

Modern Medicines Vs. the role of Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā in Promoting Health and Wellbeing

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Abstract:

This paper explores the contrasting approaches of modern medicine and the Gheranda Samhita in promoting health and well-being. Modern medicine, grounded in scientific materialism and evidence-based practices, focuses on diagnosing and treating diseases through technological advancements, precision interventions, and standardized clinical protocols. Its primary objective is the alleviation of physical ailments and the extension of life expectancy, emphasizing efficiency and rapid results. Conversely, the Gheranda Samhita, rooted in ancient Hatha Yoga traditions, offers a holistic and preventative approach that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual practices to achieve balance, harmony, and self-realization. By addressing the union of body, mind, and spirit, the Gheranda Samhita emphasizes long-term wellness and spiritual growth as foundational to health. The paper concludes by advocating for a synergistic integration of these two paradigms to provide a more inclusive and comprehensive framework for addressing the multifaceted dimensions of health in contemporary society.

Keywords: Gheranda samhita, physical health, mental health, modern medicine system

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1. Introduction

1.1. Modern Medicine:

Health and well-being in the modern era are profoundly influenced by technological advancements, lifestyle transformations, and evolving healthcare systems. Ghatge (2023) mentioned that lifestyle plays a crucial role in influencing an individual's physical, social, and psychological well-being within society. Cutting-edge technologies, such as imaging tools (MRI and CT scans), molecular diagnostics, and artificial intelligence, have revolutionized disease detection and management, enabling early and accurate diagnoses. Precision medicine, which tailors treatments based on an individual's genetic profile, lifestyle, and environmental factors, has become a cornerstone of contemporary healthcare. Innovations like robotic surgeries, telemedicine, and wearable health devices have further enhanced the accessibility and efficiency of medical care, facilitating real-time monitoring and minimally invasive procedures. Despite these advancements, modern lifestyles have introduced significant challenges, including an increase in sedentary behavior, unhealthy dietary habits, and exposure to environmental pollutants, which contribute to a rise in lifestyle-related illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases. Mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, and depression, are exacerbated by the fast-paced nature of contemporary life. Technological solutions, such as wearable devices and telemedicine platforms, offer personalized and accessible healthcare options, empowering individuals to manage chronic conditions effectively. These innovations underscore the dual impact of modern advancements, addressing health challenges while offering transformative tools to promote well-being in a rapidly changing world. Modern medicine places a strong emphasis on preventive care, employing strategies such as vaccinations, health screenings, and public health campaigns to mitigate diseases before they arise or spread. This proactive approach has played a pivotal role in controlling epidemics, eradicating diseases like smallpox, and managing chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension more effectively. In addition to its reliance on scientific advancements, modern medicine recognizes the significance of holistic care, integrating patient-centered practices that address emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of health. This comprehensive perspective ensures that treatment plans are tailored to the unique needs of individuals, fostering both physical and mental well-being. By harmonizing technological innovation with a humanistic approach, modern medicine continues to advance, improving quality of life and deepening our understanding of health, disease prevention, and management.

1.2. Gheranda Samhita:

The *Gheranda Samhita* serves as a foundational text for holistic health, offering an integrative approach that unites physical, mental, and spiritual practices. As one of the core scriptures of Hatha Yoga, it introduces *Saptanga Yoga*—the yoga of seven limbs—a systematic framework aimed at achieving harmony between the body, mind, and spirit. The text redefines health as more than the absence of disease, framing it as the balanced and optimal functioning of all aspects of human existence. Its practices, such as purification techniques (*shatkarma*), physical postures (*asanas*), breath control (*pranayama*), and meditative introspection (*dhyana*), are designed to cleanse and strengthen the body while cultivating mental clarity and spiritual awareness. The *Gheranda Samhita* underscores the interdependence of physical health, mental wellbeing, and spiritual evolution, presenting a timeless model of holistic health. This ancient wisdom continues to hold relevance in contemporary contexts, offering valuable insights into achieving sustainable wellbeing through disciplined and integrative practices. The treatment approaches in modern medicine and the *Gheranda Samhita* represent two distinct paradigms of healthcare. Modern medicine, rooted in empirical research and technological advancements,

