



## Ayush': A Path to Health and Family Welfare

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### ABSTRACT

*Good health of the citizens is very essential for growth and development of every nation. A better human capital is in fact an asset as it increases employment, productivity as well as growth rate of the economy. A healthy community is the infrastructure upon which an economically viable society can be built. Realising the significance that a healthy population is vital for a healthy nation, Indian economy gave prime role to the development of health infrastructure through its new mission AYUSH.*

**KEYWORDS :** Health, Ayush, Life style diseases, Morbidity, Traditional and Kitchen medicine

Health is one of the key factors that influence a family's welfare. As rightly pointed out by Mahatma Gandhi "It is health that is real wealth, and not pieces of gold and silver". Neglecting traditional herbal medicines which cost less and have fewer side effects is one of the main problems faced by our economy. Such medicines possess more linkages with nature and it creates a better human capital for a better tomorrow. With a view to create a better human capital with its roots in our tradition, AYUSH mission is initiated by the Government of India. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM, April 12, 2005) and International Conference on Traditional medicines organized in New Delhi by Government of India supported by WHO (February 2013), accepted the significance of traditional medicines for sustainable development. Similarly, the 32<sup>nd</sup> meeting of ministers of health of countries and 67<sup>th</sup> session of WHO regional committee for South East Asian region held at Dhaka, Bangladesh from September 9-12, 2014 too stressed the significance of traditional medicines. WHO's South-East Asia Region comprises the following 11 Member States: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste and the main traditional medicine system practices, include AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) in India, Sowa Rigpa in Bhutan, Jamu in Indonesia; Koryo in Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Ayurveda, Unani in Bangladesh; Desana, Bhesijja, Netkhatta and Vijjadhara in Myanmar; Ayurveda, Unani and Amchi in Nepal and Deshiya Chikitsa and Sidhha in Sri Lanka.

The Dhaka conference stressed the need for reviving our age old traditional medical strategy for the coming years. According to WHO "Traditional medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness". In the Dhaka conference, Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, the regional director for WHO South East Asian Region point out the significance of the safety and unique history of traditional medicine. High economic cost of today's medical treatment put the average and poor income categories into the clutches of poverty. To regulate the efficient use of medicines and to achieve universal health coverage by linking it with the traditional and heritage based medical strategy is the essence of Traditional Medical Strategy of WHO 2014-2023. On the basis of all such contemporary developments in the field of traditional medicines our Prime Minister on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014 announced 'Ayush Mission' to integrate traditional medicines into national healthcare system both at the centre and at the state level.

The **three main objectives associated with the renewal of traditional medicine** are as follows:

- to build a knowledge base and formulate national policies in association with the traditional medical heritage,
- to strengthen the safety, quality and effectiveness of traditional medicines through regulation and
- to support Universal Health Coverage through appropriate integration of traditional medicine services and self-health care into

national health-care systems.

### A look back to AYUSH

AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy), is a governmental body initiated in March 2003. Formally created in 1995 as the Department of Indian Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy, Ayush plays an important role in the union government's flagship programme National Health Mission. The name Ayush is taken from Sanskrit which means long life and it aims to give more significance to Indian tradition and Indian system of medicine. Central government in order to promote research activities set up Central Council for research in Ayurveda and Siddha, Central Council for research in Unani medicine, Central Council for research in Homeopathy, Yoga and Naturopathy. One important drawback in our public healthcare system is that it lack decentralized planning in health care services, Ayush aimed to provide grass root level training through government hospitals. Gaps in healthcare system can be bridged by supporting state governments particularly in the rural and vulnerable areas. More education to enhance Ayush services in hospitals and dispensaries, better availability and quality of drugs with better drug laboratories are carried out. However there is growing awareness among the scientific community and the general public about the intrinsic value of traditional medicines, incorporated under AYUSH.

To examine the role of AYUSH, a detailed picture of the health indicators of India and Kerala is given in table 1. Kerala stood far ahead among Indian states in terms of these health Indicators but a question often arises, Is Keralaties stood in a much favourable health situation? Indicators reveal a good sign of progress but the cost of hospitalization, cost of medicines etc are increased at an alarming rate.

