

REVIEW ARTICLE

Exploring the Sub-pillars of Life: *Trayopastambha* with Special Reference To *Nidra*

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received on: 29-08-2025

Accepted on: 03-10-2025

Published on: 31-10-2025

Key words:

Ahara,
Brahmacharya,
Nidra,
Sleep,
Trayopastambha

ABSTRACT

There has been an unpredictable variation in *Trayopastambha*: *Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya*/*Abrahmacharya* in the modern world as a result of increased urbanization and civilizational advancement, leading to many ailments. Understanding this altered style of life requires an understanding of the *Trayopastambha* concept, which aids in leading a healthy existence. The fundamental tool that all people possess to safeguard their destined lives is the *Trayopastambha*. Through its close relationship with the three *Stambhas* of life, it preserves the *Swasthya* and protects the *Ayu*. Among all the *Upastambhas*, *Nidra* holds a particularly significant role, as it not only supports overall health but also influences the other two – *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of *Nidra*, including its definition, physiology, classification, and significance, is essential. Such insight can greatly enhance our appreciation of its vital role in maintaining balance and well-being in daily life.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda remains one of the most ancient and yet living traditions documented and practiced widely in India.^[1] *Ayurveda* is considered an *Upaveda* of the *Atharvaveda*.^[2] According to the foundational principles of *Ayurveda*, the human body is a well-organized system rooted in three essential components: “*Dosadhatumala mulam sada dehasya*.” These components are *Dosha* (the functional energies), *Dhatu* (the structural tissues), and *Mala* (the waste products).^[3]

Proper health is maintained when these components function harmoniously, while an imbalance leads to disease and disorder.^[4] *Ayurveda* describes the *Tridosha*: *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* as the *Tristhuna* (three main pillars) governing bodily functions.^[5] Similarly, *Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya* are considered the three external supportive pillars that uphold the primary foundations of life.^[6] *Acharya Charaka* mentions the third *Upastambha* as *Brahmacharya*, whereas *Ashtanga Hrudaya* and *Ashtanga Sangraha* mention it as *Abrahmacharya*.^[7] When these are followed mindfully and in a well-regulated manner,

they contribute significantly to one's overall well-being, promoting physical strength, a radiant complexion, and the attainment of a full and healthy lifespan.^[8]

The concept of *Trayopastambha* is discussed in the *Nirdesha Chatushka* of *Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana*, specifically in the *Trisreshaneeya Adhyaya*. To fulfill the *Trividha Eshanas* (three fundamental desires of life), seven key principles (*Trikas*) are outlined, among which *Trayopastambha* is mentioned first.^[9]

Ahara serves as the primary element essential for sustaining life. *Acharaya Charaka* states that *Hitkar Panchabhautik Ahara*, consumed as *Ashita* (eatables), *Peeta* (beverages), *Leeda* (lickables), and *Khadita* (masticables), undergoes digestion through *Jatharagni* to form *Ahar Rasa*. *Bhutagni* and *Dhatwagni* further metabolize this *Ahar Rasa* to maintain the balance of *Dhatu* and *Panchamahabhuta* in the body. They contribute to growth, strength, complexion, comfort, and longevity by supporting and replenishing the body tissue.^[10]

Nidra is one of the most vital factors for a happy and healthy life. According to *Acharya Charaka*, sleep occurs when the *Mana*, along with the *Indriyas*, becomes fatigued and withdraws from their respective *Vishaya*.^[11] “*Nidrayattam sukham duhkham pushtih karshyam balabalam | Vrishata klibata jnanam ajnanam jivitam na cha ||*” Proper or quality sleep (*Samyak Nidra*) brings *Sukha*, *Pushti*,

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strength, fertility, intellect, and longevity, whereas disturbed or improper sleep (*Avidhi Nidra*) causes *Dukha*, weakness, emaciation, infertility, *Agyana*, and a shortened lifespan.^[12]

Brahmacharya, the third *Upastambha*, plays a key role in maintaining both physical and mental health. By the term *Brahmacharya* are implied self-control of the senses, mental qualities that favor *Brahmagyana* (as it is knowledge) in harmony with the pursuit of spiritual knowledge.^[8] The *Vashishtha Samhita* mentions that *Brahmacharya* entails the complete avoidance of sexual indulgence under all circumstances, through mind, speech, and action. *Brahmacharya*, when practiced properly with reason, discipline, and moderation, is beneficial. However, improper practice, either through lack of training or excessive restraint of the senses, can lead to mental agitation and disturbance.^[8]