follows a reductionist approach to disease management, focusing on identifying and treating specific conditions through precise diagnostic tools and therapeutic interventions. It is particularly effective in managing acute illnesses and leveraging innovations in imaging, pharmaceuticals, and surgery. In contrast, the *Gheranda Samhita* offers a holistic, integrative system that prioritizes the balance between physical, mental, and spiritual health. Its approach emphasizes prevention and long-term wellness through practices like purification, physical postures, breath control, and meditation. By focusing on restoring and maintaining balance within the body and mind, the *Gheranda Samhita* provides a framework for overall health that extends beyond the treatment of illness to foster continuous well-being. While modern medicine excels in addressing immediate health crises, the *Gheranda Samhita* promotes a more preventative and balanced approach to health, integrating all dimensions of human existence.

2. Approaches of modern medicine and the Gheranda Samhita to health & wellbeing

Modern medicine and the Gheranda Samhita approach health and well-being through fundamentally different methodologies, focuses, and executions. While modern medicine emphasizes scientific research, technological advancements, and targeted treatments to address physical ailments, the Gheranda Samhita advocates a holistic path integrating physical, mental, and spiritual practices for overall harmony. Modern medicine excels in diagnosing, treating, and preventing diseases, significantly enhancing life expectancy and managing chronic conditions. It operates on a foundation of scientific research, technological innovation, and clinical practices emphasizing physical health. Singh et al. (2020) outlined that Medical science has successfully addressed numerous major health challenges, significantly reducing the threat of life-threatening diseases such as measles, typhoid, polio, and cholera. Additionally, it has achieved remarkable advancements in surgical techniques and procedures. As global health perspectives evolve, there is growing acknowledgment of the need for holistic approaches that encompass mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness alongside physical health.

Modern medicine recognizes the importance of addressing both curative and palliative needs. While curative care aims to resolve underlying conditions, palliative care focuses on enhancing quality of life, particularly for those with chronic or terminal illnesses. This dual approach ensures comprehensive patient support. Singh and Teixeira (2010) discussed that pharmacology, including psychopharmacology, has predominantly focused on control and symptom management. They emphasize that the focus of both clinical practice and research must shift decisively toward prevention and curative strategies. Adherence to professional standards, patient confidentiality, informed consent, and equitable access to care ensures that medical interventions respect human dignity and rights. Patient-Centered Care emphasizes personalized care plans, open communication, and respect for individual preferences, promoting shared decision-making and improving patient satisfaction.

Modern medicine is deeply grounded in evidence-based research, objectivity, and technological progress. Dalamagka (2024) addressed that modern medicine is founded on rational scientific principles, validated knowledge, and established ethical standards. It relies on clinical trials, reproducible outcomes, and measurable data to effectively address health challenges. By focusing on the biological and physiological causes of diseases, it employs precise interventions such as pharmaceuticals, surgical procedures, and diagnostic tools like MRIs and CT scans. This systematic, data-driven approach prioritizes accuracy and efficiency, particularly in managing acute or life-threatening conditions. Innovations like robotic surgeries, AI-enhanced diagnostics, telemedicine, and advanced imaging technologies are central to modern medical practices.

The primary aim of modern medicine is to treat diseases, manage symptoms, and enhance life expectancy. It alleviates suffering through scientifically validated methods that restore health and improve

functionality. Targeted treatments, such as antibiotics for infections or chemotherapy for cancer, exemplify its ability to achieve rapid and precise results. Additionally, modern medicine extends its focus to palliative care, enhancing the quality of life for patients with terminal illnesses. This comprehensive framework underscores its dedication to addressing a wide range of health issues with scientific rigor and advanced technological solutions.

The *Gheranda Samhita* views the body not merely as a vessel for survival but as a medium for achieving higher states of consciousness. Its methodology is experiential and introspective, with a focus on self-regulation and cultivating internal harmony. Its practices are designed to harmonize the body, mind, and spirit, promoting long-term well-being and spiritual evolution rather than focusing solely on the treatment of ailments. The ultimate goal of the *Gheranda Samhita* is achieving holistic health and spiritual liberation (*moksha*). Physical health is regarded as a foundational element that supports mental clarity and spiritual growth.

