidram	Rākṣasagraha
32.	Ut. 4/ 40	Bahunidram	Vetalagraha
33.	Ut. 4/ 41	Nidrālum	Pitṛgraha
34.	Ut. 6/ 13	Nidrā	Kaphaja unmāda
35.	Ut. 6/ 16	Jāgarūko	Ādhija unmāda
36.	Ut. 35/ 51	Svapna	Garaviṣa

Jāgaraṇa as a treatment

Although suppression of sleep is prohibited, it is not an absolute contraindication. There are specific conditions, where suppressing the urge of sleep and avoiding sleep altogether will prove beneficial to an individual. Such conditions are:

Table 1.4. Nidrā vegdhāraṇa as cikitsā

Sl. No	Reference in AH	Term related to Jāgaraṇa	Indicated in
1.	Su. 7/60	Naiva jātu niśāsvapi	Viṣārta- kaṅṭharogī
2.	Chi. 7/42	Jāgaraṇena	Śleṣmaja madātyaya
3.	Chi. 10/33	Niśi jāgarāḥ	Prameha
4.	Ut. 20/9	Tyajet bhṛṣam śayyām	Pratiśyāya

Nidrā in other procedures

In some of the processes, the due completion of sleep is given importance. Incomplete sleep, on the contrary, is considered as a contraindication in some procedures. All such points which relate nidrā to some procedures are enlisted below.

Table 1.5. Nidrā as a part of other procedure

Sl. No	Reference in AH	Term related to Nidrā	Context
1.	Su. 20/28	Niśānte	Pratimarśa-kāla
2.	Su. 21/4	Jāgarite	Dhūmapāna niṣedha

3.	Su. 21/6	Nisānte	Madhyamadhūma-kāla
4.	Su. 21/7	Nidrānte	Virechanadhūma-kāla
5.	Su. 22/26	Jāgare	Śirobasti viṣaya
6.	Su. 23/23	Jāgare	Añjananiṣedha
7.	Su. 23/24	Divāsvapte	Añjananiṣedha
8.	Ut. 39/10	Yuktasvapnaprajāgarah	Rasāyanayogya-puruṣah

Discussion

The diseases and the treatment mentioned under vegadhāraṇa of nidrā is very minimal. The same, when explored in the entire saṃhitā appears quite elaborate. Especially, since udīraṇa of any vega is not explained, we have to creatively imagine various scenarios and then establish it with evidence. Divāsvapna which is discussed in many places, has been considered as a form of udīraṇa of nidrā. This adds a lot of information about nidrā dhāraṇa and udīraṇa as hetu. After analysing the results of the review, it may be postulated that it is not only the suppression of urge that causes disease, but also the doṣa being manifested due to abnormal sleep. Vegadhāraṇa is a common hetu for vāta vṛddhi, [4] whereas divāsvapna leads to kapha-pitta vṛddhi. [5]

The same rationale is behind the consideration of nidrā as lakṣaṇa. Even when the disruption is caused due to some morbidity in the body, divāsvapna and jāgaraṇa, being snigdha and rūkṣa respectively, [6] add to this morbidity. Hence,

they have to be resolved accordingly.

The qualities attributed to sleep and wakefulness has also been utilized in planning the treatment. Most of the observations in table 1.4 include diseases caused due to morbid kapha. Rūkṣa jāgaraṇa, being the antagonist of snigdha kapha, helps to mitigate these diseases. Divāsvapna is also utilised as treatment, in conditions such as ajīrṇa, where the resulting śleṣmā nourishes the body, rather than harming it. [7]

Nidrā having an importance as part of some procedures is an interesting finding. In procedures such as nasya and dhūmapāna, time period after waking up from sleep is considered appropriate. Jāgaraṇa and divāsvapna both are contraindications for añjana.

A simple review of nidrā from one classical text of Āyurveda, proves its importance in maintaining a healthy state. The overall benefits of sleep have been summarized in one verse, saying the health and illness, nourishment and

malnourishment, strength and weakness, virility and impotency, clear and improper perception are all dependent upon the quality of sleep. [8] While some of them can be experienced immediately after a couple of nights of bad sleep, few effects are born out of chronic sleep impairments. This statement, made thousands of years ago is being proven in the current scientific world with experiments. It was found in rats that

sleep deprivation resulted in loss of weight, in spite of increased calory intake, and eventual death. [9]

Insomnia and excessive sleep are among the most common complaints physicians have to deal with, in their practice. Such reviews of the concept result in a better understanding of the concept and lead to a better practice.

References

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