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TIME AS A REGULATOR OF HEALTH: RE-EXAMINING HUMAN BIOLOGICAL RHYTHMS THROUGH AYURVEDIC CHRONOPHYSIOLOGY

Dr. Anandita Verma[1*], Dr. Suchita Shrikhande[2], Dr. Abhishek Singh Rajawat[3], Dr. Amit Gupta[4]

[1]PG Scholar, Department of Kriya Sharir, L. N. Ayurved College and Hospital, Bhopal.

[2]Associate Professor, Department of Kriya Sharir, L N Ayurved College and Hospital, Bhopal.

[3]PG Scholar, Department of Kriya Sharir, L. N. Ayurved College and Hospital, Bhopal.

[4]PG Scholar, Department of Kriya Sharir, L. N. Ayurved College and Hospital, Bhopal.

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***Corresponding Author**

Dr. Anandita Verma

PG Scholar, Department of Kriya Sharir, L. N. Ayurved College and Hospital, Bhopal.

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ABSTRACT

Time is a fundamental, yet often overlooked, regulator of human physiology. Contemporary biomedical research has demonstrated that biological processes follow intrinsic rhythmic patterns, particularly circadian rhythms, which regulate the sleep–wake cycle, hormonal secretion, metabolism, immune responses, and cognitive function. Disturbances in these rhythms are strongly associated with lifestyle disorders and chronic diseases. However, the recognition of time as a determinant of physiological balance is not exclusive to modern medicine. Classical Ayurvedic literature conceptualizes *kala* (time) as an active regulatory principle governing biological processes, adaptation, and homeostasis. This review adopts a narrative and conceptual integrative approach to examine biological rhythms from the perspective of Ayurvedic chronophysiology. Key Ayurvedic concepts—including *Kala*, *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, and *Agni*—are interpreted alongside contemporary findings in chronobiology, physiology, and metabolic research. The analysis reveals important parallels between Ayurvedic temporal frameworks and modern understanding of circadian, infradian, and metabolic rhythms. Timing influences digestion, metabolic regulation, seasonal

adaptation, and disease susceptibility, whereas individual variability is reflected through concepts such as *Prakriti* and chronotype. By integrating classical Ayurvedic perspectives with modern chronobiological insights, this review highlights the importance of temporal alignment in maintaining physiological coherence and good health. Such an integrative perspective may contribute to the development of preventive and personalized healthcare strategies that align lifestyle and therapeutic interventions with intrinsic biological rhythms of the body.

KEYWORDS: Chronobiology; Chronophysiology; Dinacharya; Ritucharya; Circadian Rhythm; Ayurveda.

1. INTRODUCTION

Time is a key, but frequently overlooked, factor in human physiology. Throughout biological systems, temporal structures govern molecular, cellular, and systemic activities, enabling coordination between internal functions and the external environment. Modern biomedical research has demonstrated that human physiology is intrinsically rhythmic and organized around regular biological cycles, most notably circadian rhythms, which regulate sleep-wake patterns, hormonal secretion, metabolism, immunological function, and cognitive functioning.[1–3] Disruption of these cycles, whether through shift work, irregular sleep, altered meal timing, or persistent exposure to artificial light, has been repeatedly associated with metabolic disorders, cardiovascular diseases, neuropsychiatric diseases, and poor general health.[4–6] These findings have led to the establishment of chronobiology as a significant subject in modern health sciences.

Circadian regulation is based on an endogenous timekeeping mechanism that is coordinated by the suprachiasmatic nucleus and synchronized by environmental cues such as light, food intake, and social behavior.[2,7] Beyond circadian rhythms, ultradian and infradian rhythms contribute to physiological stability, highlighting that biological time operates across numerous temporal scales.[8] The notion of chronophysiology—the study of how timing affects physiological function–is increasingly acknowledged as crucial for understanding health and illness, spurring advancements in chronotherapy, chrono diet, and time-tailored clinical interventions.[9,10]

Surprisingly, the identification of time as a regulator of physiological integrity is not unique to contemporary research. Traditional medicinal systems, particularly Ayurveda, have long

viewed time (kala) as a fundamental organizing force of life and health. In Ayurvedic physiology, time is more than just a chronological measure; it is an active determinant of body function, adaptive ability, and homeostasis. Daily (Dinacharya), seasonal (Ritucharyā), and life stage-specific temporal frameworks recognize that physiological processes fluctuate over time and must coincide with natural cycles to maintain health.[11,12] According to this viewpoint, health is maintained through synchronicity between internal functional dynamics and external temporal rhythms, whereas illness results from misalignment.

