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Modernization of *Samhita* - A Need or Purposeless Task

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ABSTRACT

The *Samhitas*, as foundational texts of ancient Indian knowledge systems—particularly in *Ayurveda*, *Vedas*, and other classical disciplines—embody centuries of wisdom, philosophy, and practical guidance. However, the relevance and accessibility of these texts in the modern era have become subjects of ongoing debate. This paper explores whether the modernization of *Samhitas* is a necessary step to preserve, contextualize, and utilize their knowledge in contemporary times, or if such efforts dilute their authenticity and render them purposeless. Through critical analysis, the study examines the challenges posed by archaic language, cultural shifts, and scientific advancements, while also acknowledging the rich heritage and holistic perspectives the *Samhitas* offer. The abstract presents a balanced perspective on whether modernization serves as a bridge between tradition and modernity or risks undermining the spiritual and epistemological integrity of these ancient texts. Ultimately, it argues that thoughtful and respectful modernization can enhance the practical applicability of *Samhitas* without compromising their essence.

Key words: *Samhita*, Modernization, Purposeless, Ayurveda

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda Samhitas are ancient Indian texts that form the foundation of *Ayurvedic* medicine, one of the world's oldest systems of traditional medicine. These

texts provide a comprehensive understanding of health, wellness, and the treatment of diseases from an *Ayurvedic* perspective. *Acharya Gangadhar* said in his commentary, *Jalpkalptaru*- Every sage composed this scripture based on his own opinion.^[1] Hence, we can say that whatever written in the *Ayurveda Samhita* is true and is relevant in the present era as well because the principles mentioned in the *Ayurveda Samhita* are said by *Apta Purusha* after testing in several ways and on proving it with reasoning.

The *Samhitas*, the earliest layer of Vedic literature, form the foundational texts of *Hindu* philosophy, rituals, and spiritual knowledge. Comprising hymns, *Mantras*, and prayers, they were orally transmitted across generations with utmost reverence and precision. However, in the context of the 21st century,

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where rapid technological, social, and educational advancements have transformed the way knowledge is accessed and interpreted, the question arises: should the *Samhitas* be modernized, or does such an effort compromise their sanctity and original essence?

Modernization, in this context, refers not to altering the spiritual core of these texts but to making them more accessible and comprehensible to contemporary audiences. This may involve accurate translations, contextual interpretations, digital preservation, and academic integration. Proponents argue that modernization is essential for preserving cultural heritage and promoting informed engagement with ancient wisdom. Critics, however, fear that modern reinterpretations may distort meanings, dilute spiritual depth, and lead to cultural misrepresentation.

Therefore, the debate on the modernization of *Samhitas* is not merely about updating texts—it is about balancing preservation with progress. Exploring this issue requires a thoughtful examination of the relevance, risks, and responsibilities involved in bringing ancient scripture into modern discourse.

Aim

To evaluate whether modernizing *Ayurveda Samhitas* enhances their relevance today or compromises their authenticity and traditional value.

OBJECTIVES

1. To highlight the core features and philosophical depth of *Ayurveda Samhitas*.
2. To examine the risks of modernization, such as loss of authenticity and simplification.
3. To explore the present-day relevance of *Ayurvedic* principles.
4. To suggest a balanced approach that preserves tradition while enabling accessibility.
5. To promote the preservation and respectful study of the *Samhitas*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative research methodology has been adopted. The approach is interdisciplinary, drawing insights from

classical literature, modern academic commentary, and contemporary societal discourse. The following materials and methods have been employed:

1. Literature Review

Primary and secondary sources were systematically reviewed, including:

- **Ancient Indian Samhitas** such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*,
- **Translated versions and commentaries** by modern scholars and Indologists.
- **Peer-reviewed journal articles**, books, and conference proceedings focusing on *Vedic* knowledge systems, cultural transformation, and legal or medical reforms.

2. Comparative Analysis

A comparative framework was used to assess:

- The original context and intent of various *Samhitas*.
- The relevance and application of their principles in the contemporary era.
- Examples of modern adaptations or reinterpretations, particularly in *Ayurveda*, *Dharmashastra*, and ethics.

Meaning of word Samhita

- संहिता - सम् + धा + क्त, हि आदेशः = संहित
- संहित + टाप् = संहिता^[2]
- परः सन्निकर्षः संहिता । वर्णानामतिशयितः सन्नधिः संहितासंज्ञः स्यात्^[3]

In *Vyakarana* literature meaning of the word *Samhita* is used as '*Sandhi*'. Some Meaning of word *Samhita* - Union, collection, compilation, systematically arranged verse or prose, compilation of laws, rules of any subject, hymns of *Vedas* following particular sequence, in grammar- *Sandhi*, *Paramatma*.