**Table 1**  
Selected health indicators for India and Kerala

Region	Life expectancy	IMR/1000 live births	Birth rate	Death rate	Total fertility rate	Maternal mortality rate
Kerala	74 y	12	14.6	6.6	1.7	81
India	63.5 y	55	22.8	7.4	2.6	212

Source: Economic review 2011, Kerala State Planning Board

Morbidity rate in Kerala across different age group has considerably increased. Number of people hospitalized per thousand is increased at an alarming rate. At the national level it is 23/1000 in rural and 31/1000 in urban areas and in Kerala it is 101/1000 and 90/1000 respectively. We often debated on Kerala Model of Development but now Kerala faces *Low mortality and High morbidity syndrome*. A detailed picture of the morbidity rate across different age group is given in table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Morbidity rate in different age group (%)**

Region	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Total
Kerala	22.2	11.8	19.2	31.5	56.2	24.2
India	7.6	4.1	6.4	10.7	28.7	8.3

Source: Census 2011

What is the basic reason for such a high morbidity rate? Is it the after effect of neglecting our rich heritage of traditional medicines? Now we are depending more on quick relief medicines and not bothered about its side effects. WHO reports revealed that life style diseases contribute about two third of the death in the world. Diseases like cardio vascular diseases like heart attacks, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, cancer etc came under life style diseases. Life style diseases are largely preventable by correcting our life styles by following a healthy diet, regular physical exercises and depending on traditional medicines. Economic review 2011 revealed that Kerala economy face high rate of life style diseases and ageing. A change from traditional dietary habits is an important cause for increase in morbidity. While undergoing a medical treatment we often wish to have a quick recovery rather than removing the root cause of the disease. Every type of treatment had its own merits and demerits. Therefore we have to select the one with fewer side effects. So a return back to our great tradition is the basic goal of Ayush mission. Ayush thus stressed the Indian system of Medicines to achieve good health and better family welfare.

### Indian Systems of Medicines

The Indian system of medicine is really a treasure house of knowledge associated with preventive and promotive healthcare. Indian Systems of Medicine department renders medical aid to the people through the network of Ayurveda hospitals and dispensaries, grant-in-aid Ayurveda institutions, Sidha- Vaidya, Unani, Visha , Netra and Naturopathy. Special hospitals such as Mental Hospital, Panchakarma, Nature cure and Marma are functioning under this department. In Kerala there are 120 hospitals and 794 dispensaries under ISM department. (Economic Review 2013, Kerala State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram). The State Medicinal Plants Board co-ordinate matters relating to the cultivation, conservation, research, development and promotion of medicinal plants in the State. A detailed picture of different types of medical treatment came under Ayush scheme are:

Ayurveda, one of the world's oldest form of medicine and considered as the mother of all healing. More than a mere system of treating illness, it is a science of life as Ayur means life and Veda means science or knowledge. Indian systems of medicines have an age old acceptance across the globe and Ayurveda stood at a position to provide safety and efficiency in our health care system. Charak Samhita and Susrutha samhita are the two main text books in Ayurveda. Ayurveda explains that diseases can be prevented by good and healthy lifestyle, and by the use of herbs. As it is a well known fact that balance is a natural order and imbalance create disorders in the system. The balance is maintained by three basic elements in human body namely Vatha (energy of movement), Pitha(energy of digestion) and Kabha (energy of lubrication). If these three are in balance we are healthy and its imbalance create physical and mental illness.

Siddha, which originated from Dravidian culture and flourished during Indus valley civilization. Tamil New year day April 14 is celebrated as the World Siddha Day. The name Siddha came from Siddhi which means to obtain a heavenly bliss. Any imbalance between the tridoshas like vatha, pitha and Khabha create diseases. Its healing include use of leaves, fruits, flowers, roots, use of Thangabashmam (using gold for the cure of diseases), Leech application, steam and solar therapy etc.

In many of our life style diseases Yoga interact and increase the quality of life. The regular practice of yoga will improve the quality of life of the individual. One of the survey released in December 2008 by US National centre for complementary and Alternative medicine found that hatha yoga was the sixth most commonly used alternative therapy in US during 2007 with 6.1 percent of the population participating. In a 2010 Boston University study revealed that the participants who practiced Hatha Yoga reported a more significant decrease in anxiety disorders.