In the Ayurvedic framework of Kriya Sharir (physiology), temporal variation is strongly related to the functional dominance of the regulatory principles that govern movement, transformation, and structural stability. These cyclical variations are characterized by dynamic processes that change during the day and seasons, influencing digestion, metabolism, cognition, and restorative processes. Although articulated in a separate epistemological language, these insights resonate with contemporary descriptions of rhythmic neuroendocrine activity, metabolic oscillations and autonomic balance.[13,14] Despite these conceptual links, Ayurvedic chronophysiological findings are often underexplored in modern scientific discourse, frequently consigned to descriptive or prescriptive contexts rather than being investigated as theoretical models for biological timing.

The increased prevalence of lifestyle-related illnesses linked to circadian misalignment emphasizes the need for more comprehensive, systems-oriented approaches to biological rhythms. Current biomedical treatments, while mechanistically sound, usually target rhythm disruption at separate levels—genes, hormones, or behaviors–without fully accounting for the integrative, whole-person feature of time regulation. Reassessing existing chronophysiological paradigms may provide additional insights into how temporal coherence across physiological systems leads to resilience and health. Such an integrated investigation does not intend to confuse different medical paradigms but rather to identify convergences that may expand conceptual knowledge and drive future research approaches.

As a result, the purpose of this essay is to re-examine human biological rhythms through the lens of Ayurvedic chronophysiology, putting traditional conceptions of time in perspective with modern circadian science. By combining insights from modern chronobiology and Ayurvedic physiological thought, the current study aims to articulate time as a health regulator in a scientifically grounded, conceptually integrative, and relevant way to current challenges in preventive and personalized healthcare. This reconsideration may help to

provide a more comprehensive understanding of temporal biology and emphasizes the need to match human behavior and physiology with intrinsic biological cycles.

The current study used a narrative and conceptual integrative review approach. Classical Ayurvedic texts on time management, including Kala, Dinacharya, Ritucharyā, and Agni, were compared with peer-reviewed material from chronobiology, physiology, and metabolic research. Rather than undertaking a rigorous quantitative synthesis, this review aims to discover conceptual convergences and complementary frameworks between Ayurveda and modern biomedical science, with a particular emphasis on the temporal control of health and disease. This method enables theoretical integration and interpretative analysis, which is especially useful for investigating interdisciplinary phenomena that transcend many epistemological traditions. Ayurveda recognizes *Kala* as a fundamental determinant of physiological change and disease causation (Charaka Samhita, Vimana Sthana 3/8).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a narrative and conceptual integrative review approach to explore the relationship between Ayurvedic concepts of time and the modern chronobiological understanding. Relevant literature was identified through searches of electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The keywords used in the search were *chronobiology*, *circadian rhythm*, *Ayurveda*, *Kala*, *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *metabolic timing*, and *chronophysiology*.

Classical Ayurvedic texts, particularly Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and relevant commentaries, were also consulted to interpret traditional concepts related to the temporal regulation of physiology.

The inclusion criteria were as follows.

- Peer-reviewed articles related to circadian biology and metabolic timing
- Studies discussing lifestyle rhythms and disease risk
- Classical Ayurvedic descriptions of temporal physiology
- Conceptual or review articles exploring integrative approaches

This review did not perform a quantitative meta-analysis but rather identified conceptual parallels and theoretical integration between Ayurvedic chronophysiological principles and modern biological rhythm research.

3.1 Concept of Kala (Time) in Ayurvedic Physiology

In Ayurveda, Kala is recognized as a fundamental determinant of physiological and biological regulation. Unlike a purely linear or mechanical conception of time, Kala is understood as an active and dynamic principle that governs change, maturation, decay, and rhythmic transformation in living systems.[11,12] Classical Ayurvedic texts describe *Kala* as both *Nimita kāraṇa* (instrumental cause) and *Parinama kāraṇa* (agent of transformation), emphasizing its role in regulating biological change over time (Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthan 1/54–55).

From a physiological perspective, Kala is inseparable from Kriya, which is the continuous functional activity of the body. Digestion, tissue nourishment (Dhatu poshana), elimination, sleep, mental alertness, and recovery are all temporally modulated processes. Health (Swasthya) is maintained when these processes occur in accordance with appropriate temporal patterns, whereas disease (Vyadhi) arises when there is a disruption or mistiming of these rhythms. This temporal regulation reflects an early systems-level understanding of biological rhythms that parallels the modern chronobiological principles.[13,14]

Ayurveda further conceptualizes time across multiple scales—daily, seasonal, and life stages—each exerting distinct influences on physiology. This multilevel temporal framework anticipates the contemporary recognition of circadian, infradian, and developmental rhythms in human biology.[15,16]

