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Concept of Dream in Ayurveda

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Abstract:

Āyurveda is the eternal holistic system of medicine. The fundamental principles of Āyurveda, which covers all the domains of life, are relevant irrespective of changes in time period and civilization. But it is unfortunate that many concepts in Āyurveda and other ancient science are unexplored. Dream (svapna) is such an untouched concept. The description of this complex phenomenon is supported by mythology and philosophy making it less palatable in present era. The understanding and analysis of dream is important not only in the conceptual field but also in the clinical field.

Keywords: *Āyurveda, dream, clinical utility*

1. Introduction

Āyurveda is the divine knowledge of life, recollected and compiled by Lord *Brahma*. The science was then divided into eight branches because of the short life span and intellect of human beings. The eight branches in particular, touch eight domains of life, making the system most competent even in the present era. The ultimate aim of *Āyurveda* is to achieve and maintain the proper health of individuals.

The earliest reference in Indian classics about dream is available in *Rgveda*. *Atharvaveda* organized dreams more conceptually and the concepts of dream in *Atharvaveda* are very much in synchronization with that of *Āyurveda*. When it comes to the *upanishadas* there are two perspectives of dream. The first mentions dream as mere expressions of inner desires. The second thought postulates the concept of soul leaving the body and being guided until awakened. Descriptions of dreams signifying omens are also elaborately available in *upanishadas*. *Puranas* also analyzes dreams on philosophical and medical accepts.

2. Concept of dream in Āyurveda

Important *Āyurveda* classics such as *Carakasamhita*, *Suśrutasaṃhita*, *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* and *AṣṭāṅgaHṛdaya* explain the concept of dream.

Dream is a state of mind, which is dominated by mind, and its projections, resulting in an experience of divergent nature, which may or may not have any significance. Mind is the initiator of dreams, which in turn is inspired by other sense organs in the process of initiation. Dream is supposed to happen in a twilight zone of sleep and wakefulness. Dreams or *svapna* are analyzed as the outcome of different perceptions, which are perceived when the person is awake or conscious. *Āyurveda* classics, such as *CarakaSamhitā*, discuss the clinical aspects of dream. *Bhela* defines dream as a state where the organs of senses get exhausted and keep themselves away from their respective objects, but the mind continues to enjoy its perceptions.

Dreams occur generally, either just before one falls fast asleep or just before one get fully awakened from sleep. When the sense organs are not alive to the external world, but the mind is, the dreams result. A state of restlessness characterizes the state of dream and this inability in the mental projections is the one factor, which differentiates dream from sleep. At times, the term *svapna* has been synonymously used for sleep and dream in *Āyurveda*.

Bhela admits that during the state of dream the dreaming individual can establish a verbal conference with his ancestors, *deva* (goddess) and *manuṣya* (human beings). *Atharvaveda* states that dream is a state of being neither alive nor dead and the origin of dream is traced to the restlessness of mind.

3. Mechanism of Dream

Āyurveda opinions the whole body to be interconnected through innumerable channels termed *srotas*. The channel involved in the genesis of dream is *manovahasrotas* i.e., the channel of mind. When the channel of mind gets completely filled with dominatingly powerful body humors (*vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*), dreams are seen by the person, who is not in a stage of deep sleep. The driving factor behind the whole mechanism is mind itself which is inspired and catalyzed by other sense organs.

4. Therapeutic advantage of dream

The great scholars of *Āyurveda* like *Caraka*, *Suśruta*, *Vāgbhāta*, *Kāśyapa*, *Bhela*, *Harita*, *Śārṅgadhara* and *Bhāvamiśra* had explained the concept of dream with due importance in physiological and clinical view. All *Āyurvedic* texts, have described different types of dream peculiar and specific to the unique nature of the person.

Suśruta describes dream, indicating the sex of the unborn baby, particularly seen by the pregnant lady. If the female during her gestational period sees dream in which she eats or drinks as that of male, does activities as that of males, visualizes flowers and fruits denoting the male gender, these dreams may be indicative of birth of a male baby. Offspring will be female if sees object that are just opposite to the objects which are indicative of male offspring.

Pūrvārupīyaindriyam chapter of *indriyasthana* of *Caraka Samhita* explains dream specific for each disease. In this chapter dreams are described in the perspective of prognosis. Detailed descriptions about various types of dreams are also available. *Prāśastapāda*, a noted commentator of *Vaiśeṣika* School discusses three types of dream based on causes of manifestation, viz. *saṃskāra* (psychic impressions), *dhātudoṣapradoṣa* (disequilibrium of the bodily humors) and *adr̥ṣṭa* (unseen).

In general, *Caraka* enumerates seven types of dream, which in turn are categorized as *saphala* (useful) and *aphala* (useless). *Aphalāsvapna* occurs as a result of past experience and do not have any impact on the person's health or life. The *saphala* variety of dreams are of huge clinical importance, especially in the prognosis point of view.

As we search through the ancient Indian classics, some other interesting and thoughtful facts regarding the same subject dream also come into the light. For example duration of result of dream after seeing them is given.

Dream seen during the first part of night	One year
Dream seen during the second part of night	Six months
Dream seen during the third part of night	Three months
Dream seen during the fourth part of night/early morning	Six months
Dream seen during daytime or rainy season	Six months

Table 1

5. Conclusion

- Dream, even though described as a metaphysical phenomenon, is a physiological process occurring in every individual.
- The utility of the dream was much appreciated in ancient times, especially in the clinical field for the diagnosis and prognosis of disease as well as the maintenance of health.
- The concept of dream, explained in *Āyurveda* classics along with other Indian classics requires exploration, interpretation and application.

6. References

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