Brahmacharya, when practiced properly, supports longevity, enhances the effects of *Rasayana*, and aids in fulfilling life's ultimate purpose by reinforcing the other two pillars, *Ahara* and *Nidra*. For these reasons, *Brahmacharya* is given significant importance in *Ayurveda*. The concept of *Abrahmacharya* has been described in the *Astanga Sangraha* and *Astanga Hridaya*, and it also holds the same importance in maintaining health.^[13] In *Gruhastashrama*, *Santanotpatti* has been given importance by following the *Samyaka Abrahmacharya*, and it has also been mentioned that *Santanotpatti* is the only way to get rid of the *Pitru Runa*. Hence, *Abrahmacharya* has been given importance.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review was conducted through a critical study of classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with relevant commentaries. In addition, *Darshanika* literature, including *Brahma Sutra*, *Yoga Darshan*, and *Nyaya Darshan*, as well as traditional lexicons such as *Shabdakalpadrum* and *Amarkosha*, were also examined for related concepts. Published research articles, review papers, and modern literature on *Trayopastambha* and *Nidra* were studied, and all the consulted sources are duly cited in the references. The collected material was systematically analyzed to present the theoretical framework of *Trayopastambha* with special reference to *Nidra* and its relevance in contemporary understanding.

2.1. *Nidra* in Darshanika Literature

In the *Vedanta Darshan*, the terms “*Swapa*” (sleep) and “*Swapna*” (dream) appear in different contexts. The *Sushupti* (deep sleep) stage is described as the state when the *Purusha* becomes identical with and fully immersed in the *Paramatma*.^[14] Here, all discussions about *Swapna* indicate that experiencing dreams is considered a form of delusion and false knowledge.^[15]

The word “*Swapna*” also appears in the *Nyaya Darshan*, where it is considered false knowledge, similar to the material world. It is used in discussions related to *Pramana* (means of knowledge) and *Prameya* (objects of knowledge).^[16]

In *Yoga Darshana*, *Nidra* is one of the five mental states (*Vrittis*). *Acharya Charaka* defines *Nidra* as the mind and senses withdrawing from their objects. *Acharya Sushruta* links *Nidra* to Lord *Vishnu*, viewing it as a sinful force affecting everyone.^[17]

2.2. Derivation of the Term *Trayopastambha*

The term *Trayopastambha* is composed of two words: “*Traya*” and “*Upastambha*.” *Traya* refers to three components, factors, or their combination.^[18]

Upastambha is further derived from two words: “*Upa*” and “*Stambha*.” *Upa* is a prefix meaning - followed by/capable of/providing a brief idea/a boundary/or nearby.^[19] The word *Stambha* originates from the root “*Stambha-rodhane*,” which signifies a strong pillar or something firm, possessing the strength to sustain or to cause.^[20] Thus, *Trayopastambha* refers to the three strong pillars that have the inherent capacity to support and sustain life.

2.3. Physiology of *Nidra* (Sleep)

In Ayurvedic classics, *Nidra* is recognized as the second *Upastambha* among the *Trayopastambha*. *Nidra* is essential for life, much like recharging a battery for the brain. If this pillar, *Nidra*, is compromised, overall health deteriorates. As mentioned earlier, according to *Acharya Charaka*, *Nidra* occurs when the *Mana* and *Indriyas* become exhausted and detach from their respective *Vishaya* (objects). This leads to the inactivation of both the sensory (*Gyanendriyas*) and motor organs (*Karmendriyas*), causing the individual to enter a state of sleep where there is complete withdrawal from external stimuli and bodily actions.^[21] He further explains that when the *Srotas* become clogged with *Kapha* and the body is fatigued from exertion, and the sense organs are no longer functioning, sleep naturally manifests.^[22]

Acharya Sushruta adds to this by stating that the *Hridaya* is the seat of consciousness (*Chetna*). When this center of awareness is overpowered by *Tamoguna*, the individual experiences sleep. He emphasizes that *Tamoguna* is the cause of sleep, while *Sattvaguna* causes wakefulness. However, he also notes that nature itself (the body's natural rhythm) is ultimately the most dominant factor in the initiation of sleep.^[23]

Science offers effective remedies for insomnia, underscoring the importance of understanding sleep physiology. Modern stress, lifestyle factors, and substance abuse contribute to sleep disturbances and related illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes, ultimately shortening lifespan.