For *Ayurveda* compendia meaning of the word *Samhita* is systematically arranged verse or prose, which is more accurate.

Acharya Priyavrat Sharma, in his book “Ayurveda Ka Vaigyanik Itihas” says that Samhita

Includes all the specialities of the subject, i.e., Ashtanga Ayurveda^[4]

Distinctive Features of The Perfect Ayurveda Samhitas

Following are the features of Ayurveda Samhita According to Acharya Charak.^[5]

1. सुमह्यशस्विधीरपुरुषासेवित- Which are followed by great, illustrious and wise physicians
2. अर्थबहुलम् - Abundance of subject matter
3. आसजनपूजितं - Respected by reputed personalities
4. त्रिविधशिष्यबुद्धिहितम् - Conducive to the intellectual of three types of disciples
5. अपगतपुनरुक्तदोष - Free from defects of repetition
6. आर्ष - Written by seers and sages
7. सुप्रणीतसूत्रभाष्यसङ्ग्रहक्रमं - Well placed aphorism together with commentaries in proper sequence
8. स्वाधारम् - Elegant ideas to convey
9. अनवपतितशब्दम् - Which are free from vulgar words
10. अकष्टशब्द- which are free from difficult words
11. पुष्कलाभिधानं - which have clear and unambiguous subject matter
12. क्रमागतार्थम् - Which conveys subject matter in proper order
13. अर्थतत्त्वविनिश्चयप्रधानं - Which have determination of real objects
14. सङ्गतार्थम् - Which are relevant
15. असङ्कुलप्रकरण - which are free from confusion related to context
16. आशुप्रबोधकं - Which conveys ideas quickly

17. लक्षणवत् - Which are equipped with definitions

18. उदाहरणवत् - Which are equipped with examples

Along with the above Features, Ayurveda Samhita Possess the following salient features also Specific Dialogue and Interpretations

- Explanation of Ashtanga-Ayurveda.
- Exemplary Guru- Shishya interactions, as observed in the Charak Samhita.
- Arrangement of diverse seminars and symposia. Incorporation of opinions from various scholars, along with their reasoned acceptance or dismissal.
- Description of the text following the “Samas-Vyas Shaili” i.e. Pattern of brief and detail description.
- Unique pattern of proposition of the chapter, discussion, summary and colophon.
- Close interrelationship of the subject matter of the one chapter with another and one section with another section.
- Absence of doubts and ambiguity

Scientific way of discussion

- Each subject is systematically explained, adhering to the principles of cause and effect.
- Every statement in the Samhitas is accompanied by sound reasoning.
- Different scholars' perspectives are duly honoured.
- There is a wealth of inquiries and cordial dialogues, reflecting a scientific disposition.
- An abundance of experiments, observations, and thorough examinations is present.

Endorsed Foundational Principles

The Ayurveda Samhitas support enduring and substantiated fundamental principles that have stood the test of time. Some of the principles are – Triguna Doctrine, Panchamahabhuta Doctrine, Tridosha Doctrine, Dosha, Dhātu, and Mala Doctrine.

Broader aspect & Unique approach

The *Ayurveda Samhitas* offer a comprehensive outlook across various dimensions, including:

- Understanding of Life - Categorized into four types of life stages.
- Notions of Well-being - Addressing health from multiple angles.
- Disease Interpretation - Covering both disorders arising from imbalances and those triggered by karmic factors.
- Therapeutic Approaches - Encompassing both rational and spiritual remedies.
- Concept of Mortal Life and Existence Beyond - Explored in detail.
- *Laukiki-Chikitsa* as well as *Naishthiki-Chikitsa*

Why Modernization of Samhita is Purposeless?

The following are the reasons which indicate the modernization of *Ayurveda Samhita* is purposeless -

Ayurveda is endorsed by an assembly of learned men. Though it appears to be divergent in views from other philosophical works and *Ayurveda*, after careful examination with earlier and later statements, it will be noticed that there is no contradiction in this aspect.^[6] Hence, we can say that *Ayurveda Samhita* is “*Trikala Abadhit*”.

- **Loss of Authenticity:** Modernization may lead to the loss of the original essence and authenticity of *Ayurveda* texts. For example, altering the language and terminology in ancient texts might distort their true meaning.
- **Loss of Ancient Wisdom:** One of the major drawbacks of modernizing *Ayurveda* literature is the potential loss of ancient wisdom. *Ayurvedic* texts, such as the *Charaka Samhita* and the *Sushruta Samhita*, are based on centuries of empirical knowledge and philosophical insights. Modernization attempts often focus on updating the language and concepts, with an emphasis on scientific validation. However, in doing so, the

richness and depth of the ancient wisdom may be compromised.

