

## RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF AYURVEDA AS A SOFT POWER TOOL

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The ancient Indian system of medicine, Ayurveda can act as a major soft power tool. It has the potential to enhance India's image on a global platform. This paper delves into the historical roots of Ayurveda, its philosophical foundations, its contemporary global impact, and its role in shaping India's soft power. By examining Ayurveda's growing influence in international healthcare, wellness tourism, and diplomatic initiatives, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of how Ayurveda contributes to India's soft power on the global stage. Finally, the paper concludes with major recommendations for India's foreign policy framework so that Ayurveda can become India's international brand.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Alternative therapy, Medical benefits, Ayurveda, Benefits of Ayurveda, Soft Power, Culture, Medicine*

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Soft power, a concept pioneered by political scientist Joseph Nye, encapsulates a nation's ability to sway others through its culture, values, and ideology (Nye, 2004). India, with its profound cultural legacy encompassing yoga, Ayurveda, and spiritual traditions, stands as a formidable force in the realm of soft power. Ayurveda, particularly, emerges as a potent instrument in projecting India's cultural and spiritual ethos onto the world stage. Moreover, it serves as a pivotal factor in amplifying India's global influence and holds the promise of bolstering the nation's diplomatic clout internationally (Nye, 2004).

**BACKGROUND OF AYURVEDA**

The ancient system of Ayurveda originates from ancient Indian culture and the earliest concepts are found in the Vedas, particularly the Atharvaveda. The concepts were analysed and refined by Sushrutain his comprehensive text *Charaka Samhita*. It focuses on internal medicine, and provides a detailed analysis on diagnosis, treatment and prevention of several diseases. There are four important Vedas which are Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. There are references to diseases, herbs and herbal cures in all four vedas. Rig Veda especially contains such specific details. Ayurveda is also considered an Upaveda of Atharva Veda. It contains around 114 hymns. This section provides a brief overview of Ayurveda, tracing its historical roots, foundational principles, and its evolution as a holistic system of medicine in India. The method of providing Ayurveda education to the students was only through the 'Gurukula' system of education. A 'Gurukula' was a place where a 'Guru' lived with the students and imparted education. During the medieval and the colonial period, the Gurukula system was abolished and it was replaced by the modern education system.

**SOFT POWER AND AYURVEDA**

In recent years, there has been a major resurgence of interest in Ayurveda and its related practices, both within India and globally. This global demand for the system has brought a major potential for India and its economy. The demand for Ayurveda and its products is particularly due to its holistic approach to well-being as it emphasises prevention as well as individualised treatment. Therefore, Ayurveda has a huge potential to emerge as a major soft power tool on the global stage. It can act as a major determinant of India's foreign policy. To provide growth and development to Ayurveda and other systems of Indian Medicine, Government of India established Department of Indian Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy (ISM&H) established under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in March 1995. It was renamed as Department of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy with an acronym 'AYUSH' in November 2003. In 2014, after NDA forming the national government it was decided that the Department will be upgraded to a full-fledged ministry. (Katoch et al., 2017)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF SOFT POWER AND ITS RELEVANCE TO AYURVEDA.**

Soft power is the ability to co-opt rather than coerce the action of other nations and actors in the foreign policy making. It uses several tools like culture, foreign policies to enact change and impact the decisions of others. Ayurveda, is one of the ancient medicine systems of the world. Its appeal on the global scale is huge and it can also provide an holistic and sustainable way of living to the global masses. Due to numerous changes in the

modern food diet and increase in the consumption of fast food, Ayurveda provides a way which can naturally provide relaxing wellness therapies to provide a way in the sustainable lifestyle.

The natural healing principles of Ayurveda align with the global trends towards holistic well-being and it therefore can act as a soft power asset for Indian diplomacy. India can boost its global appeal by portraying to the world the benefits of Ayurveda. Ayurveda brings several natural benefits for the beauty industry, health industry, wellness industry, tourism industry etc. The potential of wellness tourism is huge. India is now globally positioned as a centre of Ayurveda, Yoga, Sidha, Naturopathy etc. by the Government of India. The industry has the huge potential to attract people from across the countries. (*Healing with nature: Why ayurveda, after yoga, promises to be India's Next Soft Power Opportunity* 2023)

## HISTORY OF AYURVEDA

*Dhanvantri*, the physician to the Gods in Hindu mythology is attributed to the science of Ayurveda. The earliest principles of Ayurveda are directly mentioned in the Atharvaveda. The major conditions that are mentioned are fever, cough, consumption, dropsy, diarrhea, abscesses, seizures, tumours, and several skin diseases. Every disease has its own line of treatment and its associated herbs. The golden age of Indian medicine which is mostly attributed from 800 BCE until 1000 CE was marked with the production of major Ayurvedic texts such as Caraka-Samhita and Susruta-Samhita, Caraka, a physician and Susruta a surgeon. The Sushruta-Samhita is the single comprehensive and extensive text that specifically describes the human body in terms of earth, water, fire, air and ether as well as the three bodily humours (vata, pitta and kapha). (*Dhanvantari* 2025)

