

## **Review Article**

### **Concept of Swapna (Dream): An Ayurvedic Perspective**

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**Abstract:** Ayurveda, a science which has stood the time test, it is unchanging and eternal. It has no doubt maintained its domain in the medical sciences. It deals all spheres of life, based on its sound fundamental principles. There are many theories and concepts such as Tridosha, Triguna, Panchamahabhuta, Loka-Purusha samya, Swapna etc. were explained by Acharyas in Ayurveda. The theories of Swapna were known since times memorial to all the ancient civilizations all around the world. In those times the literature on this concept was abundant and elaborated through mythology or mystic and in the linguistic excellence of that era. But concealed in this mythology, mystic, and the linguistic curves; were the hard core scientific facts and observations. Gradually with time the art and scientific literature involved with dreams was lost and with them those who could interpret them were also gone. Now a days it is not in clinical practice but it has its own significance in the field of medicine. According to modern science also Dreaming is biologically important.

**Keywords:** Ayurveda, Tridosha, Swapna, Dream.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Ayurveda being a medical science, the human body and its functions are topics of research. Dreams are also one of the functions of the human body in both the physiological condition as well as the pathological condition. Again there are certain concepts of Manas and Atma, whose descriptions and their role in the dream process is novel to the Ayurvedic science; and understanding the dream process provides a deeper insight into these concepts.

Dreams are described to depict the physical constitution and also the mental status of the person in the physiological condition. In the pathological condition it also signifies the disease condition, Arista. Sometimes the Laksanas of the disease do not seem to be very specific; at such times, the Dosha dominance in the Swapna, or the type of Swapna may lead to the diagnosis.

But now a days Swapna is not in clinical practice. As cited above all the ancient Ayurvedic scholars have given great importance to this concept right from birth to death in different context.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This article is based on a review of Ayurvedic texts. Materials related to Swapna and relevant topics have been collected. The main Ayurvedic texts used in this

study are Carak Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Samgraha, Ashtanga Hridaya, Bhela Samhita, Bhava Prakash and available commentaries on these. Other texts are also used to collect information about Swapna.

#### **HISTORICAL REVIEW**

Dreams have a long history both as a subject of conjecture and as a source of inspiration. Throughout their history, people have sought meaning in dreams or divination through dreams. They have been described physiologically as a response to neural processes during sleep, psychologically as reflections of the subconscious, and spiritually as messages from God or predictions of the future. Many cultures also practiced dream incubation, with the intention of cultivating dreams that were prophetic or contained messages from the divine.

The description of Swapna according to various classical texts, schools of thought and civilizations, both in oriental as well as western world are as follows:

#### **Veda**

The earliest Indian reference to dreams is in the Rig Veda (4000 or 6000 B.C.). It describes a nightmare, but it leaves ambiguous the question whether what is feared is merely the experience of the dream, i.e. the experience of having a bad dream or the content of the dream, i.e. the events in the dream and the implication

that it will come true. References regarding Swapna are also available in the Sam Veda. The significance of the content of the dream was the subject of the sixty-eighth appendix of the Atharva Veda composed in 1500 B.C.

### **Upanishads**

By the time of the Upanishads (700 B.C.) the question of the reality of dreams was approached in a more systematic way. These Upanishads spoke of four states of being: waking i.e Jagriti, dreaming (Swapna), dreamless sleep (Supta) and the supernatural, transcendent fourth state, (Turiya) the identity with Godhead. Other Upanishads added certain significant details to the outline of these four states mentioned above.

### **Puranas**

The Hindu Epics and Puranas also incorporated into their narratives many of the traditional dreams analyzed in the philosophical and medical texts. In Valmiki's Ramayana, when Sita had been stolen by the demon Ravana and is being held captive on the island of Lanka, the ogress Trijata has such a dream that symbolized the defeat of Ravana in the hands of Rama. Likewise the dreams of Bharata symbolizing the death of his father and that seen by Lord Hanumana also are described in detail.

