

Keynote Address
The potential of Ayurveda

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It is well known that the oldest of all the sciences in the world is the science of life, Ayurveda.

Traditionally it is believed that Maharishi Bharadwaja was the first human being to have been deputed to acquire the first knowledge of Science of Life Ayurveda from Indra, the king of gods.

Indra is supposed to have acquired this knowledge from Ashwins and they from Prajapati. Finally it is from Brahma that this supreme knowledge was acquired. Brahma is stated to have acquired this knowledge as Revelation through Yogic Samadhi.

Thus, even though, it was revealed knowledge, revealed in deep yogic state of Samadhi, this knowledge of Ayurveda or Science of Life was enriched later by the practical and experimental means, adhering to the 'Scientific Method' of the Modern Science, an essential requirement for the development of any Science.

The scientific method of Modern Science is founded on the principle of (a) Observation (b) Hypothesis / anti-thesis (c) Experimentation and (d) Proof.

Was the Scientific method of Modern science followed by Ayurveda? The answer is 'yes' – The notion of Hypothesis was known in Ayurvedic texts as Charaka Samhita as "Ooha" and the anti-thesis was called "Apoha".

Thus we find that both hypothesis and anti-thesis were used along with observations and experimentation. Therefore, we have to conclude that 'revealed knowledge' was continuously enriched by experimentation along with the appropriate hypothesis, which can be generalized into the laws of science when supported by 'proof'.

What is the 'proof' in a medical science such as 'Ayurveda'? The proof is its efficacy – the treatment – the cure or prevention of a disease or malady. We all know that Ayurveda indeed works – the treatment has its beneficial results – even today. Ayurveda is the oldest medical system of the world, which works even today – The therapy and cure are universally known.

Among all the tests (or proofs) the test of the time is the most challenging. Survival of the fittest – Ayurveda has survived the test of the time – not for a few centuries (as in the case of other medical systems) but for thousands of years – for millennia altogether! Which medical system has survived the test of the time, more than Ayurveda?

Modern Science and Modern Medical Science believe that its own vision, framework of the nature especially the physical nature and human body is the last and final. This may not be acceptable. Alternative medical systems have their own vision and framework. The treatments based on Allopathy are no doubt effective but not without side effects. The side effects are very serious, sometimes, much more stronger than the original symptoms.

My own personal experience and that of thousands of patients of Allopathy shows that the side effects of drugs are very drastic, often causing even new diseases and maladies and sometimes causing even death of the patient – a legalized murder by the doctors – while there is no guarantee that the original health problem will be definitely cured, it is definite that the side effects will be harmful or even dangerous and fatal, depending on the drugs used. It is the arrogance of the Allopathic practitioners that does not allow them to accept the truth – the truth that they give treatment, which does cause positive harm to the patients. No legal channels are available to sue the doctors who cause damage to the health of their patients.

What is the reason that Allopathic drugs have harmful side effects ? There are many reasons – (a) The treatment is given not in a holistic manner but on a symptomatic basis (b) Treatment is given on a mass basis not individualistic (c) The drugs act at the molecular level and not at the tissue level (d) The drugs are artificially produced, therefore, very strong and have highly potential concentration of single drug molecules without any counter balancing contents. In the case of herbal medicine, the drugs are at the tissue level, from natural herbal sources with balancing contents.

In the recent times there is a new realization, awakening and awareness in the whole world, even in the western medical world that (a) a holistic approach to medicine is essential (b) the human personality as a whole has to be studied and understood (c) the cause of ill-health could be other than just infection or physical origin (d) the mind / psyche and emotional state is accepted now as the major cause of ill health (e) life style – discipline and moral character are accepted to have major role in health (f) diet – green and natural is now being accepted as a major force in health (g) treatment has to be holistic – acting at various levels – physical, mental, emotional and even spiritual levels of the individual (h) Life style changes can lead to dramatic improvements in health (I) stress management – avoidance of stress and recovery from stress by techniques such as yoga, meditation, relaxation – all accepted as fundamental requirements to healthy life (j) Avoidance of chemical drugs – using alternative natural therapies using natural items such as water, green diet, fruit diet, herbal medicines (if at all) for curing common health problems.

This list could be much longer. It is heartening to note that Allopathic Medical Practitioners themselves are now prescribing not only Yoga but even Ayurvedic medicines. What can be a greater homage to Ayurveda?

It can be investigated scientifically to find that ancient Ayurveda was very advanced in various directions of science – Chemistry and Molecular Biology. The Vaiseshika system was the basis for the components of physics and chemistry for Ayurveda.

Some research has indicated that the lens was known (Suryakanta Mani) and could perhaps had been used as a Microscope to see large molecules such as proteins – thus came up the Science of Molecular Biology of Ayurveda – the basis for Tridosha theory.

