

Review on Sadvritta of Charaka Samhita and Its Modern Relevance

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Abstract

Charaka Samhita identifies Sadvritta, the “codes of right conduct,” as a holistic foundation for sustaining physical, mental, social, and spiritual balance. Rooted in the preventive philosophy of Ayurveda, Sadvritta encompasses comprehensive ethical, hygienic, and psychological guidelines designed to promote Swasthya (well-being) and prevent Vyadhi (disease). These codes reflect ancient behavioral wisdom that aligns remarkably with modern understandings of mental health, stress management, and lifestyle regulation.

This review critically examines the conceptual basis and classifications of Sadvritta Vyavaharika (ethical), Samajika (social), Dharmika (spiritual or moral), Manasika (mental), and Sharirika (physical) as described by Acharya Charaka. It explores their direct correlations with contemporary health disciplines such as behavioral psychology, hygiene science, cognitive therapy, and preventive medicine. The study underscores that principles like truthfulness, compassion, hygiene, moderation in diet and sleep, and control over sensory indulgence remain central to both ancient and modern paradigms of health promotion.

By integrating Sadvritta into present-day wellness frameworks, educational curricula, and public health models, Ayurveda’s timeless concept of “ethical living as preventive medicine” can serve as a sustainable tool to combat lifestyle disorders, psychosomatic illness, and social disharmony. This synthesis suggests that Sadvritta, far beyond a moral code, is a dynamic psychosocial strategy for achieving holistic health and global well-being.

Keywords: Sadvritta, Charaka Samhita, Ayurveda, Ethics, Lifestyle, Mental Health, Preventive Medicine.

Introduction

The term Sadvritta is derived from two Sanskrit words “Sat” meaning good, and “Vritta” meaning conduct or behaviour^[1]. It denotes the code of good conduct essential for maintaining a balanced condition of both body and mind. Sadvritta encompasses not only mental and emotional faculties but

also includes rules related to general hygiene, diet, sleep, and exercise^[2]. Following these principles leads to the prevention of psychological, physical, and psychosomatic disorders, thereby serving as a comprehensive health-promoting conduct.

According to Charaka Samhita, Sadvritta plays a vital role in preventing disease and maintaining health, forming a part of Swasthavritta (science of healthy living) ^[3]. The observance of Sadvritta is universal and is applicable to all individuals, at all times, and in all places. By following these rules, a person attains both Arogya (health) and Indriya Vijaya (control over sense organs) ^[4].

Charaka Samhita further states that a person who follows the complete code of good conduct will lead a healthy life, free from diseases, while neglecting it leads to Pradnyaparadha (intellectual error), which becomes the cause of various disorders^[5]. Therefore, one who wishes to promote his or her own well-being should strictly observe the entire code of good conduct constantly and carefully^[6].

Materials and Methods

This review article is based on an extensive compilation of information from classical Ayurvedic literature and contemporary scientific sources. Primary references were collected from Charaka Samhita and its authoritative commentaries, including Ayurveda Dipika and Charaka Chandrika, as well as other related Ayurvedic Samhitas and textbooks of Swasthavritta.

In addition, relevant research articles were identified through systematic searches of academic databases and online platforms such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and AYUSH Research Portal, using keywords like Sadvritta, Ayurvedic ethics, and preventive lifestyle in Ayurveda.

All the collected data were carefully reviewed, compared, and analyzed to elucidate the conceptual framework of Sadvritta as described in Charaka Samhita. A critical analysis was then performed to evaluate its modern-day relevance, especially in the fields of preventive medicine, behavioral science, and mental health. The findings were interpreted considering classical principles and modern health perspectives, and conclusions were drawn accordingly.

Concept of Sadvritta

The term Sadvritta literally means to follow good conduct or behavior. It emphasizes the observance of ethical and disciplined behavior in all aspects of life^[7]. Charaka Samhita explains various aspects of Sadvritta in the Indriyopakramaniya Adhyaya of Sutrasthana, highlighting its essential role in maintaining physical, mental, and social health.

Aim of Sadvritta

The primary aims of Sadvritta are:

Arogya – maintenance of health

Indriya Vijaya – control over the sense organs

By following these codes of good conduct, an individual can preserve health and prevent the onset of diseases^[8]. Conversely, neglect or violation of these behavioral rules leads to Pradnyaparadha (intellectual blasphemy), which is described as the root cause for the manifestation of various disorders^[9].

Thus, Sadvritta plays a key role in health promotion and disease prevention, forming the foundation of psychosomatic and behavioral hygiene in Ayurveda.