In the Mahabharata the Swapna of the Kaurav signifying their defeat in the hands of the Pandavas is described just as that those of Parsurama and King Krtavirya heralding their success and defeat respectively.

### **Darsanas**

All the Astika Darsanas have described the Swapnawastha. Kanada defines dream-cognition as the consciousness produced by a particular conjunction of the self with the manas (mind) in co-operation with the subconscious impressions of past experience, like recollection. The commentators of Vaisesika Darsana namely, Prasastapada, Sridhara, Samkara Misra, Sivaditya and others also recognize the central origin of dreams similar to the original author. The ancient Naiyayikas also consider dreams as presentative in character. Gautama does not include dream cognition in recollection.

Patanjali in the Yoga Darsana also gives the description of Swapna when describing Prasanna Citta Sthairyopaya.

The Mimansakar also recognize the representative character of dreams. Kumarila Bhatta, Parthasarathimisa, etc, support this theory. Prabhakara regards the presentative character of dreams but adds the theory of obscuration of memory (Smritipramosa).

Among the Nastika Darsanas, the Bauddha texts also carry descriptions of the several significant dreams seen

by Lord Gautam Buddha before his enlightenment, and these were corroborated by the dreams of his father and wife on the night before his departure from the palace .

### **Samhitakala**

The Brihatrayi, i.e. Caraka Samhita, Susruta Samhita and Ashtanga Samgraha along with Astan'ga Hrdaya has mentioned Swapna. While each treatise has mentioned its importance as the Purvarupa in Arista Laksanas, Susruta has described specific dreams denoting the sex of the unborn child and along with both the Vagbhatas have mentioned it for assessing the Dosika Prakriti. Carakacarya who has given the in depth description of the Purusa or Atma, has also described Swapna as its Linga. He also states that the absence of Vaikrita Swapna is an indication of health, similar to the description among the Vikaropasamana Laksanas according to Susruta.

Among the Laghutrayi, Sarangdhara have also described Swapna in detail in the Purvardha. A considerable description of Swapna, specifically in the mother denoted the health of the child, is also seen in the Kasyapa Samhita. The other texts like Bhavaprakasa, Swapna is described in the Garbhaprakarana signifying the gender of the foetus, in relation to Prakriti, etc. In Madhava Nidana the description of Swapna is only pertaining to the Purvarupa of Rajayaksma.

### **Adhunika Kala**

As time advanced the description of Swapna has not been given much emphasis in the classics. With the advent of the British Empire and the influence of the Allopathic science over the traditional Indian sciences the philosophical and metaphysical concepts took a back stage. The science took a clinical outlook where the present health scenario and the new diseases took the centre stage. Hence not much description is available in the literature written in the Adhunika Kala.

### **CONCEPT OF SWAPNA**

Swapna literary means loss of touch or ignorance. It may be defined so because in Swapna, the most important requisite of Jnana i.e. Indriyarth Sannikarsa is absent. Hence it is also described as one of the four Avidyas by Vaisesika Darsana and the other Indian philosophical texts, i.e. Acc. to Gunagrantha Samsaya, i.e. doubtful knowledge, Viparyaya, i.e. contradictory knowledge, Anadhyavasaya, i.e. indeterminate knowledge and Swapna are the four types of Avidya.

Acarya Dalhana describes Swapna as:when the waking functions of the Manas are hindered in the Nidrawastha by the Tamas, at a stage when the Raja Guna increases and the Manas cognizes the Visaya as if in the waking state (albeit without any contact of the Arthas with the Indriyas) it is called as Swapna [1].

The Darsanikas described Swapnawastha as; during the waking phase that which is seen and heard creates wishes and wants in the mind of the person and are expressed as factual illusions in sleep. These are called as dreams [2].

**CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE AYURVEDIC CLASSICS**

Various scattered references of Swapna are available in the classics. If all these classifications are seen, and compiled, the following can be the probable classification criteria in a nut shell:

- The source and content of the dream,
- The efficacy of the dream,
- The effect of the dream,
- According to the person, who sees the dreams,
- Their utility in the Ayurvedic Chikitsasashtra &
- The doshika dominance of the dream.

Each of the classifications seems to be complete in their own sense as each of them analyzes different aspects of the same dream.

**Classification According to the Source and Content of the Dream**

Carakacarya [3] in his seven fold classification of the Swapna covers the waking experience, somatic impulses, imagination, and the influence of the supernatural. They are as follows

- Drista,
- Sruta ,
- Anubhuta,
- Prarthita,
- Kalpita,
- Bhabik &
- Doshaja [4]

**Classification According To the Efficacy of the Dream**

According to Carakacarya, these seven types of Swapna can be further divided into two;

- Aphala - those which do not have any impact on the person’s health or life.

- Phala – those which definitely have an impact on the person’s health or life.

**Classification According To the Effect of the Dream**

- Subha,
- Asubha [5]

**Classification According To the Person Who Sees the Dream**

These dreams can also be divided into those seen by the person himself and those seen by another person who may be associated to that person affected by the dream; e.g. The dreams of the mother heralding Subha and Asubha for the child as described in Kasyapa Samhita [6].

**Classification According To the Utility of the Swapna in Ayurvedic Chikitsasashtra**

Swapna have been described in many aspects in the classical texts, such as;

- Swapna denoting the Prakriti: they are again divided into Vataja, Pittaja, Kaphaja types.
- Swapna heralding the sex of the unborn child: They can be again divided into those Swapna signifying a male child and those signifying a female child. Just as described by Susrutacarya [7].
- Swapna specific for the Arista of each Vyadhi and those explained due to Skandhagraha, Naigamesa, etc. Graha Badha, according to Kasyapa Samhita [8].

**Classification According To the Doshika Dominance of the Dream**

Swapna denoting the doshika dominance like Vataja, Pittaja, Kaphaja etc .

**Duration of Result of Swapna**

Acharya Harita has given the duration of the result after seeing a dream:

Time of Seeing Swapna	Duration of Result
First part of night	One year
Second part of night	Six months
Third part of night	Three months
Fourth part of night or early morning	Ten days
During day time/ Rainy season	Six months

This kind of view is also given in the Bramhavaivarta Purana.

**SWAPNA ACCORDING TO PRAKITI**

With the exception of Carakacarya, the authors of all the other Samhitas have described specific Swapna in the description of Prakriti. The dominance of

a particular dosha in the Prakriti is considered responsible for the type of Swapna seen; and the Mahabhutas dominating the characters in the Swapna

are homologous to the Mahabhutas dominant in that particular Dosha. The Swapna described are as follows:

**Table 1: Vata Prakriti [9-11]**

Sl. No.	Swapna	S.S.	A. S.	A. H.	S.Sa.	B.P.	Bhela
1.	Flies or rises high in the sky	+	+	+	+	+	+
2.	Climbs trees or mountains	-	+	+	-	-	-
3.	Rides camels (animals)	-	-	-	-	-	+
4.	Dried and crooked trees and rivers	-	+	-	-	-	-

**Table 2: Pitta Prakriti [12]**

Sl. No.	Swapna	S.S.	A.S.	A.H.	S.Sa.	B.P.	Bhela
1.	Sees Gold	+	+	-	-	-	-
2.	Sees Palasha and Karnika trees	+	+	+	-	-	-
3.	Sees fire, falling meteors, lightning	+	+	-	-	-	+ (Only Fire)
4.	Red coloured sky	-	-	+	-	-	-
5.	Sees the sun	-	+	+	-	-	-
6.	Sees bright flames or light	-	-	-	+	+	-