The *Gheranda Samhita* serves as a comprehensive guide for practitioners, emphasizing a transformative journey toward achieving physical, mental, and spiritual purification and perfection, culminating in liberation (*moksha*). This classical Hatha Yoga text provides a structured, holistic framework for health and well-being, integrating the body, mind, and spirit into a unified whole. By advocating a disciplined and systematic practice of yoga, the text lays the foundation for attaining inner harmony and ultimate spiritual realization. The *Gheranda Samhita* prescribes preventive and restorative practices through its seven limbs (*saptanga yoga*). These include purification techniques (*shatkarma*), physical postures (*asanas*), breath control (*pranayama*), energy regulation (*mudras*), and meditation (*dhyana*). Gaglani and Dave (2023) indicated that the Shatkarmas play a pivotal role in harmonizing Ida and Pingala, the two primary channels of Prana, fostering equilibrium in both physical and mental states. Additionally, they aid in balancing the three dosha-Vata, Pitta, and Kapha-whose imbalance, as per Ayurveda and Hatha Yoga, is believed to be the root cause of illness. These practices aim to cleanse the body, strengthen its resilience, and promote holistic healing, often requiring time and consistent effort.

3. Foundational Principles of Modern Medicine vs. Gheranda Samhita

The foundational principles of modern medicine are built upon a framework of scientific rigor, technological advancements, and a patient-centered approach to healthcare. With a focus on diagnosing, treating, and preventing diseases, it integrates technological innovations, standardized practices, and ethical considerations to ensure high-quality care. Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) integrates the best available scientific evidence into clinical decision-making to improve patient outcomes. It relies on well-conducted research studies, such as randomized controlled trials and systematic reviews, to guide treatment strategies. Clinical guidelines, based on robust research, provide standardized protocols for consistent, high-quality care. Personalized medicine, incorporating genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors, is a growing component of EBM, optimizing treatments through pharmacogenomics to enhance effectiveness and minimize adverse reactions. By using scientifically validated methods, EBM ensures improved healthcare delivery and better patient outcomes. A cornerstone of modern medicine is its commitment to rigorous scientific research. Objectivity is maintained through controlled experiments, peer reviews, and reproducible findings, ensuring that medical advancements are grounded in verifiable evidence rather than anecdotal observations or unproven theories. The concept of drugs in modern medicine is rooted in evidence-based practices, aiming to alleviate suffering, prolong life, and improve the quality of health. Technology and innovation have revolutionized modern medicine, transforming diagnosis, treatment, and disease management. Advanced diagnostic tools like MRI, CT scans, and genomics enable early and precise disease detection, while robotic surgeries and targeted therapies provide personalized, efficient treatment. Telemedicine, wearable health devices, and AI expand

healthcare access and enhance real-time monitoring and decision-making. Telemedicine represents a cutting-edge advancement in healthcare, serving as a catalyst for transforming the healthcare system. It has enabled thousands of individuals in remote regions to access medical services previously unavailable to them (Yuldasheva & Azkhodjaeva, 2022). Innovations in gene editing, regenerative medicine, and nanotechnology offer precise treatments for complex conditions, and big data and vaccine advancements play crucial roles in public health. These breakthroughs collectively improve the quality, accessibility, and personalization of healthcare globally.

Modern medicine approaches disease through a scientific and reductionist lens, viewing it as a disruption in the normal functioning of the body caused by identifiable factors such as pathogens, genetic abnormalities, or environmental influences. The focus is on understanding the underlying biological or physiological mechanisms of illness. Diagnosis in modern medicine relies heavily on advanced tools and technologies, such as blood tests, imaging techniques (MRI, CT scans, X-rays), molecular profiling, and artificial intelligence-based analytics. Disease management involves evidence-based interventions, including pharmaceuticals, surgeries, and therapies, with the aim of eliminating or managing symptoms and restoring health. Preventive strategies like vaccinations and screenings are also key to identifying risks early and preventing the onset of diseases. These principles are designed to address the complexities of human health by combining precise interventions with holistic care, fostering better health outcomes and improved life expectancy.