Types of Sadvritta

According to Ayurvedic literature, Sadvritta can be broadly classified into four major types, each focusing on a specific dimension of human behavior and lifestyle. These classifications collectively guide the individual toward holistic well-being encompassing ethical, spiritual, social, and physical health^[10].

1. Vyavaharik Sadvritta (Ethical Codes of Conduct)

Acharya Charaka has elaborated numerous ethical and behavioral guidelines under Sadvritta, which are essential for maintaining psychosomatic balance and social harmony. These principles are explained in various chapters of Sutrasthana, especially under Indriyopakramaniya Adhyaya. These are the moral and ethical principles that govern an individual's personal and professional life. They emphasize truthfulness (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), compassion (Karuna), humility, and control over emotions. Observance of Vyavaharik Sadvritta ensures mental peace, social harmony, and emotional stability.

The important Vyavaharik Sadvritta (ethical codes of conduct) are summarized below

Truthful and Pleasant Speech

One should always speak the truth, at an appropriate time, using words that are beneficial, gentle, limited, and meaningful^[11]. Such speech promotes harmony, prevents conflicts, and maintains mental balance.

Carrying Protective Items During Travel

While going outdoors, one should carry an umbrella, a walking stick, and cover the head with a turban. The umbrella protects against rain, dust, heat, and snow, thereby preserving complexion, vision, and vitality. Carrying a stick prevents fear and injury from dogs, reptiles, or wild animals, and provides physical support and confidence^[12].

Moderation in Exercise

Exercise should be stopped before one becomes completely exhausted. Proper exercise promotes lightness, stability, strength, and enhances digestion. However, overexertion leads to fatigue, excessive thirst, bleeding, visual darkness, cough, fever, and vomiting^[13]. Hence, moderation is essential for physical and mental well-being.

Proper Sleeping Habits

Sleeping on a comfortable bed alleviates fatigue and Vata aggravation, and induces sound sleep, satisfaction, and courage. Excessive sleep or prolonged wakefulness, however, disturbs the equilibrium of the body. Adequate and timely sleep ensures nourishment, complexion, strength, enthusiasm, and balance of body tissues^[14].

Rules Regarding Bathing

One should not take a bath while exhausted, without rinsing the mouth, or in a state of nudity. After bathing, the same clothes worn before should not be reused. Observing these rules enhances hygiene, freshness, and physical vitality^[15].

These Vyavaharik Sadvrittis serve as ethical and lifestyle disciplines, designed to sustain physical strength, emotional stability, and social grace. They clearly indicate that Ayurveda gives equal importance to moral behavior and physical routine in maintaining total health.

2. Dharmik Sadvritta (Religious Codes of Conduct)

Dharmik Sadvritta refers to conduct aligned with one's spiritual and moral duties. It involves devotion to God, performing righteous acts, respecting teachers and elders, and observing ethical rituals. These

practices nurture spiritual strength and inner purity, supporting the concept of Sattvavajaya Chikitsa (mental control and purification).

Samajik Sadvritta (Social Codes of Conduct)

The concept of Samajik Sadvritta as mentioned in Charaka Samhita reflects a well-developed framework of social ethics and interpersonal discipline. It emphasizes compassion, respect, and hygiene as essential components of a healthy and harmonious society. Acharya Charaka has beautifully described these principles under Indriyopakramaṇīya Adhyaya of Sutrasthana^[16].

Compassion and Non-violence

One should be kind to all living beings (sarva bhūta hita), pacify those who are frightened, assist the poor, and remain truthful and peaceful. Tolerance towards harsh speech and undesirable behavior reflects emotional maturity and self-control. These principles embody the modern concept of empathy and emotional intelligence, which are essential for psychosocial health.

Hospitality and Social Grace

One must maintain a friendly and respectful demeanor toward others, initiate pleasant conversations, and treat guests with warmth and honor. Such behavior promotes social bonding, stress reduction, and mental well-being, in line with modern social psychology.

Respect for Elders and Teachers

Association with learned persons (Siddha), teachers, and the elderly is encouraged. They should be treated with utmost respect and served with humility. This tradition of Guru-Shishya Bhava promotes ethical learning, discipline, and community cohesion.

Public Decorum and Cleanliness

Actions such as combing hair, cleaning teeth, or touching the nose and ears should be avoided in public. These reflect a sense of personal hygiene and social etiquette, preventing the spread of germs and maintaining dignity in social settings.

Modesty in Behavior

Laughing loudly or producing noise while passing flatus is discouraged as it violates social harmony and decency norms. Ayurveda thus anticipated the modern idea of social propriety and body language awareness.

