



## Critical Study of Yoga Nidra: A Review Article

S. Rajalekshmi<sup>1</sup>, Anand Katti<sup>2</sup>, Arun Chandran R<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>P G Scholar, Department of PG Studies in Panchakarma, Government Ayurvedic Medical College, Bangalore

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Ayurved Samhita Siddhanta, Government Ayurvedic Medical College, Bangalore

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Kriya Sharir, Netra Chikitsa Ayurved College, Amreli

**Corresponding author: Dr. Rajalekshmi. S**

**ABSTRACT:** Yoga Nidra, a form of relaxation is profoundly embedded in Indian philosophy. It can be considered as a state of consciousness which is neither sleep nor awaken. It is the state immediately preceding sleep in which the mind is in Rajasika avastha and hence active. Yoga Nidra can be regarded as a concised version of Pratyahara, one among the Ashtanga of Yoga. Practice of Yoga Nidra has shown great potential to relieve the stress among the population and in diseases with stress as an etiology. An analysis of Yoga Nidra will help to discern the facts and falsehoods about this practice.

**KEY WORDS:** Yoga Nidra, Pratyahara, Nyasam

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of Yoga Nidra is subtle and profoundly embedded in Indian philosophy. The usage of Yoga Nidra as a form of relaxation is much more current. Nowhere in classics there exists the description and practice of Yoga Nidra as such. However, it was practiced and employed along one's spiritual path. As Yoga Nidra is an experience beyond jnanendriya. So the explanation based on rational or Pancha jnanendriya analysis remains challenging. Yoga Nidra has shown a great potential to relieve the level of stress among the population. A number of studies have shown that Yoga Nidra is effective in managing psychosomatic diseases. Thus arose various myths and deceptive flatteries that deserve explanation. In this article, a humble effort is made to critically review the literature available on the concept of Yoga Nidra and to discern facts and falsehoods.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this review, literary materials were compiled, explored and analyzed in a critical manner from texts like Yoga sutra, Yoga Nidra by swami Satyananda and Ayurveda literatures like Susrutha Samhita, Charaka Samhita, Ashtanga Hrdaya, Ashtanga Sangraha and their commentaries. Various published research articles on Yoga Nidra have also been reviewed for this paper.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term Yoga Nidra is composed of two words, Yoga and Nidra. Yoga stands for union<sup>1</sup> and Nidra signifies sleep. The description of the term Yoga Nidra is available in literatures like mahabharata, markandeya purana,

bhuidist tantra text mahamaya tantra, Saiva tantra text *cincinimata sarasamuccayam*. In Mahabharata Yoga Nidra symbolize the sleep of Vishnu<sup>2</sup>. Buddhist literature has narrated Yoga Nidra as a state in which perfect Buddhas enter to realize secret knowledge<sup>3</sup>. In Saiva text *cincinimata sarasamuccaya*, Yoga Nidra is elaborated as a peace beyond words<sup>3</sup>. According to Swami Satyananda Sarasvati, Yoga Nidra is described as a systematic method of inducing complete physical mental and emotional relaxation. In this state the relaxation is achieved by turning inwards towards, away from outer experiences<sup>4</sup>. Yoga Nidra can be considered as a state of consciousness which is neither sleep nor awaken. It is neither concentration nor hypnotism.

### THE THREE STATES

Each life form passes through the cycles of three states: jagrath, swapnam and sushupti<sup>5</sup>. Jagrat refers to the state of consciousness while suhupti is the state of unconsciousness. Sushupti is wholly inactive and to hold prana in the body, shwasa uchwasa or breathing continues. Swapnam is a dreaming state or the state between consciousness and unconsciousness. Consequently, this state exerts an influence on body and mind.

When one dream, in keeping with the dream, there will be changes in the body such as increased heart rate, sweating, etc. Throughout swapnam one traverse between the two stages of jagrat or sushupti. The following stage tureeya or tureeya ateetha are phases of ultimate salvation or samadhi. Tureeya is the state of pure consciousness in which one attains the non dual self- as one with everything and everyone. The perception throughout Tureeya is measureless and is described as Samadhi itself. Samadhi can be savikalpa or nirvikalpa.

### HYPNOTISM

The process of inducing hypnosis is known as hypnotism. Hypnosis induces an altered state of mind or trance. Generally, there will be enhanced concentration and focus, as well as an improved response to suggestions, while ignoring all environmental factors. Participants will be directed by an external factor- the commands or suggestions hypnotist. These suggestions may sometimes be contradictory to the real environmental stimuli.

### YOGA NIDRA AND NIDRA

As per Ayurveda classics, Nidra happens when the Hridaya is covered with tamas and kapha<sup>6</sup>. Hridaya is also described as chethana sthana or the site of consciousness<sup>7</sup>. Acharya sushrutha describes tamas as the cause of Nidra while Satva the reason of bodhana or waking state<sup>8</sup>. During the awakened state Indriyas in association with the mind and atma with the domination of satwa guna, begins to perceive jnana or knowledge. When the mind is exhausted, it dissociates itself from the indriyas or the senses and hence the person falls into sleep.

Chakrapanidutta in his commentary quote swapna as *nirindriya pradesha mano avasthanam*<sup>9</sup>. The mind associated with rajo guna starts to dream during sleep. Dalhana says that unlike sleep where tamas dominates, dreams occur when the mind predominant with rajo guna appreciates sensory objects (*vishayas*) as if they were in a state of wakefulness<sup>10</sup>. There is no conjunction of sensory objects (*Arthas*) or sense organs (*Indriyas*) here. Sleep for a satwika person is predominant of satwa guna, as it transcends over the doshas of the mind. As a result, he attains sushupti with satwa guna. This Nidra enlighten the knowledge. In this way Nidra provides both jnanam and jnanam. In Yoga Nidra, the practitioner attempts to know whether he can sleep with knowledge. As the phase traverses initially in rajas and later in Satva.