2.4. Meanings of the Word “*Nidra*” According to Various Dictionaries

1. *Vachaspatyam*: *Shayan* (lying down), *Swapna* (dream), *Tatvaprati-bodhe* (realization of truth), *Abhavapratyaya-almbananam* (state based on the sense of absence), *Vritti* (mental activity or state).
2. *Shabdakalpadruma*: *Medhyamanah-samyoga* (union with a meditative mind), *Sushuptavashtha* (deep sleep), *Swanyavastha* (state of self)
3. *Amarakosha*: *Shayan* (reclining/rest), *Swapa* (sleep), *Swapna* (dream), *Samvesha* (entering or lying down).
4. *Vaidyaka Shabda Sindhu*: *Swapi* (to sleep).
5. Sanskrit-Hindi Dictionary by V.S. Apte: *Suptavastha*, *Neend*, *Sithilala*, *Aakhayan Mudra*, *Kali Ki Avastha*.
6. Sanskrit-English Dictionary by V.S. Apte: sleep, sleepiness, sloth, shutting, bidding state.

2.5. Types of *Nidra*^[24]

1. *Tamobhava* - *Nidra* caused by an increase in *Tamas Guna* (inertia or dullness)
2. *Shleshma Samudbhava* - Sleep arising from an increase in *Kapha Dosha*
3. *Manah-Shareera Sambhava* - Sleep due to physical and mental exhaustion
4. *Agantuki* - Sleep that occurs as a bad prognostic sign before death

5. *Vyadhyanuvaritini* - Sleep that appears as a complication or symptom of a disease
6. *Ratri Swabhav Prabhava* - Natural, physiological sleep that occurs at night.

Acharya Dalhana, referring to the *Sushruta Samhita*, classifies *Nidra* into three types:^[25]

1. *Tamsi Nidra*: Occurs when the sensory channels (*Sangyavaha Srotas*) are filled with *Sleshma* dominated by *Tamoguna*.
2. *Swabhaviki Nidra*: The natural, regular sleep that occurs daily in all living beings.
3. *Vaikariki Nidra*: If there is any disturbance in the mind or body, sleep does not occur; and if it does, it is considered *Vaikariki Nidra* (abnormal sleep).

Acharya Vagbhata classifies *Nidra* into seven types:

1. *Kalaswabhawaja*: Sleep occurring at the usual or natural time, typically at night.
2. *Amayaja*: Sleep caused by diseases.
3. By fatigue of *Mana*: Sleep resulting from mental exhaustion.
4. By fatigue of *Sharir*: Sleep due to physical exhaustion.
5. *Shleshmaprabhavaj*: Sleep caused by the predominance of *Kapha Dosha*.
6. *Agantuka*: Sleep induced by external factors, such as trauma.
7. *Tamobhava*: Sleep produced by the dominance of *Tamoguna*.

2.6. Role of *Trayopastambha* and *Stambha* in *Ayurveda*

A person's lifespan is shaped by past actions (*Poorvajanma krut Phala*) and guided by the *Tridanda* (*Satva*, *Atma*, and *Sharira*). Strengthening these through the *Trayopastambha* can boost personal strength (*Purusha Bala*) and help reduce the effects of fate (*Daivabala*). Balancing the *Trayopastambha* supports the *Tridanda* and *Tristhuna* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), promoting health, preventing disease, and aiding healing. *Tridanda* is considered as *Purush*, it is called "Sa Puman."^[26]

The *Trayopastambha* are three key pillars that support and sustain life. Each one helps maintain balance in the *Tridosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*). Neglecting any of them can lead to imbalance and health issues. These pillars act as practical tools to keep life healthy and harmonious.^[6]

Based on their purpose and underlying principle, "*Bhetta hi bhedhyam anyatha bhinatti*" (the one that penetrates or differentiates brings distinction),^[27] both *Tridanda* and *Tristhuna* can be regarded as *Stambhas* for the body, as they serve the essential function of sustaining and supporting life. According to Acharya Dalhana, "*Ta eva vatadayah, vyapannashcha vikritisthah pralayhetavo vinashhetavo bhavanti*."^[28] The origin, maintenance, and dissolution of the body are governed by the *Tridosha*. Therefore, he identifies the *Tridoshas* as the *Tristhuna* or *Tristambha*, the foundational pillars that uphold and regulate life. "*Anyena stabhyamanam dharyamanam upa samipam pradhana karanasya gatva stambhayati dharayati ityupastambhah*." Thus, according to Chakrapani, the entity that supports the main supporting pillars and maintains the body (*dharana*) is called *Upastambha*.^[8]