**Table 3: Kapha Prakriti**

Sl. No.	Swapna	S.S.	A. S.	A. H.	S.Sa.	B.P.	Bhela
1.	Sees lotuses	+	+	+	-	-	-
2.	Sees birds like Hansa and Chakravaka	+	+	+	-	-	-
3.	Sees ponds	+	+	+	+	+	+
4.	Sees clouds	-	-	+	-	-	-

**Garbha Linga Dharana According To Types of Swapna**

Some Acharyas have described certain dreams which are seen by the pregnant woman, which specify

the sex of the child to be born. The objects seen in the Swapna are evaluated and classified as having masculine or feminine gender on the basis of which the classification is done.

**Table 4: Signifying Male Gender [13]**

Sl. No.	Swapna	C.S.	S.S.	A.S.	A.H.	B.P.
1.	Takes food and drink as that of a male	+	-	-	-	-
2.	Does activities as that of a male	+	-	-	-	-
3.	Sees Padma, Utpala, Kumuda	-	+	-	-	+
4.	Sees Amrataka etc. fruits denoting the male gender	-	+	-	-	+
5.	Sees such Padartha which denote the male gender	-	-	+	+	+

**Table 5: Signifying female Gender [14]**

Sl. No.	Swapna	C.S.	S.S.	A.S.	A.H.	B.P.
1.	Takes food and drink as that of a female	+	-	-	-	-
2.	Does activities as that of a female	+	-	-	-	-
3.	Sees flowers denoting female gender (Taruni-rose, Japa-shoe flower, etc.?)	-	+	-	-	+
4.	Sees fruits denoting female gender (Kadali-bananas)	-	+	-	-	+
5.	Sees such Padartha which denote the female gender	-	-	+	+	+

**Role of the Atma in Swapna**

Ayurveda accepts the opinion that Swapna is an attribute of the Atma, where in Carakacharya states Desantargati in Swapna to be one of the Laksanas of the Atma [16]. Further when proving the existence of Atma, Acharya Caraka categorically states, that it is one such entity which is responsible for Ahamkara (ego),

Phala (enjoyment of fruits), Karma (engagement in action), Desantargati (transmigration) and Smriti (memory) [17]. Swapna is also a type of Smriti (Yoga Darsana describes it to be a type of Smrti, i.e. Bhavita Smrti. Samkara Bhasya on Mimamsa Darsana also accounts the dream nature of recollection or Smriti. Hence Atma can be termed to be responsible for the

creation of Swapna [18]. Here though Atma is Akriyasila, it is still said to be the Karta and is responsible for Swapna, though only by itself it cannot be responsible for the manifestation of things.

#### **Role of Manas in Swapna**

In case of Swapna; though the initiator is the Atma, it is the Manas who is responsible for creating the dream images as Manas is the Kriyasila Tatva, in the machinery of knowledge perception. Hence the perception or non perception of knowledge is also attributed only to the Manas [19]. Among the two types of Sparsa described, i.e. Indriya and Manas, which are responsible for the Vedana, i.e. Sukha or Dukha [20]. Swapna can be grouped under the knowledge cognized by the Manas Sparsa, as here no external stimulus or tactual contact is expected during the process of creation of the dream. Whatever is thought of is automatically presented to and perceived by the mind. Hence it can be considered to be the most vital entity in the creation of Swapna.

#### **Role of Indriya in Swapna**

After Atma and Manas the Indriyas are comparatively the grosser entities. They are functionally divided into two types, the Jnanendriya and the Karmendriya. Five each, they are the perceptual faculty of the Sarira. During the process of dream cognition, the external Indriyas, i.e. Jnanendriyas as well as the Karmendriyas are in state of sleep or declined function. As Acharya Vagbhata states[21], the Indriyas do not have any specific function to play in the dream process, because the Manas also has withdrawn itself from the Indriyas, so no perception or transfer of knowledge is possible in the Supta or Swapnawastha. But if the representative theories of dreams are considered the cognition of knowledge in the waking state, giving rise to the memory which is stored and revived in dreams can be attributed to their perception by the Indriyas. In this state the Indriyas are withdrawn from their external Arthas, but the Suksma Indriyas can be still understood to participate in the process of Swapna even though their Adhithana is functionally asleep; and accordingly the dream is visualized.

