



**THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF
ADEQUATE SLEEP FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF
'DHARMA' FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
ANCIENT INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AS
WELL AS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
*BHAGAVADGITA***

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the ancient Indian Knowledge System is the holistic development which encompasses the physical, mental and spiritual growth of everyone. The *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Dharmashastras*, *Ayurveda*, *Bhagavadgita*, *Yogasutra* and all the ancient Indian scriptures give importance on proper sleep to make a healthy life. It is universally truth that a healthy body can create a good thing. Again, a healthy body is formed by a good quality of food, drink and air. Likewise, desirable sleep is the most essential for a healthy body. So, it is the prior duty of every person to give attention about the health. In this context all aforesaid scriptures have a significant role for human wellbeing which is very relevant in modern lifestyle. Now-a-days most people are living in a busy schedule and majority of people are suffering from insufficient sleep. Inadequate sleep is so harmful for both mental and physical health as well as spiritual growth. The word 'Dharma' has very vast meanings- generally, it implies moral virtues or duties, customs, laws, rules, rituals, religious beliefs and practices etc. The ancient Indian knowledge system emphasized the concept of 'Dharma' which implies duties or moral code of



conduct. The proposed paper tries to highlight that proper sleep is not only necessary for good health, but also for performing Dharma and for achieving bliss or *ananda* from the perspective of Indian Knowledge System as well as with special reference to *Bhagavadgita*.

Key words: Indian Knowledge System, *Bhagavadgita*, Sleep, Triguna, Karma-Dharma.

Introduction:

Ancient Indian knowledge system is the perfect source to know about how can one live as a healthy person or how can an individual is holistically developed person. At present time it is seen that majority of people both the youngsters and adults are suffering from insufficient sleep or too much sleep. There are many reasons for that, such as, improper food habits, irregular diet system, either excessive workload or stress and no physical activity, uncomfortable bed, fear, anxiety, smoke, suppression of '*tamas*' so on and so forth. But many years ago, in ancient Indian scriptures our ancestors, gurus and sages mentioned some particular knowledge and remedies for every human being to make a healthy body and mind. And it is more relevant in modern period. For a good health adequate sleep is very important. Proper sleep makes a good health and brings happiness to human body. It can balance both the mind and the human body. The *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Dharmashastras*, *Ayurveda*, *Bhagavadgita*, *Yogasutra* and all the ancient Indian scriptures give importance on proper sleep to make a healthy life. The ancient Indian knowledge system emphasized the concept of 'Dharma' which implies duties or moral code of conduct. The proposed paper tries to highlight that proper sleep is not only necessary for good health, but also for performing Dharma and for achieving bliss or *ananda* from the perspective of Indian Knowledge System as well as with special reference to *Bhagavadgita*.

Methodology: The methodology of this paper is analytical.

Discussion:

The term sleep is called in Sanskrit as '*nidra*' or '*savpna*'. '*Atisvapna*' indicates excessive sleep (more than 10 to 12 hours in a day). Although sleeping is very essential for good health but in different ancient Indian scriptures states that everyone should be sleep less than 7 hours in a day (*SrimadBhagavadGita yathayath.p.303*).



Sleep plays a crucial role for balancing our health as well as spiritual development. In the Vedic hymns, sleep is considered as healing power. Deep sleep signifies inner transformation.

According to different ancient Indian scriptures, sleep is interrelated to physiology and psychology. There is no contradiction with mind and sense organs of human body. *The Caraka Samhita*, one of the ancient Indian sciences played a vital role on merits and demerits of sleep for good health and holistic development of human being. He said, when the mind, soul, sense organs and motor organs of human body are fully exhausted by different reasons then human body automatically inactive and gets sleep. Sleep is completely depending on the individual physiology and psychology.cf.,

Yada to manasi klante karmatmanah klamanvita /

Visayebhyo nivartante tada svapiti manavah // (Caraka Samhita, xxi.35)

Classification of sleep-

Sage Caraka had classified the sleep in seven categories for different reasons, such as---

- i) *tamas* of tri gunas(*satva*, *rajas* and *tamah*),
- ii) *kaphah* of tri dosas(*vata*, *pitta* and *kaphah*),
- iii) mental diligence,
- iv) physical exhaustion,
- v) *agantuka* (low chance of recovery ie., critical health condition),
- vi) high fever like *samnipata jvara*
- vii) and *ratri svabhava* (physiological sleep). Cf.,

Tamobhava slesmasamudbhava ca manahsarirasramasambhava ca/

Agantuki vyadhyanuvartini ca ratri svabhavaprabhava ca nidra// Caraka Samhita.xxi.58

Mental and physical diligence brings inactivity of the mind and the sense organs from their objects which are responsible for sleep.



Effect of sleep (good and bad)-

Any matter of the Universe is associated with both good and bad aspects. These two aspects are influenced by both inert organisms. Therefore, human society should pay attention to it in all areas. It is very true for all that everyone wants a healthy body. However, the appropriate qualities should be acquired for this healthy body. Just as a healthy body needs a balanced diet, limited sleep brings happiness, nourishment, strength, knowledge and longevity of human body cf.,

dehavrittou yathaaharastatha svapnah sukhou matah... (caraka.xxi.51).

