

Ayurvedic Perspective of Nidra and its Influence on Dhi, Dhruti, and Smruti

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Abstract: *Nidrā (sleep) is regarded in Ayurveda as one of the Trayopastambha (three pillars of life), essential for maintaining the integrity of both body (Śarīra) and mind (Manas). Sound sleep nourishes the mind, stabilizes emotional functioning, and restores neurocognitive processes essential for Dhī (intellect/cognitive processing), Dhṛti (emotional regulation and self-restraint), and Smṛti (memory and recollection). According to classical Ayurvedic texts, Nidrā arises when the mind and senses withdraw from external stimuli, allowing the body to enter a state of repair and rejuvenation. The Caraka Saṃhitā describes sleep as a natural mechanism for replenishing vital energies, enhancing strength, complexion, immunity, and cognitive clarity¹.*

Ayurvedic theory correlates sleep with the functions of Kapha—especially Tarpaka Kapha—which nourishes the brain, enhances mental stability, and supports the consolidation of mental impressions. Disturbance in Nidrā leads to impairment of mental faculties, irritability, poor decision-making, memory deficits, and emotional instability, all reflecting defective Dhī, Dhṛti, and Smṛti. The modern neuroscientific understanding of sleep as a period of synaptic homeostasis, memory consolidation, emotional regulation, and glymphatic clearance complements classical descriptions, offering an integrated model of brain restoration.

This article presents a comprehensive Ayurvedic and modern scientific exploration of Nidrā, its physiology, types, and impact on higher mental functions. It further examines therapeutic strategies to improve cognitive faculties through the regulation of sleep. The alignment of classical Ayurvedic doctrine with contemporary neuroscience provides a holistic framework of understanding mental health rooted in physiological balance.

Keywords: Nidra, Dhī, Dhṛti, Smṛti, Ayurveda, sleep physiology, Tarpaka Kapha, Manovaha Srotas, cognition, memory consolidation

I. INTRODUCTION

Nidrā (sleep) is a foundational physiological process described in Ayurvedic and modern science as essential for homeostasis, neurocognitive functioning, tissue repair, and emotional balance. Ayurveda positions Nidrā as one of the *Trayopastambha*—the three supportive pillars of life—alongside Āhāra and Brahmacharya. Its disturbance affects all dimensions of health, particularly psychological functions related to cognition, judgment, emotional resilience, and memory¹.

Classical texts emphasize that sleep is more than physical rest; it is a vital state where the mind disengages from sensory input. Caraka defines the origin of sleep as:

“यदातुमनसिक्लान्तेकर्मत्मानःक्लमान्विताः।

विषयेभ्योनिवर्तन्तेतदास्वपितिमानवः॥”(C.S. Su. 21/35)¹

“When the mind becomes fatigued and the senses withdraw from their objects, man sleeps.”



The contemporary understanding of sleep parallels this view. Neuroscience recognizes sleep as an active neurophysiological process associated with memory consolidation, synaptic plasticity, emotional regulation, and glymphatic cleansing. Sleep deprivation leads to impaired attention, judgment, learning, and mental stability¹², similarly to what Ayurveda explains through disturbed *Dhī*, *Dhṛti*, and *Smṛti*.

Thus, exploring sleep through Ayurvedic and modern lenses offers insight into human cognition, decision-making, emotional control, and memory formation.

II. AYURVEDIC CONCEPT OF NIDRĀ

2.1 Definition of Nidra

Classical authorities clearly define the mechanism of sleep. As quoted above, Caraka states that sleep occurs when the mind becomes tired and withdraws from sensory objects¹. Sushruta also describes Nidra as a state of *Manas* and *Indriya* inactivity, produced by the increase of Kapha and heaviness in the body⁴.

Ayurveda conceptualizes sleep as a natural, mandatory physiological function arising from the interplay of:

- *Manas* (mind)
- *Indriyas* (senses)
- *Doṣas* (primarily Kapha)
- *Srotas* (channels of communication)

2.2 Types of Nidra

Caraka enumerates various types of Nidra depending on causation¹:

- TāmabhāvanītāNidra
- ŚleṣmaSamudbhavā
- ŚārīraŚramaJanitā
- Manasika ŚramaJanitā
- VyādhiAnubandhinī
- Āgantukī
- RātriSvabhāva Prabhāvā (natural sleep)

This categorization highlights physiological, psychological, pathological, and environmental factors affecting sleep.

2.3 Functions of Nidra

Caraka states that proper sleep promotes:

- Strength (Bala)
- Immunity (Ojas)
- Fertility and wellbeing
- Knowledge and clarity of mind
- Longevity

Sushruta adds that sleep refreshes the body, maintains mental stability, and supports the functions of the heart⁴.

2.4 Importance of Samyak Nidra

Caraka Su. 21/36 describes the beneficial effects of proper sleep²:

Enhances health, longevity, strength

- Nourishes tissues
- Improves complexion
- Supports intellectual and perceptual clarity
- Sustains mental and physical stability
- Impairment of sleep is associated with:



- Loss of happiness
- Weakness
- Cognitive dysfunction
- Diseases related to Vāta predominance

Thus, Samyak Nidrā is essential for normal functioning of *Dhī*, *Dhṛti*, *Smṛti*.