#### **Role of Sarira in Swapna**

The Atma, Manas and Indriya are the subtle components of the Ayu, the fourth and the last component which is even more grosser and is the Asraya or abode for all the above three subtle components is the Sarira. Their optimum and specific combination is not only required for the sustenance of Ayu, but also for the generation of Swapna. The dream being a metaphysical process, the descriptions involving it are usually related to the Atma or the Manas or even rarer the Indriyas. The role played by the Sarira is usually sidelined.

In fact Sarira can be considered as one of the important factors as it is the nexus for the tools of the

dream. No dream can be seen only in the Spruk Sarira without a Pancabhautika Sarira, though the other three components are present.

#### **DISCUSSION**

To get the real worth out of a scientific compilation, it needs to be subjected to thorough discussion and analysis. The Acharyas have described at several places the relativity of the Swapna and the Prakriti of the person and is also considered as the physiological phenomenon. In the Indian as well as the western ancients traditions, the theories of Swapna available are entwined with religion and mythology; wherein they were considered to be premonitions or messages sent by God. But if these theories evaluated scientifically show a strong hint of psychotherapy, which was only modified to easily convince the god fearing people.

As per the definition of dreams, they are described to be a play of the mind that decides and conceptualizes what is seen in dreams. If such a theory is accepted and as is also seen in practical life, every dream that is seen by even the same person is different from the other in manifestation. Only at times the cause, basic happening, people, emotions, or its effects may be similar and only on its basis they can be classified.

Acharya Caraka has described seven types of Swapna. This classification was then followed by all the other Acharyas in the Ayurvedic texts. The criteria of classification consider not only the source of the dream, eg. Drista, Sruta, Anubhuta, Prarthita and Doshaja; but also effect of the dream, eg. Bhavika. In fact one dream may contain facts which have more than one source, i.e. might have some parts which were Drista, some which were Sruta and some Anubhuta and may still be in accordance to the vitiated Dosha. Hence these are general classifications and dreams do not particularly bind to only one particular category.

Different Acharya described types of swapna according prakriti of human being. It means dominance of a particular Dosha in the Prakriti is considered responsible for the type of Swapna seen; and the Mahabhutas dominating the characters in the Swapna are homologous to the Mahabhutas dominant in that particular Dosha. They also commented on garbha linga nirdharana by character of swapna, by which we can assess the gender of the foetus. All the four constituents Sarira, Indriya, Manas and Atma, have their own role to play in the process of the creation of the dream.

The Manas to be the reins which lie in the hands of the charioteer, i.e. the Atma; it binds the horses, which are the Indriyas. The chariot is compared to the Sarira. So it can be understood that though the Atma controls the functions of the Indriyas and the Sarira, it is only through the Manas. Hence at times it is the Manas which is seen to perceive knowledge through the Indriyas. Similarly, in case of Swapna; though the

initiator is the Atma, it is the Manas who is responsible for creating the dream images as Manas is the Kriyasila Tatva, in the machinery of knowledge perception. Hence the perception or non perception of knowledge is also attributed only to the Manas .

#### CONCLUSION

- Swapna is a physiological process occurring in every individual.
- In the ancient time when no advanced tools and technologies were available, the concept of Swapna was very popular in clinical practice for the diagnosis and prognosis of diseases as well as for the maintenance of health.
- All the four components of the Ayu (Atma, Manas, Indriya and Sarira) play an equal part and have their own functions in the genesis of Swapna.
- It requires attention for exploration, interpretation, and application, sincerely with patience and devotion.

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