On the other hand, insufficient sleep brings misery, weakness, ignorance and death. So, the excessive sleep and insufficient sleep both are not good for health. There are some indications mentioned by sage Caraka regarding sleep to make healthy body in *Caraka Samhita*. Though during day time sleep is not beneficial for healthy body but sage Caraka prescribed it for those people who are feel tired by singing, studying, taking alcoholic drinks, sexual acts, carrying overload, long walking, indigestion, injured, too thin, too aged, too little, weak and skinny; thirsty, suffering from diarrhoea, bronchial crises, singultus, mental, who are exhausted by long drive, anger, grief, and fear may sleep in day time. These types of people can sleep in day time and also in all seasons. At that time, the body is balanced by dhatus and energy is produced, again the slesma (*kaphah*) nourishes the organs and increased lifestyle. Sage Caraka specially mentioned day time sleep during summer. Because in summer season night becomes too short and *vata dosa* aggravated in the body and the body's fluids (*adana*) dry out. Therefore, day time sleep is prescribed for all cf.,

Gitadhyayanamadyastrikarmabharadhvakarsitah ...

trishnatisarasulartah svasino hikkinah krisah...

krodhasokabhayaklanta divasvapnocitasca ye...

dhatusamyam tatha hyesam balam capyupajayate...

grisme tvadanarukshanan vardhamaneca marute /

ratrinan catisangkshepahivasvapnah prasasyate // (caraka.xxi.39-43)



In another place of this chapter contradictions of day sleep is mentioned, which are depending on the strength and weakness of different factors of human body.

In *Chandogya Upanishad*, it is mentioned, in the condition of deep sleep, personal consciousness subsides and the self is said to be absorbed in the Highest Self. Speech, mind and senses rest. Only the breath is active. In dreamless sleep, buddhi or understanding remains in a potential condition and becomes active in the dream and waking states. (*The principal upanishads*, p. 456)

The *koshas* are considered as the energetic layers of one's body that surround one's soul. The *koshas* may awaken one's deeper states of awareness on the path to self-realization. The description of *koshas* is found in *Taittiriya Upanishad*.

There are five *koshas* or sheaths in which the Self is manifested as the ego or *jivatman*. The first of them consists of food (*annamaya kosha*). Other sheaths consist of *prana* or life (*pranamaya kosha*), *manas* or instinctive or perceptual consciousness (*manomaya kosha*), *vijnana* or intelligence (*vijnanamaya kosha*) and *ananda* or bliss (*anandamaya kosha*). (*The principal Upanishads*, p. 542)

Anandamaya kosha is associated with the state of dreamless sleep and Samadhi. Persons experiencing *Anandamaya kosha* are stable in behavior as well as firm in decision making. They are happy in every state of life and appreciate higher order of things and thinking like nature, prayers, meditation, and connection with God etc. They are self-realized persons. *Anandamaya kosha* is the layer of bliss in which there is the perfect balance, harmony and health. It is the key to realizing complete profound peace that leads to perfect health. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, it is stated that a student, Bhrgu, realizes that all layers of our existence emerge from *Anandamaya kosha*. It indicates that happiness is within us, and each one of us in our causal state is *Ananda* (bliss) embodied. At *Anandamaya kosha*, one can experience bliss continually when action-in-relaxation, selflessness and service attitude is to be practiced.

For improving our health or well-being it is essential to keep these five *koshas* in a good condition.

In *Mandukya Upanishad*, *nidra* or sleep is associated with different states of consciousness. They are – *Jagrat* (waking state), *Swapna* (Dreaming), *Sushupti* (Deep



sleep state) and *Turiya* (The Fourth state or transcendent state). Waking state is the outward moving consciousness and Dreaming state is inward moving consciousness. Among these states, *Sushupti* or deep sleep state is necessary for mind-body's healing processes. This state signifies deep serenity. In this state, the consciousness enjoys peace and has no perception of both external and internal objects. In deep sleep state, there is no desire, no thought, only knowledge and bliss can be found. There is no walking and dream experiences in this state of consciousness. Mastering *nidra* means go to the higher stage of *Turiya* or transcendental state where ultimate reality and divine consciousness are realized. In this state, there is no world of duality. In this state, one has a pure consciousness of Self or Absolute.

For Patanjali, sleep is that state which is lack of all activities of thought and feeling. In deep sleep state, the senses of perception stop to function because the mind at rest.

Svapna-nidra-jnana-alambanam va (1.38)

In his *Yoga-Sutras*, Patanjali mentioned that both dreaming and deep sleep state can help one to mentally stable and to focus.

Patanjali states that sleep occurs when the mind cognizes non-existence. Concentration of the mind during the day time can determine the quality of sleep. (1.10)

Sleep is related to *tamaguna* in the body. The people with the presence of *sattvaguna* had less sleep when compared to the ones with *tamaguna*.