The *Gheranda Samhita* emphasizes the importance of both internal and external purification as essential steps for achieving health, harmony, and readiness for higher spiritual practices. External purification, referred to as *Bahiranga Shuddhi*, involves cleansing the physical body through techniques such as the six *Shatkarmas*—*Dhauti* (alimentary canal cleansing), *Basti* (colon cleansing), *Neti* (nasal passage cleansing), *Trataka* (gaze fixation), *Nauli* (abdominal churning), and *Kapalabhati* (respiratory cleansing). These practices help eliminate toxins, improve bodily functions, and prepare the practitioner for the physical demands of advanced yoga. Internal purification, or *Antaranga Shuddhi*, focuses on the mind and energy systems, utilizing methods such as *Pranayama* (breath control) to clear energy blockages, *Pratyahara* (sense withdrawal) to detach from external distractions, and *Dhyana* (meditation) to cleanse the mind of negativity and foster mental clarity. Together, these purification practices create a holistic pathway to physical vitality, mental peace, and spiritual awakening, enabling the aspirant to progress steadily toward self-realization and union with the divine. It presents the body as a sacred vessel, often described metaphorically as a temple that must be maintained with care and reverence to support spiritual progress. This perspective underscores the necessity of cultivating physical strength, vitality, and health as foundational prerequisites for deeper yoga practices. The text emphasizes that a strong and healthy body forms the base for achieving higher states of consciousness, as it provides the stability and endurance required to engage in prolonged meditation, breath control, and other advanced yogic techniques. The inclusion of physical postures (*asanas*) aims to build strength, flexibility, and vitality, preparing the body as a strong foundation for higher practices. Breath control (*pranayama*) and energy locks (*mudras*) are prescribed to regulate vital energies, calm the mind, and reduce stress, while the withdrawal of senses (*pratyahara*) fosters inner focus and detachment from distractions. Through meditation (*dhyana*) and concentration (*dharana*), practitioners develop mental clarity and emotional stability, creating a harmonious connection between the physical and mental realms.

The *Gheranda Samhita* takes a holistic and experiential approach to disease, considering it as an imbalance in the body, mind, or spirit, or as the accumulation of impurities. It emphasizes prevention and self-awareness as the primary tools for maintaining health and preventing disease. Diagnosis, as described in the *Gheranda Samhita*, is less reliant on external tools and more focused on introspection and self-regulation. Disease is seen as a result of lifestyle imbalances or disruptions in internal energies, and the goal is to restore harmony through natural methods such as cleansing techniques, postures (*asanas*), breath

control (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*). It emphasizes self-awareness, where practitioners monitor their own physical and mental states through practices like mindfulness, purification (*shatkarma*), and meditative introspection to prevent imbalances.

4. Discussion

The comparison between Modern Medicine and the Gheranda Samhita in promoting health and well-being reveals distinct approaches rooted in their respective philosophies and methodologies. Chourasia (2024) indicated the integration of traditional and modern medicine have the capability in Paving the way for a robust and integrative healthcare system, this approach emphasizes addressing the diverse needs of individuals and communities, fostering the long-term sustainability of global health and overall well-being. On the Philosophical Foundation aspect, Modern medicine is grounded in the principles of scientific materialism and empiricism, where health is primarily conceptualized as the absence of disease or the restoration of biological function. This framework focuses on the physiological and biological aspects of health, employing a reductionist approach to diagnose, treat, and prevent diseases. It addresses specific pathological causes through scientifically validated interventions. In contrast, the Gheranda Samhita, rooted in Hatha Yoga, presents a more holistic perspective of health. It integrates the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of well-being, viewing health not merely as the absence of disease but as a state of balance and harmony. The text emphasizes the purification of the body and mind through a variety of yogic practices, with the ultimate goal of achieving self-realization and moksha (liberation). In this framework, physical health is seen as a foundation for achieving higher spiritual consciousness, and well-being is approached as a comprehensive state of inner and outer harmony, beyond just the alleviation of symptoms or disease. The focus on self-discipline and spiritual practices highlights the importance of cultivating mental and emotional resilience alongside physical health. Soni and Chatterjee (2024) elaborated that the medical community increasingly acknowledges and accepts Hatha Yoga for its therapeutic benefits.