The highly advanced surgery of Shushruta Samhita (which forms the basis for modern surgery and surgical instruments) indicates a very great level of knowledge of various branches of Medical Sciences - Anatomy & Surgery). Highly advanced plastic surgery was being practiced by Shushruta and others even earlier to 1000 BC. What does this indicate ? There cannot be great advancements in only one line of Medical science without corresponding developments in other branches of all Sciences such as metallurgy, chemistry, etc.

In the direction of Psychology, Psychiatry, Psychotherapy definitely the advancement was very large compared to modern times. The science of yoga clearly related to Ayurveda, is now accepted universally as a super science – both of the body and the mind. No comparable science is found in modern times. So also Ayurveda is the greatest of all Medical Sciences, which, in fact, was the parent of the modern medical sciences, which has a history of only about 300 years.

The Ayurvedic system was substantially harmed by the British in the early days of the British regime in India. They closed down Ayurvedic Colleges and encouraged Allopathic education, even though initially they learnt many things from Ayurveda – such as inoculations, nose section surgery, etc.. As a result of the British onslaught, the Ayurveda went into background, Allopathy came into the frontline at the cost of Ayurveda. So did all bright students – they all study Allopathy and not Ayurveda.

But now the full circle is completed. The modern day Allopaths came to understand the benefits of Ayurveda – some of them even prescribed Ayurveda for their patients. Now they accept and promote Ayurveda.

Just as the modern world, especially so the Western world has taken up to Yoga as a unique science, without a comparison, so is the modern world is taking up to Ayurveda as the better Medical Science, as a better alternative supplement to Allopathy. This does not mean Allopathy has no role to play – the emergency care can be best taken care by Allopathy. Ayurveda has to be studied and applied, integrated into Allopathic practice – in both preventive and therapeutic levels for the better treatment quality – a good integration and absorption, of Ayurveda, Yoga with Allopathy is the answer. Thus we have a great potential for Ayurveda and Yoga in modern health care and it has already started – a great development indeed. Let us look forward for an integrated health care system which integrates Yoga, Ayurveda and Allopathy.

I appeal to all the Practitioners to take forward this happy marriage. However this calls for greater effort from both sides – the Allopaths should study and understand Ayurveda in its depth of spirit in detail. Similarly the Ayurvedics – very few of them being of high standard and quality – should understand how to integrate Allopathy with Ayurveda in the larger interest of the society. An integrated research is the call of the hour.

Ayurveda has the greatest potential for a new era of bio-medicine. The modern western society is vexed with synthetic drug usage related side effects. The western society is desperately looking for alternative medicine which is biomedicine, based largely on natural therapies. Chinese oriental herbal medicine is extremely famous and popular in the U.S.A. Next comes Ayurveda, even though full fledged recognition to Ayurveda is not granted in U.S.A. on par with Chinese Herbal Medicine. I feel that the principles of all herbal medicinal systems in the world is the same. All herbal medicinal systems have originated in the forests – man's close interaction with nature – both plant and animal kingdom has given mix to systems of herbal medicine. Ayurveda is distinguished in its long history, extensive literature base and continuity of time tested improvements and formulations. In the broader framework, Naturopathy and even Yogic therapy fall under the same category as Ayurveda. Even though modern Naturopathy has German origin, its roots can be traced in Ayurveda itself. Yoga therapy and Ayurveda share common framework of Tridosha theory. However, yoga therapy does not involve herbal formulations. Ayurvedic text clearly supports the yogic framework and relevance of Yoga. Both Yoga and Ayurveda believe in prevention of disease being better than its treatment after its growth. Role of disciplined way of life. Ritu Charya and Dina Charya of Ayurveda have a lot of importance in the prevention of diseases. Yoga ensures in prevention by regular yoga practice and cure by Yogic therapy.

While Yogic Kriyas ensure cleaning of the body using water and air only, Ayurvedic Panchakarmas clean the body using medicinal herbs. Both have similarity in approach.

Ayurveda is the most potential system of bio-medicine of the world today as it has the largest history of bio-medicine. Large scale usage of Ayurvedic methodologies has started taking place in the west – in U.S.A., Canada and Russia, even in the rural areas. The reasons are very clear. The Allopathic Drugs cause serious side effects – bio-medicine as Ayurveda and Unani herbal medicines are much better placed with very less side effects.

Some of the unique characteristics of Ayurveda as a biomedicine are its very simple diagnosis methodology, unique subjects of Rasayana and Vajikarana (Rejuvenation and Virility). Thus, universally Ayurveda is being recognized as a unique system of Biomedicine.

