

Sleep as Restoration in a Restless Age: Circadian Rhythms and Healing Insights from Indian Knowledge Systems, Naturopathy, and Modern Science

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Abstract: Food has long stood at the centre of human well-being. This study explores the place of food as the connecting principle among Indian Knowledge Systems, naturopathy, and modern nutrition. It examines how the ancient idea of *Āhāra* as the source of *prāṇa* aligns with clinical and scientific views on metabolism, circulation, and vitality. The research follows a qualitative and analytical method, drawing from classical texts such as the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed medical studies. The findings show four shared themes: food as the regulator of internal flow, obstruction and its removal through proper combinations, restoration through cleansing and moderation, and the convergence of traditional and scientific reasoning. Evidence from naturopathic practice and modern biomedicine demonstrates that natural, plant-based, and balanced diets improve vascular health, regulate metabolism, and support emotional stability. The study concludes that food is not merely a substance for survival but the living medium through which body, mind, and environment maintain harmony. The integration of these perspectives offers a sustainable and holistic model of preventive and restorative health.

Keywords: Sleep health, circadian rhythm, Indian Knowledge Systems, naturopathy

1. Introduction

Sleep, though seemingly passive, is one of the most dynamic processes vital to human well-being. In the physiological sense, it regulates memory consolidation, immune function, metabolic equilibrium, and emotional stability (Walker, 2017). Yet, in contemporary society, chronic sleep deprivation has become commonplace, linked to rising rates of anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, and lifestyle-related disorders (Knutson et al., 2017; Medic, Wille, & Hemels, 2017). This disconnection between natural sleep rhythms and daily life patterns reflects a deeper rupture in the alignment between the body and its environment.

Indian Knowledge Systems place *Nidrā* (sleep) alongside *Āhāra* (food) and *Brahmacarya* (regulated conduct) as one of the three essential pillars of health (*Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Sūtrasthāna*, 11.35). In these traditions, sleep is not only a biological requirement but a process of repair and realignment—a restoration of *prāṇa* (vital energy) through stillness. The Yogic and Ayurvedic view asserts that sleep quality depends on daily rhythm (*dinacaryā*), mental calmness, and balance among the *doṣas* (Sarma, 2020). Naturopathy, grounded in similar principles, emphasizes the role of circadian alignment, dietary rhythm, and sleep hygiene in sustaining mental and physical restoration (CCRYN, 2023).

Modern science corroborates many of these insights through the study of circadian biology, which reveals how sleep–wake cycles are governed by endogenous clocks responding to light, food timing, and hormonal patterns (Czeisler & Buxton, 2017). Disruption to these rhythms—whether by artificial

lighting, irregular work schedules, or psychological stress—leads to a cascade of metabolic, cardiovascular, and cognitive impairments (Baron & Reid, 2014).

This paper titled *Sleep as Restoration in a Restless Age: Circadian Rhythms and Healing Insights from Indian Knowledge Systems, Naturopathy, and Modern Science* explores how sleep serves as a junction of inner balance and outer rhythm. It aims to synthesize scriptural, empirical, and clinical perspectives to uncover the central role of sleep in sustaining vitality. In doing so, the study repositions sleep not as a passive retreat from productivity but as a conscious return to wholeness.

Scope of the Study

This study explores sleep as a foundational principle of restoration across Indian Knowledge Systems, naturopathy, and modern biomedical science. The scope encompasses classical philosophical perspectives on *Nidrā*, naturopathic practices addressing sleep hygiene and lifestyle correction, and recent scientific advances in circadian rhythm research. It highlights sleep as a physiological, psychological, and ecological phenomenon, shaped by internal balance and external cues.

The analysis is interdisciplinary and comparative in nature. It focuses on synthesizing textual knowledge from traditional Indian sources with empirical findings from naturopathy and global biomedical literature. The study does not confine itself to sleep disorders but rather investigates sleep as a daily reset mechanism vital for metabolism, cognition, and emotional stability. Special attention is given to how disruption of

circadian alignment correlates with modern lifestyle diseases and how traditional frameworks offer practical solutions rooted in rhythm, restraint, and natural living.