Towards the approach to health, Modern medicine adopts a predominantly interventionist approach, focusing on diagnosing and treating the biological or physiological causes of diseases. It operates within a framework of evidence-based practices, relying heavily on scientific research, clinical trials, and advanced diagnostic technologies (such as MRIs and CT scans) to identify health conditions. Treatment methods are specialized and targeted, often offering quick and efficient responses to both acute illnesses and chronic conditions. The primary aim is to provide immediate relief from symptoms, cure diseases, and restore normal bodily functions, with an emphasis on reactive care when illness or dysfunction is detected. In contrast, the Gheranda Samhita advocates for a holistic and preventative approach to health. It integrates practices such as asanas (physical postures), shatkarmas (cleansing techniques), pranayama (breath control), and dhyana (meditation) to purify the body, calm the mind, and elevate the spirit. Health is not a mere reaction to illness but a continuous process of self-improvement and personal growth. By cultivating balance through regular practice, the Gheranda Samhita aims to maintain health, prevent disease, and elevate spiritual consciousness, creating a state of ongoing wellness.

Modern medicine is also characterized by technological innovation, with advancements in diagnostic tools, surgical techniques, and pharmaceuticals playing a central role in improving healthcare. Technologies such as robotic surgeries, AI-assisted diagnostics, and telemedicine have revolutionized patient care, making it more efficient and accessible. The rapid development of biotechnology, genomics, and pharmacogenomics has led to more personalized treatments that are tailored to the genetic makeup and health conditions of individuals. The Gheranda Samhita does not incorporate technology in the way modern medicine does. Its focus is on natural, time-tested methods of self-discipline and body-mind practices. The emphasis is on self-awareness and spiritual discipline, using minimal external tools.

Modern medicine has increasingly recognized the importance of mental health, with treatments for mental disorders like depression, anxiety, and stress; it is often segregated from physical health. Psychiatric treatments are commonly focused on pharmacological interventions (e.g., antidepressants) and psychotherapy. The mind-body connection is acknowledged, but the focus remains largely on symptom relief rather than promoting overall emotional or spiritual well-being whereas The Gheranda Samhita places a strong emphasis on the mental and emotional dimensions of health. Practices like pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (sense withdrawal), and dhyana (meditation) are designed to calm the mind, enhance concentration, and promote emotional stability. By engaging in these practices, individuals develop a deeper sense of inner peace and emotional resilience, which are critical for overall well-being. This approach views emotional and mental health as integral to spiritual growth and overall health.

The treatment philosophy in modern medicine is highly scientific, focused on achieving measurable outcomes in the form of symptom reduction, disease prevention, or cure. It is often short-term and symptomatic, providing immediate solutions for acute or chronic health problems. The Gheranda Samhita's approach is not necessarily focused on curing diseases in the conventional sense but rather on achieving inner purification and spiritual enlightenment. Practices such as asanas, shatkarmas, and meditation help to maintain a sense of balance, fostering long-term mental and physical wellness. Healing is seen as a continuous journey of self-improvement and spiritual development, rather than a one-time cure.

Modern medicine typically does not incorporate a spiritual dimension into its approach. While there is growing interest in the mind-body connection and the importance of emotional and psychological health, spirituality is often excluded from the clinical setting. Spirituality is at the core of the Gheranda Samhita's approach to health. It views physical and mental well-being as stepping stones toward spiritual liberation (moksha). Practices are designed to purify the body, calm the mind, and awaken spiritual consciousness, ultimately leading to enlightenment and self-realization. Modern medicine operates within the realm of quantifiable outcomes and evidence-based practices, emphasizing precise interventions aimed at restoring normal bodily functions and alleviating symptoms. Advanced technologies and treatments often come with high costs, making healthcare inaccessible to certain populations. The Gheranda Samhita's practices are largely accessible to anyone who is willing to dedicate time and effort. They require minimal resources and can be practiced in diverse environments, making them widely accessible.

5. Conclusion

Modern medicine and the teachings of the Gheranda Samhita represent two distinct paradigms of health and well-being, each offering valuable contributions. Modern medicine excels in its precise, evidence-based interventions and technological advancements, making it indispensable for diagnosing, treating, and managing acute and chronic conditions. The *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* provides a comprehensive system for health and wellbeing that goes beyond physical fitness to include mental clarity and spiritual balance. By emphasizing the importance of postures, breath control, purification, and meditation, the text offers a holistic approach to health that addresses the interconnectedness of the body, mind, and spirit. Together, these approaches highlight the importance of both curative and preventative care, demonstrating that a comprehensive understanding of health encompasses not only the absence of disease but also the cultivation of overall well-being and inner fulfillment. An integrative approach with these paradigms could offer a more comprehensive healthcare model, addressing immediate medical needs while fostering holistic wellbeing.

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