Unani otherwise called Graeco-Arabic medicine based on the teachings of Greek Physician Hippocrates and Rome Physician Galen. History of Unani medicine can be traced back to the writings of Avicenna 1025 A.D. who wrote the cannon of medicine in Persia. During the Delhi sultanate we found the significance of unani for the first time in India (1206-1527). Human body is filled with four basic substance called humors (phlegm, blood, yellow bile and black bile) and its balance keep us healthy. These humors are connected with four elements: earth is present in black bile, fire in yellow bile, water in phlegm and all the four in blood. In the diagnosis of the disease signs, symptoms, laboratory features, and temperament are so significant.

Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) gave homeopathy its name and expanded its principles in the late 18th century. Homeopathy uses many animal, plants, mineral, and synthetic substances in its remedies. Homeopathic pills are made from an inert substance (often sugars, typically lactose), upon which a drop of liquid homeopathic preparation is placed. There are 661 homeopathic dispensaries and 31 hospitals with total bed strength of 955 under Homoeopathy department in Kerala.

### Resource base of Ayush

From the above explanation it is clear that the main resource of Ayush is plants. Species of medicinal plants are documented in the published medical and ethno botanical literature. It is true that a large number of species are under threat. During the tenth plan period National Medical Plants Board (NMPB) was set up to conserve and increase the cultivation of medicinal plants. Coming to the eleventh plan, it stressed four important dimensions of Ayush like: Mainstreaming Ayush in public health, up grading the technology, assistance to centers of excellence, revitalization and validation of commonly based local wealth tradition of Ayush. It thus stressed the need for increasing the number of educational institutions in the Ayush system. So much research activities are taking place under Ayush.

If any one of the family members faces the problem of ill health, it adversely affects the entire family welfare and economic stability. There came the role of Kitchen medicine or herbal medicine for everyday use which has its own role in Ayurveda. Allopathic medicines give fast relief, but high cost and more side effects. Traditionally herbs and spices play a very significant role in healing. A herbal garden in the courtyard is essential for a health population. We can depend upon our kitchen to cure many of the day to day diseases we face. We can use dried ginger, for a better digestion but we are not using it but depending upon omeprazole tablets. 45 percent of Americans relied more on home remedies to save doctor fees. In the case with allergies, sore throat, sneezing and itchy eyes we depend on anti-histamine tablets. Why we are not looking into our kitchen and courtyard and save our valuable time and money. Some of the kitchen remedies for a better health which had its roots in our tradition are given below:

**Salt:** for low blood pressure, in diarrhea mixed it with sweet lemon water, act as nerve stimulant

**Lemon:** for cough, vitamin C and antioxidants helps to prevent heart disease and cancer

**Honey:** good skin tonic, cleanser, used in sore throat, used in burns etc

**Olive oil:** good laxative and used to fight constipation

**Ginger:** reduce nausea and vomiting, helps in digestion

**Dried ginger coffee along with pepper:** Best for fever and headache

**Cardamom:** Increase digestion if taken after meals, solution to apple obesity.

**Turmeric:** most popularly called as arthritis tea

**Cloves:** Internally good as it kills intestinal parasites

**Garlic:** For asthma, bronchitis, high blood pressure\

### Conclusions

Archeological and modern genetic evidence revealed that the knowledge of the medicinal value of plants and their uses goes back to the time of the earliest settlers. It is very essential that we have to recognize the role of nature in our life. Without nature it is not possible for us to lead a sustainable life. Massive life style education programme from the basic schooling itself should be carried out so that the coming generation should live in harmony with nature. It is quite true that prevention is better than cure so a look back to our own rich cultural heritage is very essential in the contemporary world. The chal-

challenge today is how to integrate the best of the different healing traditions to meet the healthcare needs of contemporary society. Ayush to a great extent faces such a challenge by creating awareness in health management and role of medicinal herbs and how far it can reach each and every segment of the economy. Dependence on our Indian system of medicines from the grass root level will surely improve our health and family well being. Thus Ayush acts as a path for a better and healthier society and nation.

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