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF AYURVEDA

### Panchakarma

It is one of the central tenets of Ayurveda and it involves a series of detoxification procedures. It helps in cleansing our body and mind. It helps in rebuilding strength and also revitalises the body, mind as well as consciousness. The principle of Panchakarma has its foundations in the five elements: Earth, Air, Fire, Water and Ether. Each person has a different balance of three doshas (tridosha) that are formed by these elements: Pitta, Kapha and Vata. Any sort of disturbance in these doshas can give rise to chaos and diseases. Several cleaning techniques are utilised for purification. These techniques are appropriately shown in Figure 1. (Davidson, *Ayurvedic detox: Overview, safety, and effectiveness* 2020)

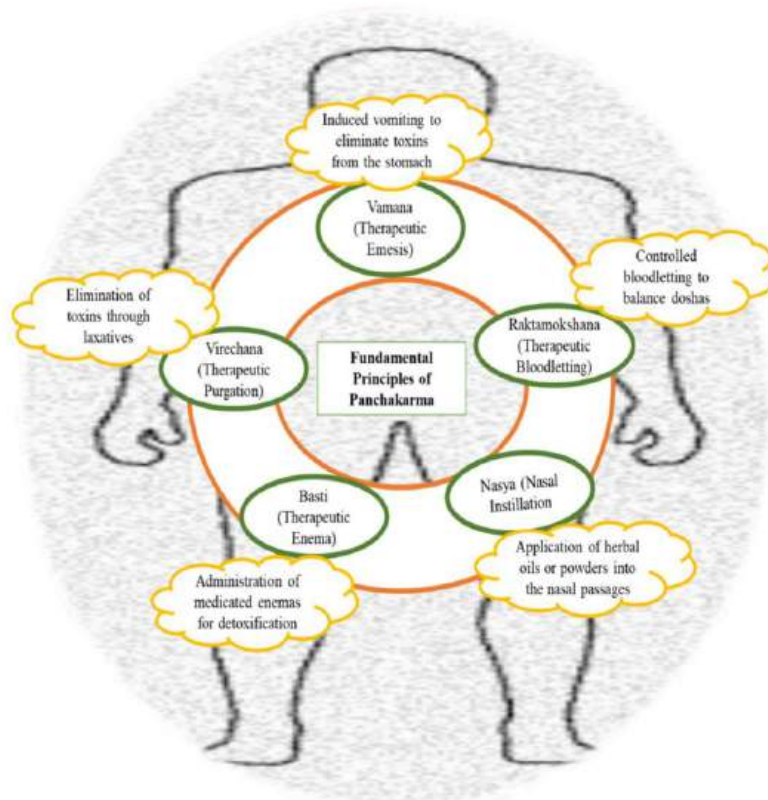


Fig. 1 Showing the fundamental principles of panchakarma for treating an infected individual

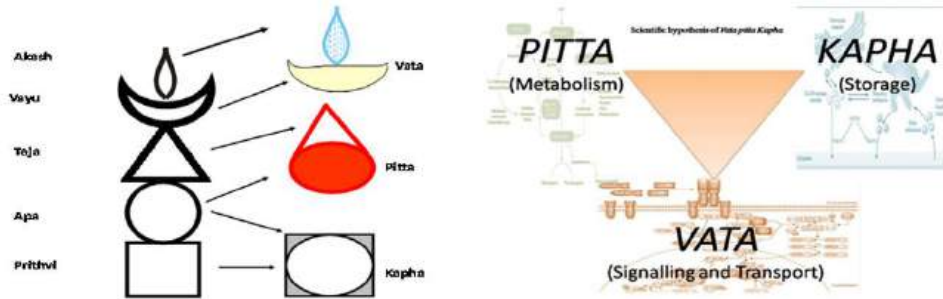
### Tridosha Theory

Along with the Panchamahabhutas, the functional aspects of growth are governed by the Tridosha Theory. The three biological humors are Vata (Space and Air), Pitta (fire and water) and Kapha (water and earth) respectively. The three doshas regulate all the physiological and psychological processes in the living organisms.

Process of Digestion: As per Ayurveda, after the intake of food, the process of digestion starts and there are two products- Prasadas (nutritional products) and Malas (excretory products). The Prasadas build the seven Dhatus (tissue) of the body, whereas Malas becomes the waste product that are expelled out. There are three types of body waste products: feces (solid), urine, and sweat (liquid). Both the Prasada and Mala are important and present in the right proportion in the body is important. For healthy living and well-being, a proper balance between body, mind and consciousness along with three humors Vata, Pitta and Kapha are necessary.