2.7. Role of *Nidra*

Nidra is classified under *Brumhana* (nourishing) factors, which is why it is recommended as a therapeutic measure in the management of *Karshya Roga* (emaciation).^[29] Acharya Charaka describes thirteen non-suppressible natural urges (*Adharaniya Vegas*), among which *Nidra* (sleep) is included. Suppression of these natural urges, including sleep, is considered harmful and can lead to various physical and mental disorders.^[30] *Samajagrana* and *Samaswapna* are also mentioned as *Achara Rasayana*.^[31]

2.8. Importance of *Nidra*

Adequate sleep helps maintain the balance of body tissues and *Doshas*, supporting both physical and mental health. It promotes happiness, nourishment, strength, vitality, and longevity. *Nidra* is a natural physiological process essential for providing rest to the *Sharira*, *Manas*, and *Indriyas*. Acharya Sushruta states that proper and adequate *Nidra* leads to freedom from diseases and brings about mental pleasure, along with enhanced strength (*Bala*), *Varna*, and *Veerya*. Therefore, one should not stay awake at night and should avoid sleeping during the day. A wise person, knowing that both are harmful, should practice sleep in moderation.^[32]

Acharya Vagbhata states that when *Nidra* is practiced judiciously and in proper measure, it leads to happiness and longevity. Just as the minds of yogis become pure through self-knowledge and penance, similarly, balanced sleep purifies and strengthens the body and mind, supporting a healthy and fulfilling life.^[33]

According to Acharya Bhavamishra, *Nidra* is most effective in alleviating *Pitta Dosha*. Acharya Bhavaprakasha states that sleeping after a meal may increase *Kapha*, ultimately stabilizing the body and providing comfort.^[34] Acharya Kashyapa also acknowledges that comfortable sleep is essential for adequate milk production in nursing mothers.^[35] In recent decades, rapid lifestyle changes have led to the emergence of disorders such as *Hridaya Vyadhi* and *Madhumeha*, largely associated with poor routines and irregular sleep habits. Both inadequate and excessive sleep are linked to adverse health outcomes, as sleep deprivation contributes to a wide range of serious physical and psychological problems.^[36]

2.9. Impact of Day Sleep and Night Wakefulness on Health

Day-to-day conduct is called *Dinacharya*. The conduct of the day is termed *Dinacharya*, while that from sunset to sleep is called *Ratricharya*. According to *Ayurveda*, one should wake up during *Brahma Muhurta*, an auspicious time ideal for meditation and starting the day.^[6] *Ayurveda* advises not to sleep during the day or stay awake at night.

- Day sleep increases *Guruta* and *Kapha-Pitta* disorders. Pregnant or postpartum women who sleep during the day may experience complications affecting their children.

Seasonal changes affect all living beings, and to benefit from these changes and avoid harm, *Ayurveda* recommends *Ritucharya*. *Divaswapa* (Daytime sleep) is advised only during *Grishma Ritu*, as short nights and dry, rough weather increase *Vata Dosha*.

- According to Acharya Charak, "*Shleshma pitte divasvapnastasmatteshu na shasyate*." Except in summer, day sleep aggravates *Kapha* and *Pitta*, raising the risk of related diseases; therefore, it is not recommended in those seasons.^[37]
- In the *Ashtang Sangraha*, *Diwaswapa* and *Ratrijagrana* are enumerated in *Garbhopghatkar Bhava*.^[38] He also quoted that *Ratrijagrana* increases *Vata* in *Sarvroga Nidana Adhyaya*.^[39]
- Staying awake at night causes dryness, increases *Vata* and *Pitta*, and reduces *Kapha*.^[40] Elevated *Vata* leads to dizziness, body stiffness, restlessness, poor concentration, and headaches. Increased *Pitta* can cause digestive problems, especially when one is awake during the *Pitta* phase, disrupting digestion. Staying awake during the *Vata* phase can further worsen digestion.
- Lack of proper sleep impairs judgment, mood, memory, and learning, and increases the risk of accidents. Long-term sleep deprivation can contribute to various metabolic disorders and premature aging.

- Acharya Charak enumerated Diwaswapa and Ratrijagrana in Nidana of Shiroroga. “Sandharanad divasvapnad ratrau jagaranamadat.”^[41]
- According to Acharya Charak, sleeping on cots or uncomfortable beds may increase Vata disorders.^[42] “kshipram vatah prakopamapadyate.”