3.2 Dinacharya and Diurnal Rhythmicity

Dinacharya, an Ayurvedic daily regimen, represents a structured model of circadian alignment. The day is divided into functional phases characterized by the dominance of regulatory principles responsible for movement, metabolism, and stability of the body. These phases correspond to predictable fluctuations in digestive power (Agni), mental clarity, physical strength, and restorative capacity.[17]

Morning hours are optimal for elimination, lightness, and mental clarity; midday for maximal digestive and metabolic efficiency; and evening and night for restoration, assimilation, and sleep. These observations align closely with modern findings demonstrating circadian variations in insulin sensitivity, gastrointestinal motility, hormone secretion, and cognitive performance.[18]

Importantly, Dinacharya is not merely prescriptive but also explanatory; it provides a physiological rationale for why activities such as eating, exercise, work, and sleep should occur at specific times. From a chronophysiological standpoint, this reflects an early understanding that timing is as important as the activity itself, a concept that is now central to chronotherapy and chrono-nutrition.

The importance of daily behavioral regulation (*Dinacharya*) is described in Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana, Chapter 5 (Dinacharya Adhyaya), where alignment with natural diurnal cycles is emphasized for maintaining physiological balance.[19]

3.3 Ritucharya and Seasonal Biological Adaptation

Beyond daily rhythms, Ayurveda emphasizes Ritucharya, or seasonal regimen, acknowledging that human physiology adapts continuously to environmental changes such as temperature, daylight duration, and humidity. Seasonal variation influences appetite, metabolic rate, immunity, and psychological state—phenomena increasingly validated by modern research on seasonal gene expression, immune responsiveness, and affective disorders.[20]

Ayurvedic texts describe cyclical patterns of physiological strength and vulnerability across seasons, recommending gradual dietary and behavior transitions to maintain internal stability. This anticipatory model of adaptation contrasts with reactive medical approaches that address pathology only after imbalance manifests.[21]

From a modern perspective, Ritucharya may be viewed as an early ecological model of chronophysiology, recognizing that biological rhythms are not isolated internal clocks but are entrained to broader environmental cycles. Such insights are particularly relevant in the context of climate change, urbanization, and artificial environmental conditions that increasingly disrupt natural seasonal cues.[22]

Seasonal adaptation (*Ritucharya*) is elaborated in Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana, Chapter 6, which describes dietary and lifestyle adjustments according to seasonal variations to maintain physiological equilibrium.

3.4 Kala, Agni, and Metabolic Timing

A principal component of Ayurvedic chronophysiology is the relationship between Kala and Agni, the functional principle governing digestion, metabolism, and cellular transformation.

Agni is described as fluctuating predictably across the day and seasons, influencing nutrient assimilation, tissue formation, and metabolic waste clearance.[23]

Midday is traditionally identified as the period of strongest digestive capacity, a view that corresponds with contemporary evidence showing peak postprandial glucose tolerance and metabolic efficiency earlier in the day. Conversely, late-night eating is described as physiologically burdensome, a notion supported by modern studies linking nocturnal food intake with metabolic dysregulation, obesity, and insulin resistance.[24]

This temporal understanding of metabolism highlights that dietary quality alone is insufficient for metabolic health; temporal congruence between food intake and biological rhythms is equally critical. Ayurvedic insights thus offer a conceptual framework that complements emerging research in time-restricted feeding and circadian nutrition.[25]

The conceptual relationship between key Ayurvedic temporal principles and modern biological rhythm science can be summarized in Table 1.

Ayurvedic Concept	Description	Modern Equivalent
Kala	**Temporal regulator of physiological processes**	**Biological timing system**
Dinacharya	**Daily behavior rhythm**	**Circadian rhythm**
Ritucharya	**Seasonal adaptation**	**Circannual rhythm**
Agni	**Metabolic transformation**	**Metabolic circadian regulation**
Prakriti	**Individual constitution**	**Chronotype**

3.5 Chronophysiological Basis of Health and Disease

Both Ayurveda and modern chronobiology converge on the principle that rhythmic coherence across physiological systems is essential for health. In Ayurveda, disease is often attributed to improper timing—untimely eating, sleeping, exertion, or sensory engagement—which disrupts functional harmony. Similarly, modern medicine increasingly recognizes circadian misalignment as a pathogenic factor underlying metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, immune dysfunction, and neuropsychiatric disorders.[26]

However, Ayurveda extends this concept beyond isolated rhythms to emphasize systemic synchrony, integrating physical, mental, and environmental dimensions. This holistic orientation addresses a key limitation in contemporary biomedical models, which often

examine rhythm disruption at molecular or behavior levels without fully accounting for their interconnected effects on the whole organism.[27]