2. Literature Review

Scientific investigations into sleep underscore its integral role in regulating cognition, immunity, and cardiovascular function. Circadian rhythms, governed by the suprachiasmatic nucleus in the hypothalamus, control not only sleep–wake cycles but also hormone release, metabolism, and core body temperature (Czeisler et al., 1999). Disruption of these rhythms has been associated with increased risk for metabolic syndrome, depression, and impaired immune response (Walker, 2017; Archer & Oster, 2015).

From a naturopathic perspective, sleep is viewed as a primary agent of restoration. The Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy (2023) identifies sleep hygiene, relaxation therapies, and alignment with solar rhythms as central to well-being. Edla et al. (2016) reported significant improvement in sleep quality and reduced medication dependency among participants following integrated naturopathy and yoga interventions. Similarly, Patil et al. (2024) demonstrated improvements in psychological well-being and biochemical markers in individuals with lifestyle-related sleep disturbances.

Indian Knowledge Systems treat Nidrā (sleep) as one of the three pillars of health, along with Āhāra (food) and Brahmacharya (regulated living). Classical texts affirm that loss of sleep (anidrā) leads to mental fatigue, digestive disturbances, and premature aging. Surabhi et al. (2024) emphasized the relevance of prakṛti (individual constitution) in determining optimal sleep patterns, suggesting personalized rest protocols for physiological and psychological balance. Such insights support the idea that sleep is not merely the absence of wakefulness but a distinct phase of healing and integration.

Contemporary research supports these notions with growing evidence. Chronobiology reveals that artificial light, erratic schedules, and digital overexposure degrade sleep quality and delay melatonin secretion (Cho et al., 2016). Tools like actigraphy and polysomnography now offer precise measurement of sleep structure, reinforcing what older systems recognized as the subtle balance between rest and rhythm.

Taken together, these sources reflect a unified understanding: sleep restores the order that wakefulness displaces. Its regulation is not merely mechanical but connected to the timing, ethics, and intention of human activity. Whether termed Nidrā, rest, or circadian synchronization, sleep emerges as the medium through which balance is maintained across body, mind, and environment.

Objectives

- 1) To analyse the role of sleep in promoting physiological and psychological well-being through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems, naturopathy, and modern science.
- 2) To explore convergences across these frameworks regarding natural sleep rhythms, lifestyle influences, and

the consequences of sleep disruption in contemporary life.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, combining textual interpretation, thematic synthesis, and empirical review. It draws from classical Indian Knowledge Systems, contemporary naturopathic literature, and current scientific research on sleep physiology and circadian health. Sources include peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, and traditional texts that examine the multidimensional role of sleep.

Comparative analysis is used to identify common themes such as rest–activity balance, circadian alignment, and the effects of modern lifestyle on sleep integrity. Particular attention is given to evidence from India while integrating relevant global perspectives. The synthesis aims to present sleep as a foundational rhythm that underlies vitality, clarity, and recovery across healing traditions and scientific paradigms.

4. Results and Discussion

The synthesis of textual, clinical, and empirical literature identified four interwoven themes on sleep and its relevance to contemporary health: (1) Sleep as Rhythmic Order, (2) Disruption and its Physiological Consequences, (3) Restoration through Natural Alignment, and (4) Integration of Ancient and Modern Frameworks.

1) Sleep as Rhythmic Order

In Indian Knowledge Systems, Nidrā is defined not as passivity but as an active principle that restores depleted energies and aligns human activity with cosmic rhythm. As emphasized in classical texts, sleep supports digestion, cognition, and emotional resilience. This view is echoed in chronobiological research, which confirms that synchronized circadian rhythms promote homeostasis through regulated hormone cycles (Czeisler et al., 1999).