The doshas can also be further categorized into two types: Sharirika (somatic) – Vatta, Pitta and Kapha as discussed earlier and Mansika (psychic)- Satva, Rajas and Tamas. The doshas are also called doshas because these are defects and must be properly organized and balanced. Also, diverse qualities and functions have been attributed to each Dosha. The kinetic energy of our system relates to Vata, the metabolic mechanism relates to Pitta and the structural and stability mechanism is directly related to Kapha.

**'Panchamahabhuta' and 'Tridosha'**



The symbols are developed from ancient Buddhist Art

**Seasonal Variation of Doshas**

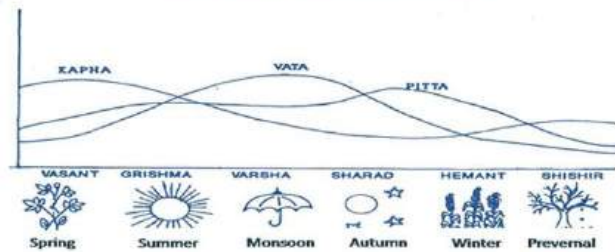


FIGURE 20.2 Relationship between Panchamahabhutas (the five primary elements) and Tridosha with its seasonal variation.

The balance of three doshas is considered important in the study of Ayurveda. It is also the basis of the science of Ayurveda.

**BRANCHES OF AYURVEDA**

In totality, Ayurveda means Science of Life that amalgamates from various aspects of life, whether physical, psychological, spiritual, or social. Ashtanga Ayurveda, also known as ‘Eight Branches of Ayurveda’ refers to the comprehensive and holistic approach of Ayurvedic medicine which means eight branches that provide a well-rounded framework for holistic well-being. The eight branches of Ayurveda are as follows:

1. Kaya Chikitsa (General Medicine)
2. Balachikitsa (Pediatrics)
3. Graha Chikitsa (Psychiatry)
4. Shalakya Tantra (ENT and Ophthalmology)

5. Shalya Tantra (Surgery)
6. Agada Tantra (Damshttra Chikitsa)
7. Jara Chikitsa
8. Vajikarana Tantra (Vrsha Chikitsa)

*(About ayurveda - all India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi)*

### **Benefits and Impact of Ayurveda**

Numerous research studies on Ayurvedic systems have concluded that the system can directly benefit the people, health policy makers, practitioners and academics. Ayurvedic interventions have been found to be cost effective reducing the personal and economic burden on people and their families. Better reach of Ayurveda to even remote and distant areas remains another major benefit of the system.

Researchers and several academics working in the field and experimenting on Ayurvedic systems. The researchers can benefit directly through the implementation of Ayurveda at a large scale as it can provide benefits while bringing Western experts to the field. *(Globalisation of ayurveda: Importance of ... - researchgate)*

### **Educational Initiatives**

The educational system and professional practice of Ayurveda are controlled by the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM), which is a statutory body set up under the provisions of Indian Medicine Central Council (IMCC) Act, 1970. The Central Government has adopted stringent regulatory provisions for granting provisions for granting permission to establish new colleges, increase in admission capacity in any course of study or training, and for starting a higher or new course of study in existing Ayurveda colleges and to maintain uniform standards of education across the country. *(The Indian Medicine Central Council Act, 1970)*

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

There are several challenges in maintaining standardization practices for Ayurveda. Further, to maintain regulations over the sector, it is important for the government to monitor the processes at every stage. Further, there must be a balance between tradition and modernization to maintain authenticity. The Ministry of Ayush is responsible for policy formulation, planning and implementation of schemes and programs for augmenting the domain, quality and outcomes of AYUSH sector in inclusive terms. Some of the major objectives of the Ministry are as follows:

- 1) Up-gradation of educational standards of teaching and training institutions
- 2) Strengthening of research and development institutions and time-bound execution of prioritized research programs
- 3) Implementation of schemes for promotion, cultivation, conservation, sustainable development and resource augmentation of medicinal plants used in AYUSH systems.
- 4) Standardization and Quality Control of drugs as per global trends.
- 5) Mainstreaming and integration of AYUSH services in the national health delivery network.
- 6) Awareness building and propagation of AYUSH through information, education and communication.

## CONCLUSION

The paper delves into the basics of Ayurveda and it concludes that Ayurveda has several benefits for the overall social well-being of an individual. Ayurveda can emerge as an important soft power tool and can enhance the image of India globally. It also has the potential to enhance India's GDP and bring several economic benefits to the country. The Indian government needs to identify the strong benefits of Ayurveda and enhance it globally. If it is utilised properly, then

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