3.6 Integrative Implications for Preventive and Personalized Healthcare

Re-examining biological rhythms through Ayurvedic chronophysiology offers valuable implications for preventive and personalized medicine. Rather than replacing modern chronobiology, Ayurvedic concepts provide a complementary theoretical lens that emphasizes adaptability, individual variability, and ecological context.[28]

Incorporating temporal principles into lifestyle counselling, dietary planning, and therapeutic scheduling may enhance clinical outcomes, particularly in lifestyle-related and chronic disorders. Furthermore, Ayurvedic chronophysiology may serve as a conceptual bridge for developing integrative research models that explore how traditional temporal frameworks can be empirically evaluated using modern tools such as wearable sensors, biomarker profiling, and systems biology.[29]

When viewed together, the evidence from current chronobiology and Ayurvedic physiology reveals that temporal structure is a key determinant of functional coherence in biological systems, rather than an accessory trait. While modern science elucidates the molecular and neurological mechanisms that underpin biological rhythms, Ayurveda provides a systems-level framework for contextualizing these rhythms within everyday life, seasonal adaption, and individual constitution.[30] This synthesis emphasizes timing as a unified regulatory principle that connects mechanistic understanding and holistic health management.

Recognizing individual variability is a key area of convergence between Ayurvedic chronophysiology and current circadian science. Ayurveda provides for temporal tolerance and flexibility through the notion of Prakriti, which recognizes that constitutional differences influence digestion, sleep habits, activity preference, and stress response throughout time.[31] Similarly, current chronobiology recognizes inter-individual variations in circadian timing, known as chronotypes, which influence metabolic efficiency, cognitive function, and disease risk. Integrating these approaches implies that temporal health advice should not be universally uniform, but rather adapted to individual biological timing, laying the groundwork for fully individualized and preventive healthcare initiatives.

4 DISCUSSION

The present review highlights meaningful conceptual parallels between Ayurvedic chronophysiology and modern chronobiological science. Although the two systems originate from different epistemological frameworks, both emphasize the importance of temporal organization in maintaining physiological balance.[32]

Modern chronobiology has primarily focused on molecular mechanisms underlying biological rhythms, including clock genes, hormonal oscillations, and neural regulation through the suprachiasmatic nucleus. In contrast, Ayurveda conceptualizes temporal regulation at a systems level, integrating environmental influences, behavior patterns, and individual constitutional factors.[33] This broader perspective allows temporal regulation to be understood not only as a biological phenomenon but also as a determinant of lifestyle organization and health behavior.

The Ayurvedic concepts of Dinacharya and Ritucharya illustrate structured behavioral adaptations aligned with daily and seasonal rhythms. These frameworks closely resemble contemporary findings regarding circadian regulation of metabolism, hormone secretion, immune activity, and sleep cycles.[34] Similarly, the Ayurvedic understanding of Agni as a dynamic metabolic regulator corresponds with modern evidence demonstrating diurnal variations in digestive efficiency and glucose metabolism.

Another important convergence lies in the recognition of individual variability. Ayurveda describes constitutional differences through *Prakriti*, while modern chronobiology identifies variations in circadian preference through chronotypes.[35] Both perspectives support the emerging paradigm of personalized medicine, where lifestyle recommendations and therapeutic interventions are adapted to individual biological characteristics.

Despite these similarities, Ayurvedic chronophysiology remains underrepresented in contemporary biomedical discourse.[36] Future research may benefit from empirically evaluating these traditional temporal frameworks using modern tools such as wearable biosensors, metabolic biomarkers, and chronotherapeutic interventions. Such interdisciplinary research could strengthen the scientific understanding of temporal physiology and promote integrative preventive healthcare strategies.

5 CONCLUSION

Time functions not merely as a passive background for physiological activity but as a fundamental regulator of biological organization and health. Modern chronobiology has clarified the molecular and neurophysiological mechanisms underlying biological rhythms, while Ayurveda offers a comprehensive systems-oriented perspective that integrates temporal patterns with lifestyle, environment, and individual constitution.

Re-examining biological rhythms through the lens of Ayurvedic chronophysiology reveals important conceptual convergences that broaden the understanding of health as a dynamic and temporally coordinated state. Integrating insights from these two perspectives may contribute to the development of preventive and personalized healthcare approaches that emphasize alignment between human behavior and intrinsic biological rhythms.

Recognizing the role of *Kala* in regulating physiological harmony underscores the enduring relevance of temporal awareness in sustaining health and preventing disease.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
BMI	Body Mass Index
CNS	Central Nervous System
SCN	Suprachiasmatic Nucleus
CTS	Circadian Timing System

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