According to *Skandhapurana*, it is mentioned that if we take *nidra* or sleep at proper time and in proper quantity, it increases our digestion power. In *Skandapurana*, the side effects of lack of *nidra* are also mentioned. Due to lack of *nidra*, one cannot digest food in a proper way. So, such person doesn't feel *Agnidipti* or appetite and taking the poor quality of food *Teja* or power doesn't enhance.

In *Padmapurana*, it is mentioned that swastha purusha or healthy person sleeps at proper time as well as wake up at proper time.



In the *Manusmriti*, it is described that the Surya or sun divides the ahuratra in two different parts. One is Ratri (night), which is reserved for the *Nidra* or sleep and the other is day time, which is reserved for indulging in karma or work.

In *Mahabharata*, it is stated that the individual who desire for a good health, should not awake at nights, sleeping in day time, laziness, addiction of bad things etc.

In *Paingala Upanishad*, it is mentioned that in the sleeping state the individual soul tired of all his inward or outward activities and enjoys his own bliss, enters his own nature. (*The Principal Upanishads*, p. 912)

In the Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha explained about “excessive and insufficient” sleep, and taught all living beings to practice in a diligent manner and keep away themselves from greed, hatred and ignorance.

Buddha told his lay disciples that sleeping after daybreak and being up all night would have a negative impact on their lives. (D. 111, 185)

Yoga Nidra or yogic sleep is considered as a meditation technique or deep relaxation technique which is found in ancient yogic traditions. It reduces one’s stress, depression, anxiety etc. It develops one’s sleep quality. It enhanced one’s concentration level. Developing self-awareness as well as emotional healing is possible due to this meditational technique.

The analysis of ‘sleep’ and ‘Karma-Dharma’ according to *Bhagavadgita*-

The *Bhagavadgita* is a part of the *Mahabharata* and it is considered as one of the most sacred books of the Hindus. It contains total eighteen chapters. The literal meaning of *Bhagavadgita* is ‘The Lord’s Song’. In the Karma Yoga of the Gita, Lord Krishna advised selfless actions. Here mentioned that knowledge is superior to action. Senses are superior to knowledge and (self) mind is superior to senses. So, controlling the mind, different practices are prescribed by the *Bhagavadgita*. These are namely, yoga and meditation, triguna (*satva, rajas* and *Tamah*), food habits and proper sleep etc. Sleep is very essential for maintaining discipline of human life. Insufficient sleep can create physical and mental diseases. Likewise, too much sleep is harmful to perform the action.



The *Bhagavadgita* says that without action no one can live a moment also, because karma is the best dharma of human beings.

The *Bhagavadgita* states that too much sleep arises from *tamah guna*. This type of sleep is to be treated as diseases. On the other hand, natural sleep (*ratrisvabhavaprabhava*) known as good sleep or '*bhutadhatri*'. Every human being is influenced by the three gunas (*satva, rajas* and *Tamah*) of nature (*prakriti*). *Tamah* guna is opposite of *satva* guna. The people who are influenced by the *tamah* guna may be facing in laziness, excessive sleep, anger, grief, fear and ignorance.cf.,

tamastvajnyanajam viddhi mohanam sarvadehinam /

pramadalasyanidrabhistanibadhanati Bharata // (Bhagavadgita.14.8)

So, lord Krishna gives advice to remove these *tamah* qualities through the practice of yoga. There are differences in the diet and work of a person with each quality. So, every action of human being is related with proper diet. Likewise, proper sleep is also indicating the quality of human body. It should be possible through the right practice of yoga or meditation. In the Gita (vi.16), lord Krishna says that those who have excessive food habits and excessive sleep cannot attain yoga. Yoga can refine mental and physical exhaustion and adequate sleep brings happiness and nourishment of human body.

Restful or comfort sleep is possible due to *satvik* food. It reduces one's stress and anxiety. During sleep *satvik* food helps natural healing processes of the body.

Rajasika food causes physical and mental health imbalanced. Due to high diet in *Rajasika* persistent sleep problems could be raised.

Due to *Tamasika* foods it is difficult to maintain a healthy sleep. It causes digestive problems, mental health imbalances etc. Even, Spiritual growth is not possible due to *Tamasika* food.

Conclusion:

From above discussion the proposed subject can prove that enough sleep does not only relieve fatigue, it helps to strengthen the human brain. The ancient Indian treatise describe that normal sleep is healthy and effective also. According to Yoga philosophy,



sleep is very important for a healthy body formation. According to *Ayurveda* and the *Bhagavadgita*, *tamas* are very sleepy. Too much sleep weakens the body and has a negative impact. Adequate sleep brings happiness. Because of it, physical health could be strong. On the other hand, inadequate sleep brings unhappiness and can lead a weak health. In modern time, people are very busy in different works. They are not conscious of the importance of sleep. As a result, life becomes unstable and stressful. Adequate sleep is helpful for righteous duties, good thinking and good decisions. Hence, lord Krishna said to Arjuna that proper sleep is beneficial for good action. It is recognized as the quality of *sattva guni*.

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