III. THE TRIVIDHA MANAS KARMA: DHĪ, DHRUTI, AND SMRUTI

Ayurveda describes three fundamental mental operations essential for cognition and conduct³:

Dhī (Intellect; Perception and Discrimination)

The ability to analyze, judge, understand, and make decisions.

Dhṛti (Retention; Emotional & Cognitive Restraint)

The power to restrain impulsive thoughts and actions—self-control, patience, emotional regulation.

Smṛti (Memory; Recall of Past Impressions)

Ability to store, consolidate, and retrieve experiences or knowledge.

These three together constitute healthy mental functioning. Any impairment in sleep directly disturbs these faculties, according to Caraka.

IV. PHYSIOLOGICAL BASIS: HOW NIDRĀ NOURISHES MENTAL CIRCUITRY

4.1 Manovaha Srotas & Nidrā

Manovaha Srotas—channels governing mental processes—require uninterrupted flow. Sleep restores their functioning by:

- Reducing sensory overload
- Allowing proper communication between *Indriyas* and *Buddhi*
- Stabilizing *Citta*

Disturbance in sleep vitiates Vāta, leading to unsteady cognition and memory loss⁸.

4.2 Role of Tarpaka Kapha and Nidrā

Tarpaka Kapha lubricates and nourishes the brain, supporting learning and recollection⁶. During deep sleep:

Synaptic pathways are nourished

Brain circuits rejuvenate

Impressions (*Samskāras*) consolidate

Mental fatigue disappears

Thus, Tarpaka Kapha is the Ayurvedic equivalent to neurochemical processes of sleep-dependent memory consolidation.

4.3 Role of Sāttvika Manas Bhāva

Adequate sleep increases Sattva:

- Enhancing clarity
- Improving judgment
- Stabilizing emotions

Reducing Rajas (restlessness) and Tamas (heaviness)⁷

This parallels modern findings on sleep regulating emotional centers of the brain.

V. NIDRĀ AND ITS INFLUENCE ON DHĪ, DHRUTI, AND SMRUTI

Effect on Dhī (Intellect)

- Enhances decision-making, attention, and problem-solving
- Poor sleep leads to inability to analyze, confusion, impaired judgment¹²



Effect on DHRUTI (Restraint)

- Promotes emotional stability and impulse control⁵
- Sleep deprivation increases irritability, emotional reactivity¹⁶

Effect on SMRUTI (Memory)

- Sleep consolidates memories, facilitates long-term retention¹⁴
- Lack of sleep disrupts recall, learning, and recognition¹³
- Thus, Nidra is the foundation for optimal intellectual, emotional, and memory function.

VI. AYURVEDIC MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE DHI, DHRUTI, AND SMRUTIVIA NIDRA

Ayurvedic tools include:

1. Nidrajanana Measures (Sleep Inducing):

- Ghee, Ksheer (milk), Ghrita formulations
- Shirodhara, Abhyanga, Padabhyanga
- Swedana (mild sudation)

2. Medhya Rasayana:

- Brahmi
- Mandukaparni
- Yashtimadhu
- Shankhapushpi
- Guduchi

These herbs improve memory, stabilize mind, and enhance cognition.

3. Lifestyle & Behavioral Guidelines:

- Regular sleep schedule
- Avoid daytime sleep in Kapha-dominant constitutions
- Reduce gadgets/bright light at night
- Practice Pranayama, meditation
- Avoid heavy food at night

VII. AYURVEDA & MODERN NEUROSCIENCE CORRELATIONS

Modern findings that support Ayurvedic concepts:

- Sleep supports attention, executive function, and emotional stability¹²
- Synaptic plasticity occurs during sleep¹³
- Memory consolidation is coordinated by slow waves, spindles, hippocampal ripples¹⁴
- Sleep facilitates glymphatic clearance of toxins¹⁵
- Sleep deprivation reduces cognitive performance and emotional control¹⁶
- Sleep protects long-term brain health and prevents neurodegeneration¹⁷
- Thus, modern neuroscience validates Ayurveda's insights into how sleep nourishes higher mental faculties.

VIII. DISCUSSION

Nidra is not merely a passive state; it is an active, restorative physiological process essential for mental and physical health. Ayurveda's descriptions precisely match contemporary neuroscience.

Dhi depends on prefrontal cortical functions—sleep enhances attention, working memory, and decision-making.

Dhrti aligns with emotional regulation; sleep stabilizes limbic circuits.

Smrti correlates with hippocampal-cortical consolidation occurring during deep sleep.

Tarpaka Kapha resembles neuro-glial nourishment, and ManovahaSrotas parallel neural communication pathways.

Both systems emphasize restoration and rejuvenation during sleep.



Sleep disturbance leads to systemic imbalance, cognitive decline, emotional instability, and memory impairment—exactly as Ayurveda described thousands of years ago.

IX. CONCLUSION

Nidrā is a vital physiological function essential for sustaining normal mental activities. Classical texts articulate sleep as a natural restorative mechanism for cognition, emotional stability, and memory. The trinity of *Dhī*, *Dhṛti*, and *Smṛti* depends profoundly on proper sleep. Modern neuroscience supports this through evidence on synaptic plasticity, emotional regulation, and memory consolidation during sleep.

Ayurveda offers comprehensive methods to restore sleep through diet, lifestyle, herbs, therapies, and mental purification. Integrating Ayurvedic principles with modern neuroscientific understanding enriches clinical practice and promotes holistic mental health.

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