Respiratory Hygiene

One should always cover the mouth while coughing or sneezing to prevent droplet transmission. Remarkably, this ancient advice parallels modern infection control practices recommended in public health guidelines (e.g., during COVID-19), demonstrating Ayurveda's timeless understanding of airborne disease prevention.

Thus, Samajik Sadvritta aims to build a socially responsible individual whose actions support personal health as well as collective well-being. These codes form the ethical foundation for modern public health behavior, emphasizing hygiene, empathy, and mutual respect.

3. Samajik Sadvritta (Social Codes of Conduct)

These principles regulate interpersonal relationships and promote social ethics and harmony. They include helping others, showing respect, avoiding jealousy and criticism, maintaining good communication, and contributing positively to the community. Adherence to Samajik Sadvritta for social well-being and collective health, which are essential aspects of Swasthavritta. Dharmik Sadvritta (Religious Codes of Conduct)

Dharmik Sadvritta refers to the conduct aligned with spiritual duties, religious observances, and reverence toward sacred entities. Acharya Charaka emphasizes that following such conduct ensures both physical and spiritual well-being, protects from negative influences, and maintains harmony with the environment^[17].

General Religious Conduct

One should not go out without first touching gems, feet of respectable persons, auspicious objects, and flowers. Wearing protective herbs like Tulsi, Sahadevi, and Rudraksha is recommended to safeguard against evil influences.

Respect should be paid to Gods, cows, teachers (preceptors), the elderly, and spiritually accomplished individuals. Such reverence cultivates humility, discipline, and ethical behavior.

Avoid wandering in unknown or prohibited areas at night, and refrain from taking shelter in temples, under holy trees, at crossroads, gardens, burial grounds, or slaughterhouses. This protects one from physical harm and spiritual disturbances.

One must not relieve sputum, flatus, feces, or urine in front of wind, fire, water, the sun, the moon, or teachers, as it is considered disrespectful and harmful to health.

Codes Regarding Food

Food should be first distributed to those in need before consumption, enhancing generosity and social responsibility^[18].

Meals should be eaten silently, attentively, and without laughter, as this enhances digestion and health.

Avoid consuming food while holding precious stones, without bathing, or in damaged clothing. Washing hands, mouth, feet, and face before eating is advised.

Food should not be eaten in inconvenient locations, such as busy areas, without offering it to the fire as per traditional rituals.

Food prepared by a hostile or unclean individual should be avoided, while curd is beneficial if consumed at proper times; however, curd consumption at night is discouraged as it may obstruct strotas (channels), contributing to digestive and systemic disorders^[19].

Observing Natural Urges

Ayurveda emphasizes attending to natural bodily urges without delay. Ignoring or forcibly suppressing them is considered a primary cause of many diseases, including urinary, digestive, and respiratory disorders^[20]. Following these principles ensures both physical health and mental equilibrium.

Thus, Dharmik Sadvritta integrates spiritual reverence, hygienic practices, ethical food habits, and timely observance of bodily functions into daily life, reflecting Ayurveda's holistic approach to disease prevention and health promotion.

Codes Regarding Study and Mental Activities

Ayurveda emphasizes that both intellectual and mental discipline are integral aspects of Sadvritta. Observing proper conduct during study and mental work ensures optimal learning, concentration, and cognitive health^[21].

Study Conduct

One should avoid studying under unseasonal lighting, during natural disasters (such as fires or earthquakes), during major festivals, solar or lunar eclipses, or during transitional periods like dawn and dusk (Sandhyas). These conditions are considered inauspicious and distracting.

Initiation by a teacher (preceptor) is essential before engaging in study. This ensures correct guidance, comprehension, and ethical adherence.

While studying, speech should be clear, complete in sound, properly accented, morphologically correct, and delivered at an appropriate pace and pitch. Avoid reciting too fast, too slowly, too loudly, too softly, or with hoarseness. Proper articulation enhances memory retention, understanding, and intellectual clarity.

Mental Activity Codes

One should not engage in any activity without thorough investigation and proper planning. Hasty actions without proper knowledge are discouraged^[22].

Control of the sense organs is vital. Allowing them to govern behaviour leads to imbalance and distractions.

Tasks should be completed at the proper time, and procrastination must be avoided. One should act with deliberation, considering all aspects of the activity.

Emotional balance is crucial. One should not be excessively elated by success nor overly depressed by failure. Awareness of the typical course of events, understanding causal relationships, and maintaining faith in the outcomes are recommended.

