

# GLOBAL ACCEPTANCE OF AYURVEDA: NEED FOR AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

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**Abstract :** Ayurveda, the traditional Indian system of medicine, deals not only with the treatment but also with the prevention of disease and promotion of health of the individual. Practice of Ayurveda is based on the innovative principles of holism and the person centered approach but it is still not considered as a scientific system of medicine by some of the scholars due to the lack of an evidence-based approach. Reasons behind are various constraints present in the teaching, training, research and practice of Ayurveda along with the issues related to the safety, quality and efficacy of Ayurvedic drugs. A serious attention to these is much needed in order to get an evidence base for the principles and practices of Ayurveda so as to get this system accepted by the scientific community at the global level.

**Index Terms – Ayurveda, research, evidence-based approach, global acceptance.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is one of the oldest medical sciences known and is practiced in India as the traditional Indian system of medicine. It is considered as the ‘science of life’ which not only deals with the treatment but also with the prevention of disease and the promotion and sustenance of health as well. Though the basic principles of Ayurveda like *pancha mahabhoota*, *triguna*, *tridosha* etc. derive their root from the *vedas* and *darshanas*, it is considered as a scientific tradition developed upon the knowledge gained after several years of experiences and observations. The therapeutics of Ayurveda follows the principle of holism and is an individual centered approach which treats the person and not only the disease. Despite being such elaborative and innovative in its approach, Ayurveda as a system of medicine is not yet accepted globally. The main reason behind this is the lack of evidence based practice which has now become the main focus of every system of medicine to validate itself as well as to stand tall against the challenges posed by the scientific community. The attitudes of scholars of Ayurveda fraternity like a blind faith in what has been written in the classical texts of Ayurveda some thousand years ago, lack of scientific validations about the therapeutic principle and practices, no standards of safety, quality and efficacy of Ayurvedic drugs and lack of proper and structured education, training and research programs are some of the issues which are responsible for its non-acceptance at the global level and are needed to be addressed and sorted out seriously. Present article reviews the constraints of the present system of Ayurveda and the need to develop an evidence-based approach in order to get a global recognition for Ayurveda as a scientific system of medicine.

## II. CURRENT STATUS OF AYURVEDA

There are three basic pillars upon which the growth of any branch of science depends; how well are the students of that particular branch educated or trained in context to the contemporary developments (education), whether the people are involved in proper research related activities to maintain the dynamism and whether the knowledge gained from the education, experiences and the experiments is applied in practice. This structured approach is fundamental for the development of any science or its acceptance in the community at large. In present era, Ayurveda seem to have struggled to register its presence in the national as well as global healthcare scenario. The reason behind this has been the stagnancy in the teaching, training and research activities as well as in the practice of Ayurveda which needs due attention.

There seems to have a constant dilemma in the mind of Ayurveda fraternity regarding how should they approach towards the teachings of Ayurveda; whether it should be followed like that of a philosophical teachings or it should be thought upon with a scientific vigor. Only a few of the individuals or the institutions have actually tried to test and validate the principles and practices of Ayurveda on scientific parameters with a reasoning and experimental approach but there are many who believe to practice it blindly considering it to be a “sacred truth” like the philosophical/ mythological teachings of a sacred saint are blindly followed by his/ her disciples without thinking about it logically. Some others try to go beyond this but produce such a vague mixture of Ayurveda and modern medicine in front of the students that they do not understand any of these in an optimum manner. The teaching faculty fails to demonstrate the practical applications of the concepts of Ayurveda to the students which led them to face the dilemma at the time of practice. Not only this, the education providers do not feel the need to update themselves about the recent researches and developments in their respective fields. The same stagnancy in thoughts is transferred to the students and whole system become stagnant gradually. This mindset has made the teaching and training programs of Ayurveda inefficient [1, 2]. Such people should borne it in mind that even the worshipped lords of Ayurveda system like *Acharya Charaka* and *Acharya Sushruta* also proposed at many places to think about new ideas, undertake more researches and add to the existing knowledge for continuous progress and validation of the system [3, 4] and we should not be abstinent to this.

Apart from teaching, the so called research activities at most of the institutions are equally disappointing. Every year, a large bunch of research records are added to the libraries of the institutions but most of them are not published in good quality, peer reviewed and indexed journals of high repute and are rejected at the initial level. The reason behind is the lack of proper research protocol and research aptitude which is very well reflected in the low quality of the manuscripts produced by the scholars [1]. Moreover, results are prejudiced most of the time and make high claims about one or other things but often fail to justify them on the scientific parameters. This is mostly seen in cases of the researches conducted at the level of educational institutes.