Improper sleep contributes to physical and mental illnesses. Those who work night shifts often experience disturbed sleep patterns, lack of concentration, disorientation, and insomnia.

2.10. Managing Sleep Deprivation and Optimizing Sleep Health^[43]

Aggravation of *Kapha* and *Pitta* leads to disorders such as insomnia (*Nidranasha*) and excessive sleep (*Atinidra*). To reduce the risk of sleep deprivation and promote healthier, more restorative sleep, the following strategies are recommended:

- Maintain a consistent meal schedule
- Establish a regular sleep routine
- Limit caffeine intake
- Engage in regular physical activity
- Optimize the sleep environment
- Manage stress and anxiety
- Use naps wisely.

2.11. Daily Sleep Need According to Age^[44,45]

Sleep requirements vary according to age. Newborns (0–2 months) need about 12–18 h of sleep/day, while infants (3–11 months) require 14–15 h. Toddlers (1–3 years) should get 12–14 h, and preschoolers (3–5 years) generally need 10–13 h of sleep daily. School-aged children (5–10 years) require 9–11 h, with at least 9 h being essential. Adolescents (10–19 years) should ideally have 8.5–9.25 h, around 9 h/day. Adults usually need 7–9 h of sleep, although 7–8 h are often sufficient.

2.12. Benefits of a Healthy Sleep Routine^[46]

In classics, the benefits of a proper sleep pattern are mentioned as follows:

1. Proper sleep nourishes the body
2. It maintains physical and mental relaxation
3. Good sleep fosters spiritual beliefs and synchronizes with nature
4. Sleep helps prevent diseases, particularly mental illnesses
5. Sleep promotes longevity, youthfulness, luster, and complexion
6. Sleep enhances memory and intelligence
7. The development and proper functioning of the physique and sense organs depend on adequate sleep
8. Sleep boosts immunity and counters early aging symptoms.

3. DISCUSSION

Trayopastambha, meaning “three supportive sub-pillars,” refers to *Ahara*, *Svapna/Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya*, which are essential for maintaining the body’s strength and vitality. When practiced properly and in balance, these pillars support physical health, enhance complexion, and promote a long, fulfilling life. Conversely, neglecting them can weaken the body and diminish the effectiveness of any medical treatments or therapies. In Ayurvedic philosophy, these three are considered external yet vital supports for the foundations of life, making their mindful regulation crucial for lifelong well-being.

Among the three *Upastambhs*, *Ahara* plays a key role in maintaining physical health, *Brahmacharya* primarily supports mental well-being,

and *Nidra* provides psychosomatic balance by nourishing both body and mind. Together, these pillars sustain the *Tridosha*. Any imbalance arising from improper adherence to these practices can disrupt these energies and lead to disease. The *Trayopastambha* theory thus forms a foundational principle in preventive *Ayurveda*, highlighting that proper regulation of these lifestyle factors is essential for maintaining health and preventing illness.

4. CONCLUSION

Nidra, one of the key *Trayopastambha* in *Ayurveda*, is crucial for health. When practiced properly, it helps prevent sleep-related disorders and supports overall well-being. Proper sleep nourishes the body and mind by enhancing *Kapha* and *Shukra Dhātu*, promoting strength, stability, and well-being. Neglecting sleep through unhealthy habits weakens these benefits, leading to illness and low vitality. Improper practice of the *Trayopastambha*, especially *Nidra*, can lead to various health disorders. *Ayurveda* emphasizes proper sleep as both preventive and therapeutic. In today’s fast-paced world, stress and irregular routines have made *Anidra* common, often leading to psychiatric and lifestyle-related issues. Adopting Ayurvedic sleep practices and good sleep hygiene is essential for maintaining overall mental and physical health. A balanced approach to *Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya* is essential for sustaining a healthy and harmonious life.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nil.

6. AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have contributed equally to conception, design, data collection, analysis, drafting, and final approval of the manuscript.

7. FUNDING

Nil.

8. ETHICAL APPROVALS

This study does not require ethical clearance as it is a review article.

9. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from the principal investigators.

11. PUBLISHERS NOTE

This journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published institutional affiliations.

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How to cite this article:

Singh P, Yadav SS. Exploring the Sub-pillars of Life: *Trayopastambha* with Special Reference to *Nidra*. IRJAY. [online] 2025;8(10):51-55.

Available from: <https://irjay.com>

DOI link- <https://doi.org/10.48165/IRJAY.2025.81010>