

IASTAM

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Connecting Systems; Bridging Disciplines

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Healing yourself is connected with
healing others.

- Nesian Mystic

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PRE NOTE

What is an Ayurvedic (AYUSH) Product?

Dr. Narendra Bhatt

On television or in newspapers, on buses or bus stands, on trains and rikshaws, on hoardings at every nook and corner hundreds and hundreds of products are being advertised in the name of Ayurved. These products sold in the name of ayurved include not only *Chawanprash*, laxatives and such but also soaps and shampoos, cosmetics and beauty products and easy solutions for weight loss and diabetes and even help in cancer care. A new international trend is of ayurvedic clothing beyond religious shawls; foot ware and head gears beyond wristbands, crystal bands, copper and iron rings and what not.

With unaffordable increase in medical cost an access to information to the use of home remedies and self-care products has seen an unprecedented growth. The belief about ayurvedic products being natural and are safe has been exploited in majority of cases.

However, this belief is now being questioned both by consumers and by a group of scientists. The conventional medicine (Allopathic doctors) have started creating a fear in the minds of patients who seek ayurvedic treatments. As a result a consumer interested in using ayurvedic product or a patient desirous of seeking ayurvedic treatment faces a dilemma of choice. It is quiet common for an ayurvedic physician to come across these questions to which explanation are sought for. In fact the questions asked about the products have

affected the profession in a significant and negative manner and these questions are expected to increase in coming times.

THIS IS A SERIOUS ISSUE IF NOT ADDRESSED IN A SQUARE MANNER WILL AFFECT THE WHOLE AYUSH SECTOR IN A DEROGATORY WAY.

When I entered industry in 1980's the licence under ayurved was given as either (1) classical or textual and (2) Patent and proprietary. It has remained the same till now. Even then I was amused with the word patent at that time as there did not exist any properly defined meaning of the word patent in the right context. In fact I was one of the six scientist who got the first ever patent that got registered for treatment of Parkinson disease in 1989. Though many more products have been registered as patented thereafter there is no clarity about it as observed. As a side note it is also surprising to know that the TKDL (Technology, Knowledge, Digital, Library) database that was evolved with the help of ISM has limited access to the Indian scientist thereby refraining the capabilities for new inventions or discoveries whereas its use has been made more confused by inappropriate interpretation and selective access to the authorities abroad.

The original approach based on 54 classical texts has undergone no change despite the fact that the

whole procedure of raw material management, manufacturing and processing have undergone major changes over last several decades.

The loose interpretation of the proprietary medicine has made the manufacturers rush towards registration of their products. This has resulted into thousands of proprietary medicines without much differentiation for its quality, efficacy and safety.

The fear of pesticides and heavy metals in raw material and products in the mind of consumer and activists has harmed the systems where the production of classical products has started reducing.

Even a simple tablet of Triphala from a consumer's or practitioner's point of view is variable. Triphala tablet collected from four different manufacturers will have difference in its form, quality and efficacy.

Use of extracts once objected upon by the conservatives is now accepted for all kinds of products. Let us accept that the extracts are part of new products emerging from traditional knowledge. The extracts are and will remain part of Ayurvedic pharmacopeia. **However, how the extracts are used and its relevance to the products and for the product claims has till now remained unclear creating more misuse than right use.**

New questions have emerged with the use of extractives as well. The enquiries have emerged for curcuma, the kitchen remedy. On internet one finds curcuminoids. The dose of 500 to 1000 mg of curcuminoids (200+ mg in 1 teaspoon full) for a day is accepted. Now, this dose of extractive has found to have side effects which are much reported. The consumer is confused what to do? This is contradictory to the ayurvedic use of curcuma where one will observe that the use of powder (not extractives) is not more than 500 – 1000 mg per dose. **But the blame does come on ayurved.** It is shocking to observe the formulations containing incompatible ingredients wrongly justified either based on traditional principles or scientific evidence.

The claims based on ayurved having ingredients either 1/100th or even 1/1000th of a recipe are rampant. Claims based on costly ingredients like *gold*, *moti* with endangered species are common than earlier. Even claims based on simple ingredients like *banafsha* are not substantiable because of poor availability. **Irrational claims as shown supported by presumed to be qualified ayurvedic doctors has added to the confusions.** I was shocked to come across an ayurvedic product brought by a patient containing 3 *Rasaoushadis*, a potent *vishdravya* and other bhasmas. This is an obvious misuse under proprietary category that was licensed by the state authority and this is more common rather than rare which requires framework and specific

guidelines. This also reminded me of allowing the sale of arsenic containing *Samir pannaga* as an OTC product debated in the ministry wherein an expert to a very large industry pleaded for its OTC sell. Fortunately, the proposal was wisely overruled.

Being witness to rub or a balm being converted from medicinal product to ayurvedic products, I am aware of its intricacies. The intention to reach larger number of consumers and the increase in profitability are necessary for growth of the industry. I have observed how these innocuous looking conversions brought major change in the fortunes of the company and how it changed the future course of another company. **However, the simple conversion has taken a monstrous proportion that requires a careful and though industry friendly or consumer-oriented rethinking. Modern dosage forms are most welcome and essential for promotion of sector and growth of industry.** However, hundreds of excipients and additives used in ayurvedic products without even a primary check for their possible interaction or toxicity are a matter of serious concern.

Claims of all pain relief, those of weight reduction, 100% relief from an ailment or as of natural or organic origin are required to be refined for their use. Safety and reliability of this product is altogether another subject to deal with.

Advertisement of these products has also raised several questions. Issues related to claims in advertisements will not be resolved and solution will not be achieved till the issue is addressed at the basic level of licensing, categorization and claims permitted. **There is an urgent need to correlate the composition, process and relevance to clinical benefits.**

The administration has opted to adhere to making amendments or issuing government resolutions from time to time which are at times even parallel and contradictory in nature. The development of monographs and the formularies have helped to bring in some harmony. This one-dimensional approach will not help to resolve the problems of ayurvedic products and its usage. **This requires 360-degree approach through open and dynamic process to create bridge between tradition and technology.** India as a country with universal knowledge base and recent history of medical pluralism will lose its gains if these questions are not attended to in urgent manner. Despite having a logically justifiable system of ancient knowledge and survival of thousands of years the questions about its efficacy and safety will lead us to questions similar in west wherein the systems and products will get degraded to unclaimed, unauthentic solutions without logic for its reliability. **There is an urgent need to relook at the categorisation, quality parameters, safety and claims and efficacy of these products.**