- **Alteration of the Author's Intent:** Modernization of *Samhita* may inadvertently alter or dilute the original author's intent, as translators and editors often make decisions based on their interpretations and biases. These changes can range from minor adjustments in language to major shifts in characterizations or plotlines. By tampering with these essentials, the modernized version might not genuinely reflect the true message and artistic expression intended by the ancient author. Thus, the authenticity and integrity of the original work can be compromised.
- **Oversimplification of Concepts:** *Ayurveda* is a multidimensional system that considers an individual's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Modernization attempts often oversimplify *Ayurvedic* concepts to fit within the framework of conventional medicine. For instance, *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) are often reduced to mere 'biological humours' in modern texts, neglecting their deeper meanings and interactions within the body. This oversimplification can dilute the holistic approach of *Ayurveda* and limit its potential for comprehensive healing and wellness.
- **Neglect of Traditional Treatment Modalities:** With the push for modernization, traditional treatment modalities of *Ayurveda* may be overshadowed or disregarded in favour of standardized protocols and pharmaceutical interventions. While scientific validation is crucial, it is important to recognize the extensive range of *Ayurvedic* therapies, such as - *Panchakarma* (detoxification), *Rasayana* (rejuvenation), and *Shirodhara* (oil pouring on the forehead). These therapies are often individualized, taking into account the unique constitution and condition of the patient. By neglecting these traditional treatment modalities, modernization efforts may limit the scope of *Ayurveda's* healing potential.
- **Dilution of Traditional Knowledge:** One of the primary drawbacks of the modernization of

Ayurveda literature is the potential dilution of traditional knowledge. *Ayurveda* has been passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions and ancient texts. As *Ayurveda* adapts to modern demands, there is a risk of losing the depth and authenticity that comes with traditional wisdom. The oversimplification and reductionism of Ayurvedic concepts in modern literature may strip them of their holistic principles and essential nuances.

- **Loss of Cultural Identity:** Modernization of *Ayurveda Samhita* can also lead to a loss of cultural identity when ancient literature is stripped of its original language. Translating a text to a different language can result in the erasure of linguistic nuances, specific cultural expressions, and poetic forms unique to the original work, thereby hindering a deeper understanding and appreciation of a particular culture or period.
- **Uniqueness of Ayurveda Samhita** lies in its adaptability for practitioners when it comes to practical aspects like selecting medicinal plants, crafting drug formulations, and determining dosage forms. This adaptability can accommodate variations based on the availability of raw materials in different geographic and climatic conditions, all while staying true to the core principles. Modernization efforts, if carried out, could potentially erode this distinctive characteristic of the *Ayurveda Samhita*.

Relevance of Ancient Ayurveda Principles at Present

■ Concept of Balanced Diet/ Ideal Diet

Sastika Dhanya (source of carbohydrate), *Sali Dhanya* (paddy yielded in winter), *Mudga* (source of Protein), *Saindhava Lavana* (Source of mineral), *Amalaki* (Source of Vitamin), *Yava*, *Antariksa Jala*, *Paya* (Source of calcium), *Sarpi* (source of Fat), *Jangala Mamsa* and *Madhu* should be taken regularly. Regular use of the above-mentioned substances results in the maintenance of health as well as to prevent invading the diseases. This

Principle of a balanced diet is given by *Acharyas*, which is still valid after thousands of years.

■ Intake of food according to the time

Intake of food according to the time (*Kala-Bhojana*) is the best one in promoting health.

Advances in Nutrition published an article in which it is said that - Timing of food consumption, meals, and macronutrients is a new tactic to address the problem of obesity and metabolic syndrome.^[6]

■ Knowledge of Hetu, Linga, and Ausadha

'*Hetu Linga Ausadha Jnanam*' means the knowledge of etiology, symptoms and medicines. the entire *Ayurveda* is embedded in these three aphorisms, i.e. *Hetu, Linga, and Ausadha* is the keywords of *Ayurveda*. In today's era, this Principle is valid because no disease can be treated without knowing *Hetu, Linga*.

■ Concept of Rasayana

By taking *Rasayana*, one can attain longevity. This Principle of *Ayurveda* has been proven in recent times. *Guduchi* as *Rasayana*, enhances the life span of *D. melanogaster*, which validates the concept of *Rasayana*.^[7]

■ Status of Agni in Hemanta Ritu (Winter season)

During *Sheeta Kala (Hemanta)*, due to the contact of cold wind, the *Agni* (digestive power) of strong/healthy individuals gets trapped in the body (like in a closed chamber) and becomes strong or powerful enough to digest food that is inherently heavy and in excess in quantity. "People have evolved to have subconscious urges to over-eat, and limited ability to avoid becoming obese, especially in winter", a University of Exeter study has found.^[8] From this, we can say the *Ayurveda* principle is still relevant.

