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### Introduction of Ayurveda and Human Potential: The First Life Science

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**Introduction:** Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine that is indigenous to and widely practiced in India. The word Ayurveda is a Sanskrit term meaning science of life. Ayu means life or daily living, and Veda is knowing. Ayurveda was first recorded in the Vedas, the world's oldest extant literature. This healing system has been practiced in daily life in India for more than 5,000 years. Ayurvedic medicine (also called Ayurveda) is one of the world's oldest medical systems. It originated in India and has evolved there over thousands of years. The term "Ayurveda" combines the Sanskrit words ayur (life) and veda (science or knowledge). Thus, Ayurveda means "the science of life."

In the United States, Ayurvedic medicine is considered a type of CAM and a whole medical system. As with other such systems, it is based on theories of health and illness and on ways to prevent, manage, or treat health problems.

According to the teachings of Ayurveda, every human being has four biological and spiritual instincts: religious, financial, pro-creative and the instinct toward freedom. Balanced good health is the foundation for the fulfillment of these instincts. Ayurveda helps the healthy person to maintain health, and the diseased person to regain health.

It is a medical-metaphysical healing life-science, the mother of all healing arts. The practice of Ayurveda is designed to promote

human happiness, health and creative growth.

Through studying the teachings of Ayurveda, the practical knowledge of self-healing may be acquired by anyone. By the proper balance of all energies in the body, the processes of physical deterioration and disease can

be impressively reduced. This concept is basic to Ayurvedic science: the capability of the individual for self-healing.

Ayurvedic medicine aims to integrate and balance the body, mind, and spirit; thus, some view it as “holistic.” This balance is believed to lead to happiness and health, and to help prevent illness. Ayurvedic medicine also treats specific physical and mental health problems. A chief aim of Ayurvedic practices is to cleanse the body of substances that can cause disease, thus helping to reestablish harmony and balance.<sup>1,2</sup>

Ayurvedic medicine, as practiced in India, is one of the oldest systems of medicine in the world. Many Ayurvedic practices predate written records and were handed down by word of mouth. Two ancient books, written in Sanskrit more than 2,000 years ago, are considered the main texts on Ayurvedic

medicine—Caraka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita. The texts describe eight branches of Ayurvedic medicine:

- ❖ Internal medicine
- ❖ Surgery
- ❖ Treatment of head and neck disease
- ❖ Gynecology, obstetrics, and pediatrics
- ❖ Toxicology
- ❖ Psychiatry
- ❖ Care of the elderly and rejuvenation
- ❖ Sexual vitality.

Ayurvedic medicine continues to be practiced in India, where nearly 80 percent of the population uses it exclusively or combined with conventional (Western) medicine. It is also practiced in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Most major cities in India have an Ayurvedic college and hospital. The Indian government began systematic research on Ayurvedic practices in 1969, and that work continues.<sup>3,4</sup>

The Ayurvedic concept appeared and developed between 2500 and 500 BC in India. According to Ayurveda, the disease evolves from the body due to external

factors. It has a vast literature in Sanskrit covering all aspect of diseases, pharmacy and therapeutics. The practice of Ayurveda therapeutics consisted of 8 sections divided into 180 chapters and listed 314 plants, which are used as medicines in India [1]. The Indian subcontinent is a vast repository of medicinal plants that are used in traditional medical treatments [2]. Many Westerners have long regarded the Indian systems of medicine as a rich source of knowledge [1].<sup>5, 6</sup> In India, around 20,000 medicinal plants have been recorded however traditional communities are using only 7,000 - 7,500 plants for curing different diseases [4-6].<sup>7-9</sup> The medicinal plants are listed in various indigenous systems such as Siddha (600), Ayurveda (700) and Amchi (600), Unani (700), Allopathy which 30 plant species for ailments [7].<sup>10</sup> Even today, majorities of the medicines are prepared from the plant and animal products, minerals and metals etc. Major pharmaceutical industries depend on the plant products for the preparation of Ayurvedic medicines. In the present context, the Ayurvedic system of medicine is widely accepted and practiced not only in the Indian Peninsula but also in the developed countries such as Europe, United States and Japan. Plant derived

medicines have been the first line of defense in maintaining health and combating diseases [8-9].<sup>11, 12</sup> In the last century, roughly 121 pharmaceutical products have been discovered based on the information obtained from the traditional healers [10].<sup>13</sup> Chemical principles from natural sources have become much simpler and have contributed significantly to the development of new drugs from medicinal plants [11-12].<sup>14, 15</sup> Biologically active compounds from natural sources have always been of great interest to scientists working on infectious diseases. Research to find out scientific evidence for claims of plants used for Indian Ayurvedic system of medicine has been intensified. Detailed research on the chemistry and pharmacology of products of plant origin are much essential and this may eventually lead to the discovery of medicine that can be used in the treatment of several diseases [3].<sup>16</sup> Moreover, these local Ayurvedic preparations are scientifically evaluated and disseminated properly, our indigenous population can be given better access to efficacious drug treatment and improved health status [13-14]. However, over commercial exploitation of these plant (herbal) products frequently degradation of

natural resources are reported to be major threats to medicinal plants in India.<sup>17, 18</sup>

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