Coming to the practice of Ayurveda, every student passing out from the Ayurveda institutions faces the dilemma, due to inefficiency of education as discussed above, of choosing between traditional Ayurveda and the integrated approach; most of them end up choosing the latter ultimately [5]. This is however a matter of personal interest as everyone needs to earn his bread first and chooses the best suitable option considering many factors but the concern related to the present title is the lack of flexible approach for improvement based on experiences and experiments. If someone, being flexible and rational in his/ her practical approach, tries new combinations and formulations based on his/ her experiences, there is no proper documentation which is the primary need to develop an evidence-based approach so that the results may be validated on large samples and a generalized consensus may be developed which may benefit the society. This problem of poor documentation is pertaining with both the practitioners, whether classical or integrated or working at institutions or at their personal centers.

Another issue which derives attention is the safety, efficacy and quality standards of the Ayurvedic drugs and formulations. Now the people have become more concerned about these issues, especially the issue of safety in cases where metallic preparations are used. Though there are debates going on regarding the safety of metallic preparations with different stakeholders producing various evidences to support their claims, the other issues like adulterations, poor manufacturing practices, poor storage and contaminations also need to be sorted out on a serious note.

### III. EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH – THE NEED OF HOUR

In today's era of scientific validations, any claim regarding the authenticity of a theory or the efficacy of any drug or therapy need substantial evidences which may only be generated through practical observations, research and proper documentation [1]. This systematic approach of verifying the observations obtained during practice through a planned and well organized research protocol and properly documenting the results along with the whole process forms the basis of evidence based approach which further guides the development of standard treatment protocols for the said condition. This evidence based approach also finds its root in the processes of education, research and practice discussed in the above section.

The current scenario of Ayurveda education in India needs a major attention for its upgradation and improvement in quality. Though the respective authorities have shown much concern about this in the past years, it still seems insufficient. Mere inclusion of the components and methods of modern system of medicine into the curriculum does not solve the problem; there is a constant need to teach the students about the practical utility of even the basic subjects taught which are otherwise studied with less interest only to pass the examinations. Moreover, the focus should be more on making the students understand the utility of basic concepts of Ayurveda like *dosha*, *dushya*, *prakriti*, *kriyakaala*, *aushadhakaala*, *pathya-apathya* etc. in the clinical practice. It is not that the concepts of modern system of medicine should not be taught, but they should be taught as an adjuvant to make the concepts of Ayurveda more comprehensively understandable in terms of the biological system of human body. For clinical expertise in Ayurveda, the focus should be more on presenting the cases, their pathogenesis and the treatment protocols in terms of Ayurvedic concepts. It has been pleasing that a content of basic research methodology has been added to the curriculum of undergraduate Ayurveda education but this should be taught more rigorously and the graduates must be encouraged and trained to develop a logical reasoning approach to implement it in practice and to develop documented evidences.

To improve the quality and reliability of the researches pertaining to Ayurveda, some scholars are of the view that being holistic and person centered in its approach, the researches regarding treatment methodologies of Ayurveda need a specific design other than the existing randomized controlled clinical trial models which are more suitable for researches in modern medicine wherein a single compound or entity is usually tested but not for Ayurveda wherein the role of other factors like diet, environment, *prakriti* etc. also play a role in expression of an effect [1]. It is an appreciable thought and such protocols, if generated, will begin a new chapter in the field of Ayurveda research. However, until then, what is needed to be done is the adoption of rigorous research protocols and systemic documentations to generate reliable resources to claim as evidence [6]. All apex institutions and government bodies related to Ayurveda must come together to generate standard treatment protocols based on the knowledge obtained from the classical texts of Ayurveda as well as through current clinical experiences. These standard protocols should be tested through multicentric randomized controlled clinical trials based on the basis of guidelines like CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials), STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology) etc. to generate reliable evidence. These tested and validated protocols may then be treated as evidence based treatment guidelines which may also be adopted by the practitioners of Ayurveda without being in dilemma.

The issues of safety, quality and efficacy of Ayurvedic medicines must be addressed through a strict surveillance program to govern the manufacturing and quality control of Ayurvedic products. There must be strict instructions to follow guidelines like Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) to ensure the quality standards of Ayurvedic drugs. These should be augmented with robust research protocols for analytical studies as well as for clinical trials with Good Clinical Practices (GCP) as well as Good Laboratory Practices (GLP) to generate data on their safe clinical use [6].

### IV. CONCLUSION

Ayurveda is a science based on several years of experiences and is attaining global attention for the last few years. It is now the duty of whole of the Ayurveda fraternity to work collectively for the development of an evidence-base for the principles and practices of Ayurveda. We must remember that it is not bad to retain traditions but to contemporize the traditions to make them

more acceptable in the present scenario is always needed. This contemporization is done through the process of research which has been the culture of Ayurveda. Even Acharya Vagbhatta favoured the idea of contemporizing the then existing knowledge in their treatise written in 6<sup>th</sup> century AD [7] and we must all follow the same steps.

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