Following these codes promotes intellectual discipline, emotional stability, and effective decision-making, illustrating that Ayurveda's Sadvritta extends beyond physical and social conduct to mental and cognitive well-being.

4. Sharirik Sadvritta (Physical Codes of Conduct)

Sharirik Sadvritta relates to maintaining personal hygiene, proper diet, regular exercise, adequate rest, and cleanliness of body and surroundings. It ensures physical health and supports the Ayurvedic aim of Swasthya Rakshana (preservation of health). By following these rules, one prevents diseases arising from unclean habits or irregular lifestyles. Sharirik Sadvritta (Physical Codes of Conduct)

Sharirik Sadvritta emphasizes physical hygiene, grooming, and lifestyle routines that maintain bodily health, enhance vitality, and prevent diseases. Acharya Charaka provides detailed instructions for daily personal care, reflecting the preventive aspects of Ayurveda.

Personal Grooming and Adornment

Use of Flowers and Perfumes

Wearing flowers and applying sweet scents stimulates libido, enhances body odor, improves mental well-being, and promotes longevity and charm. It contributes to strength, vitality, and overall satisfaction^[23].

Wearing Gems and Ornaments

Wearing protective gems and ornaments is advised to attract prosperity, auspiciousness, and grace, while safeguarding from negative influences. It also enhances ojas and personal charm^[24].

Oil Massage (Abhyanga)

Routine oil massage of the head, ears, nostrils, and feet is recommended for maintaining strength, improving circulation, and promoting relaxation and vitality.

Hygiene Practices

Excretory and Body Hygiene

Frequent cleaning of excretory passages (urethra, anus, vagina, nose, skin, feet) is essential. Regular washing prevents infections and maintains health^[25].

Hair, Nail, and Beard Care

Hair cutting, nail trimming, and shaving should be performed at least three times per fortnight. Regular

grooming prevents accumulation of dirt and pathogens, reducing the risk of diseases, especially those transmitted via the fecal-oral route^[26].

Bathing

Bathing once or twice daily, depending on the season, removes fatigue, sweat, and body odor. It enhances emotional well-being, self-confidence, vitality, and immunity, and contributes to longevity and attractiveness.

Footwear Selection

Appropriate footwear, chosen according to physical constitution, geographic conditions, season, and type of activity, protects the feet, promotes circulation, supports vision and skin health, reduces discomfort, and enhances strength and sexual vitality^[27].

By observing Sharirik Sadvritta, an individual ensures physical cleanliness, disease prevention, improved bodily strength, and overall health, demonstrating Ayurveda's holistic approach to preventive medicine and lifestyle management.

Collectively, these four types of Sadvritta form a comprehensive lifestyle framework integrating ethical, spiritual, social, and physical dimensions of health, reflecting Ayurveda's holistic view of human well-being.

Although Acharya Charak has described numerous codes under Sadvritta, the ones discussed above represent only a selection of the most important principles regarding personal, social, ethical, and physical conduct. These guidelines demonstrate that Ayurveda is not merely a medical science but a comprehensive science of life, teaching individuals how to live harmoniously in society, cultivate personal happiness, increase well-being in others, and lead a long and healthy life.

The dos and don'ts prescribed in Sadvritta were highly relevant in ancient times, addressing social behavior, hygiene, and ethical living. However, over the centuries, societal structures, religious customs, and lifestyles have evolved. As a result, some ancient practices continue to be observed, some have disappeared, some are less relevant in modern contexts, and a few cannot be practically applied today. Despite these changes, the core principles of Sadvritta promoting health, ethical behavior, social harmony, and mental discipline remain timeless and applicable in contemporary life.

Conclusion

Sadvritta, as described in Charaka Samhita, provides a comprehensive framework for ethical, social, spiritual, and physical conduct. It emphasizes the holistic integration of mind, body, and society, highlighting the preventive and promotive aspects of health beyond mere treatment of disease. Observing Sadvritta ensures physical hygiene, mental discipline, emotional balance, social harmony, and spiritual growth, which collectively contribute to longevity and overall well-being.

Although some practices outlined in ancient texts may not be fully applicable in the modern context, the underlying principles remain highly relevant. Concepts such as personal hygiene, balanced lifestyle, moderation in food and exercise, respect for elders and teachers, and control over the senses resonate strongly with contemporary preventive medicine, mental health practices, and public health guidelines. Thus, Sadvritta exemplifies Ayurveda's vision of a science of life, offering timeless guidance for achieving optimal health, ethical living, and social well-being. Integrating these classical principles into modern daily life can help individuals lead healthier, more balanced, and socially responsible lives.

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