

A brand new ministry

Tackling imbalances in lifestyle

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THE NDA Government has decided to establish a separate Ministry for Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathic systems of medicine ~ 'Ayush' in short. The step is welcome. The basic premise of the Ayush and Allopathic systems are different. The former focuses on lifestyles ~ food, exercise, mental makeup, and so on. It believes that health problems arise because of a certain imbalance in lifestyle. The role of medical treatment is limited to providing immediate relief. For example, a person who wakes up late, does no physical exercise, is on a rich diet and is always fighting with others is likely to suffer from BP or other psychosomatic diseases. The Ayush practitioner will prescribe early rising, morning walk, yoga and light food. That would be the basic treatment. This approach is codified in the *Vata, Pitta, Kapha* classification of the bodily processes in the Ayurvedic system. For example, if the veins get blocked, the Ayush practitioner will check the *Vata, Pitta* and *Kapha* and try to recreate a balance between them. He will eventually try to correct the bodily processes instead of merely removing the blockage. The assumption is that removal of blockage will not be successful if the underlying processes for their occurrence are left unattended.

The Allopathic system focuses more on the anatomy. A stent is placed in the veins and the blockage is removed. Indeed, suggestions for diet and exercise are also given but the focus is on anatomical treatment.

The difference between the Ayush and Allopathic systems is similar to the difference between International Standards (ISO) and British Standards (BS). The ISO focuses on the processes. An ISO certification for a paper factory, for example, will look at the systems in place in a factory for measuring variations in weight and colour, and the control systems for determining the amount of chlorine added for bleaching. It is assumed that the paper will be of good quality if these processes are in good shape. This is like the Ayush focus on *Vata, Pitta* and *Kapha*. The BS, on the other hand, focuses on the physical measurements of the paper such as weight, colour, and strength. This is like the Allopathic system that focuses on the physical parameters of anatomy. All over the world, there is an increasing trend to switch over from BS to ISO. As a corollary, we may expect a movement from Allopathic medicine to Ayush for achieving 'Holistic Health' than a mere management or absence of ailments.

There is also a difference in the underlying purpose of life between the two systems. The objective, according to Ayush, is peace or happiness, "inner" peace to be more precise. Ayurveda, for example, is best practised along with

the disciplines of astrology, *vaastu*, and *yoga*. The idea is that the human mind is influenced by various forces and they must all be aligned with the character of the person.

The inner desires of a person may be indicated by astrology, for example, and *vaastu* and *yoga* may help in the attainment of those inner desires. The role of Ayurveda gets limited to providing stop-gap treatment until the deeper realignment takes place. The objective of life, according to the Allopathic system, on the other hand, is increased consumption. The purpose is to increase the life-span so that a person can consume more. A person travelling in a Mercedes car is considered to be privileged even

many diseases. The anatomical problems are only a symptom of the underlying malfunctioning of the processes.

The Ayush Ministry should work with the Sports Ministry to introduce *yoga* as one of the streams in a sport competition. The Ayush ministry should work with the Ministry of Human Resources to introduce the different principles of Ayush and Allopathic medicine in the high school curriculum. The ministry on the anvil must work with the Ministry of Urban Development to adopt the principles of *Vaastu* in city planning. And, of course, the Ayush Ministry should work with the Ministry of Health to establish dedicated treatment centres in all hospitals so that patients get an option to be treated by either system. The benefits of Ayush will accrue only if these various messages are conveyed to society. Essentially, it involves a healthy lifestyle.

The second agenda of the Ayush Ministry should be to promote joint research with the Allopathic system. Ayurveda excels in the treatment of certain diseases like those relating to the stomach, while the Allopathic system excels in infectious diseases and surgery. There is a huge area in between where both systems have contributions to make. There is need to undertake an ambitious programme on joint studies for the treatment of various diseases by the two systems so that the best of both can be in place.

The third agenda should be to evolve a sound basis for the revival of the Ayush system. It is imperative to establish standards so that patients do not suffer due to the use of substandard Ayush medicines. The cost of such medicines is often high because certified raw materials are not easily available, especially to small manufacturers. The cost of certification of small batches of raw materials is exorbitant, leading to the use of uncertified inputs of poor quality. The Ayush Ministry could provide certified raw materials in small lots to enable small manufacturers to compete.

There is need to undertake cost effectiveness of the alternate modes of treatment. For example, certain Ayurvedic medicines are prescribed to be taken with honey. But that is expensive. So there is need to study its effectiveness when consumed with water.

The target of the Ayush Ministry should be to integrate the good practices of Allopathic medicine into the overall lifestyle management. The Ministry must desist from trying to compete with Allopathic medicine within the framework of an anatomy-based approach.

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A separate Ayush Ministry is welcome. As distinct from Allopathy, it will cover Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathic systems of medicine ~ 'Ayush' in short. The basic premise of the Ayush and Allopathic systems are different

if he is tense and suffering from several diseases. It is not easy to integrate the two systems because of these fundamental differences. A separate Ayush Ministry is, therefore, welcome.

How do we then explain the huge improvement in average life expectancy that has come about due to the use of Allopathic medicine? There is no doubt that the inventions of penicillin and antibiotics have contributed significantly towards controlling diseases. However, we have simultaneously seen the emergence of new diseases like AIDS, Mad Cow Disease, Sars and Ebola. Therefore, while recognizing the seminal contribution of Allopathic medicine, there is need to be cautious in becoming dependent on Allopathic medicine alone. There is need too to take the dimension of physical processes and inner happiness on board.

The agenda for the Ayush Ministry has to be made in this backdrop. The critical point is that it should focus not merely on the treatment of the ailments but on the holistic redirection of the individuals as well as the society in its various dimensions. Health must not be looked at in a stand-alone way, but as part of the larger human condition. The Ministry should work with the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to formulate a policy to educate the people that wrong lifestyles and processes are at the root of