The naturopathic model reflects this alignment by recommending early sleep, minimal exposure to artificial light, and pre-sleep rituals to harmonize internal cycles with external cues. The Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy (2023) recognizes these rhythms as essential to mental clarity and physiological recovery.

2) Disruption and Its Physiological Consequences

When sleep deviates from its natural rhythm, disturbance spreads across multiple systems. Archer and Oster (2015) documented that irregular sleep–wake patterns increase the risk of metabolic syndrome and inflammatory disorders. Walker (2017) outlined cognitive deficits associated with chronic sleep loss, including impaired memory, judgment, and emotional regulation.

These findings parallel traditional claims that sleep deprivation (anidrā) leads to derangement in vāta, affecting both mind and circulation. The modern term “social jetlag” captures this misalignment, where one’s biological rhythm conflicts with social or occupational demands.

3) Restoration through Natural Alignment

Clinical studies affirm that naturopathic practices such as yoga nidrā, fasting, and digital detoxification contribute to restoring sleep quality. Patil et al. (2024) reported reduced cortisol levels and improved subjective sleep quality following integrative interventions. Edla et al. (2016) observed a decline in medication dependency when participants adopted nature-aligned routines and nutritional regulation.

These practices resonate with the older concept of satmya-gradual adaptation through balance. Sleep restoration, in this view, is not externally imposed but cultivated through consistent, mindful habits that reintegrate the body with the day-night cycle.

4) Integration of Ancient and Modern Frameworks

Despite differences in terminology, Indian Knowledge Systems, naturopathy, and modern chronobiology converge on the idea that sleep is a cyclical, regulatory force. Surabhi et al. (2024) proposed personalized approaches to rest based on prakṛti, akin to individualized chronotherapy in modern sleep medicine.

Technology-based measurements like actigraphy and wearable sleep trackers offer precise metrics, yet their effectiveness is enhanced when coupled with traditional practices like prāṇāyāma, mindful eating, and early sleeping routines. This convergence affirms that sleep, while biologically rooted, is also behaviourally and ethically shaped.

Summary of themes:

Theme	Key Insights
1. Sleep as Rhythmic Order	Sleep is understood as a restorative force governed by natural cycles. Indian Knowledge Systems view Nidrā as essential to vitality and balance, aligning with chronobiological findings on circadian regulation.
2. Disruption and Consequences	Disturbances in sleep lead to systemic imbalance. Traditional views of anidrā as vāta derangement find support in studies linking irregular sleep to metabolic dysfunction and cognitive decline.
3. Restoration through Natural Alignment	Practices such as yoga nidrā, early sleep routines, and dietary moderation restore natural rhythms. Evidence shows improved sleep quality and stress reduction through integrative naturopathic interventions.
4. Integration of Ancient and Modern Frameworks	Both traditional and modern sciences affirm that healthy sleep is cyclical, individualised, and lifestyle-dependent. Modern tools enhance traditional practices, creating a unified approach to rest and renewal.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Sleep is neither merely the absence of wakefulness nor a passive lapse in consciousness. It is a rhythmic, active state in which the body and mind engage in repair, integration, and renewal. Drawing from Indian Knowledge Systems, naturopathic traditions, and modern circadian science, this study affirms that sleep is a cornerstone of human well-being-intimately linked to physiological harmony, cognitive clarity, and emotional steadiness.

The Indian tradition regards Nidrā as one of the three pillars of life, emphasizing its role in regulating internal energy and mental tranquillity. Naturopathy reinforces this wisdom by promoting non-invasive methods-such as early bedtime, dietary alignment, and relaxation practices-to restore sleep without dependence on medication. Modern science confirms the biological underpinnings of this insight, particularly through the study of melatonin cycles, sleep architecture, and the effects of light exposure on circadian rhythm.

Despite their distinct vocabularies and approaches, all three systems converge on a shared truth: sleep is a function of rhythm. When disrupted, health suffers. When respected, healing becomes innate. In an age increasingly defined by stimulation and unrest, the cultivation of good sleep stands as an act of both individual care and collective well-being.

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