### YOGA NIDRA AND PRATYAHARA

A yogi advances from tamas to satwa during the Ashtanga Yoga practice. He commences the path with a prominent Tamo guna or bhautika guna. The yogi gradually sheds the Pancha bhoota domains and gathers

more Rajasika gunas upon his path, eventually flourishing with the Satvika gunas. Ashtanga of Yoga are succeeding superior to each other. Yama, Niyama and Asana are indeed considered bhautika or Tamasika. The management of Prana in the body is the subject of Pranayama <sup>11</sup>.

The mind, which has evolved to rajas, is focussed in pratyahara. Satwa guna enlivens in dharana, however kevala atma illuminates dhyana. The journey takes place in the reverse chronology of creation, from srsthi to samhara. Ashtanga Yoga portrays a river's journey to its final moment of merging with the ocean. Yoga Nidra is the state immediately preceding sleep in which the mind is in rajasika avastha and hence active. As a result, Yoga Nidra can be regarded as a type of Pratyahara.

However in contrast to Yoga Nidra, Pratyahara does indeed have a highly evolved mind. Only a Satwa dominated mind could accomplish higher levels Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

During Pratyahara, the mind began to evolve from Rajasika to Satvika. As a result, knowledge in this phase is rajasika in nature and incomplete. If the knowledge was perfect, the subsequent stages of dharana, dhyana, and Samadhi would be superfluous. As a result, a concised version of Pratyahara- the Yoga Nidra- never provides complete and pure knowledge.

### **NYASAM AND YOGA NIDRA**

Niyasa is the process of imposing a mantra, beeja, or devatha on one's body and meditating on it. It is a mandatory procedure before repetition of a mantra. In Nyasa, the individual places parts of the mantra in designated parts of the body in a sequential order before performing japa<sup>12</sup>. The Sri Vidya upasaka assigns the 51 aksharas in their body to represent the matrkka Devi during nyasa. Thus, there are 51 Shakti peethas scattered throughout the Bharata. Contemporary Acharyas' general tendency to compare Nyasam to Yoga Nidra is mutually contradictory. As a matter of fact, Yoga and Nyasa cannot be compared.

### **YOGA NIDRA MIND IS RECEPTIVE IN NATURE**

When mind is jagrat, sense organs (jnanendriyas) conjunct with mind and it becomes receptive or performs its function. In Nidra, the mind appears to be detached from its vishaya (vishayehbyo nivartanthe). Unlike Nidra, the mind is noted veiled by Tamas in Yoga Nidra. Here neither jnanendriyas are functioning completely nor does conjunction occur.

However, the rajas, who are the doer or pravarthaka of the entire cosmos, render the mind susceptible to jnana. The mind that is harmonised becomes more sensitive to insight and consequently less stressful. Yoga Nidra practice makes the mind more receptive to Pratyahara.

### **DISCUSSION**

In a nutshell, it may be described as Yama, Niyama and Asana as Tamasika, Pranayama as the first step to Rajasika and Pratyahara as the mind progressing from Rajasika to Satvika. Dharana and dhyana are Satvika in nature. However Samadhi is a Tureeya avastha, or a state beyond Satwa.. Atma has five koshas, or coverings. The outer Annamaya Kosha is completely Panchabhoutika or tamasika, the Pranamaya Kosha is tamasika Rajasika and the Manomaya Kosha is wholly Rajasika. The Vijnamaya Kosha is purely Satvika. Anandamaya Kosha is realized in Paramananda or the level above Satwa.

If such variance exists in the lowest levels of annamaya kosha, then variation on the upper planes of manomaya koshas is unfathomable. As a result, in Ayurveda, the treatment that functions holistically on multiple planes is referred to as *purusham purusham veekshya*. Prthvi is gandhavathi. Different parthiva compounds have distinct gradations in the gandha and each individual perceives a different gandha of the same dravya. So, if the differences in Panchabhootas are considerable, it is up to the individual to

choose the various methods of spiritual satisfaction. As a result, the advantages and practice of Yoga Nidra are dependent on the person. The assumption and exaggeration that Yoga Nidra is a comprehensive cure is inaccurate.

The extensively debated question of whether Yoga Nidra is a successful treatment for various diseases must also be addressed here. When the panchabhoutika body is afflicted, only another Panchabhoutika dravya medium can heal it. Doshas are both amoortha and functional.

As a result, the three triads of dravya, guna, and Karma might soothe their angst. When progressing to the higher koshas of Manas, the doshas rajas and tamas demands karma oriented Satwavajaya and Daivavyapashraya chikitsa. The ultimate treatment for Manodosha is Jnana, Vijnana, dhairya, smriti, and Samadhi. If disorders affecting the psyche aggravate Doshas in the body, there Daivavyapasraya should always be used. Yoga Nidra, as a relaxation practise, may give relief for persons with stress as a nidana of their vyadhi. However, the highly developed disorders that overwhelmed the kriyakala necessitate holistic medicine.

## **CONCLUSION**

Yoga Nidra is neither the same as the third eye or the ultimate path to samadhi. It is fruitless to describe Yoga Nidra as if the eye opens after meditation and it is Samadhi. The progression is extremely individualised, and each experience is unique. The sweetness of sugar differs from that of sugarcane. Even the sweetness of the same sugarcane varies from person to person. As a consequence, generalizing Yoga Nidra will be pointless, and the results will be largely dependent on one's own past life, present life and the purpose that he harbors.

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