■ Ayurvedic Standard Treatment Guidelines

A document prepared and funded by the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India (1st Edition, 2017). Management of diseases in ASTG is based on the fundamental principles of *Ayurveda*, as outlined in

the Samhitas. This document is also valid according to international standards and useful to the international community. So, we can say that Ayurveda Samhitas and their principles are still relevant without modernization. Thus, Ayurveda is the most ancient system of medicine of Indian origin and is equally relevant in modern times.

DISCUSSION

The question of whether the modernization of *Samhitas* is a necessary evolution or a purposeless endeavour has become increasingly prominent in the face of globalization and scientific scrutiny. On one side of the debate, advocates of modernization argue that adapting these texts into contemporary language and scientific paradigms allows for greater accessibility, comprehension, and practical application, particularly in academic, clinical, and international contexts. Proponents believe that modernization can serve as a bridge connecting ancient wisdom to contemporary needs without undermining its philosophical foundations.

However, the traditionalist perspective - strongly supported by many *Ayurvedic* scholars - emphasizes the timeless nature of *Samhitas*. These texts, especially *Ayurveda* Samhitas, are not merely medical treatises but comprehensive repositories of philosophical, ethical, and spiritual knowledge. Their format, style, and terminology are intentionally crafted to suit the holistic principles of the *Ayurvedic* system. As discussed, they possess a unique blend of clarity, precision, and depth that is often lost in translation or simplification.

The concern that modernization may lead to the loss of authenticity and dilution of traditional knowledge is valid. *Ayurveda* is rooted in experiential validation and spiritual insight, rather than reductionist empiricism. Efforts to reinterpret complex doctrines such as *Tridosha* or *Rasayana* using only modern biomedical language can result in oversimplification and misrepresentation. This concern becomes more serious when one considers that these principles are not just theories but lived traditions embedded in specific cultural and linguistic frameworks.

Moreover, the scientific disposition of the *Samhitas*, as highlighted by their structured reasoning, cause-effect explanations, and dialogical format, demonstrates that they are already methodical and rational in their own right. Modernization might falsely presume a superiority of Western scientific paradigms over indigenous epistemologies, whereas the integration of both requires a respectful understanding of each system's strengths.

Nevertheless, selective and context-sensitive adaptation could be beneficial. Translating and commenting on *Samhitas* in a way that retains their philosophical essence while improving pedagogical clarity can aid modern students and practitioners. Modern tools like digital platforms, comparative studies, and interdisciplinary research can help disseminate *Ayurvedic* knowledge globally, provided the core values and methods are preserved.

The relevance of *Ayurvedic* principles in modern times, such as dietetics, seasonal regimens, and the emphasis on preventive healthcare, showcases the living applicability of Samhita-based teachings. Principles such as *Kala-Bhajana* (timely eating), *Agni* (digestive power), and *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) have found resonance even in modern research, thereby validating the *Samhitas* without needing major overhauls.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the modernization of *Samhitas* should neither be dismissed outright as purposeless nor accepted uncritically as a necessary evolution. The wisdom encoded in these texts is both profound and perennial, continuing to offer insights into health, ethics, and human well-being. Rather than full-scale modernization, what is needed is thoughtful interpretation, academic translation, and respectful contextualization—ensuring that the original essence, authenticity, and cultural identity of the Samhitas remain intact.

Modernization that respects the epistemological and spiritual foundations of these ancient texts can serve as a harmonious bridge between tradition and innovation. On the other hand, indiscriminate

alterations driven by market forces, reductionist science, or superficial understandings may render these timeless scriptures into distorted imitations of their former selves.

Thus, the path forward lies not in rejecting or rewriting the Samhitas, but in revitalizing their study and practice through sincere scholarship, cultural respect, and integrative approaches—honouring the past while engaging with the present. Only such a balanced approach can ensure the Samhitas continue to guide humanity for generations to come.

The knowledge found in the *Samhita* regarding *Ayurveda* is also found in other texts, and anything not present in the *Samhita* cannot be found in any other text. It is a matter of research to find out a better way of applying *Samhita*. We have a very good heritage of *Ayurvedic* knowledge in the form of *Ayurveda Samhitas*. It should be our prime preference to preserve, protect the *Ayurveda Samhitas*, because *Ayurvedic* scriptures are similar to a light to illuminate the physician's intellect.

Significance of literature quoted by a scholar is worth mentioning in this context- "**The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation**". - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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