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Revival of Traditional Indian Medicine

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This article is based on **“Fusing traditional medicine with the modern”** which was published in The Hindu on 05/11/2019. It talks about the revival of traditional Indian medicine.

The traditional Indian system of medicine, which comprises of **Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH)**, is a perennially neglected alternative medicine sector. It played an important role against the imperialistic British reign by the cultural nationalistic reassertion but is losing its significance in modern times. This article focuses on the challenges it faces and suggests measures for its revival.

Significance of Alternative Medicine

- These systems are based on **definite medical philosophies and represent a way of healthy living with established concepts on prevention of diseases and promotion of health.**
- **Importance and demand** of Yoga, Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Siddha and Unani medical systems **have grown** especially due to **growing challenges** of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), lifestyle disorders, long term diseases, multidrug-resistant diseases, which are **not easily solved by the allopathic medical system.**
- After Independence, the Government started supporting all the medical systems for their growth, thereby offering the public a choice for their routine health care need. Because of this as now there are **public patronage and institutional support to widen the strength of these systems** in **curative, preventive, promotive aspects of health care.**

Challenges

- **Historical:** Steps were taken to uplift the sector after the **Report of the Committee on Indigenous Systems of Medicine, published by the Ministry of Health in 1948** but they were scrapped later. Almost all attempts of integration of AYUSH sector has failed till now.
- **Inadequacy of resources:** The policy to mainstream AYUSH faces the problem of **inadequate medicines, lack of health centres, capacity building, practitioners and public faith on its efficiency.**
- **Quantity vs Quality:** Integration of AYUSH into the health-care system faces the **debate of, whether to provide AYUSH facilities everywhere** leaving no place behind or **to improve the existing facilities** to full potential.
- **Competition with modern medicine:**
 - **Dishonest practices** by most of the AYUSH practitioners makes **allopathy look more trustworthy.**
 - **Scepticism towards** AYUSH treatments and procedures by people, mainly the allopathic sector.
 - **Mindless cosmeticisation** of AYUSH products in the name of natural-organic origin in comparison to the artificial allopathic products.
 - **More focus on the export promotion** of AYUSH products to gain market attention.
- **Less or no efforts:** There is a **sharp status gap** between modern medicine and AYUSH and **little has been done to harmonise** both the sectors. Merely expanding AYUSH's framework will only expand the present list of problems.
- **Conflict of Interests:** AYUSH lobby **fears a loss of identity** following such integration. The allopathic lobby alleges that **standards of medical care would be diluted** after the integration.
- **Isolationist attitude:** In the case of traditional medicine, an **isolationist attitude to keep it separate** from other systems of medicine, could **deter scientific scrutiny and block some potential value addition.**

Initiatives to Promote AYUSH

- Creating **AYUSH wings in defence and railway hospitals.**
- Giving **soft loans and subsidies** for the establishment of **private AYUSH hospitals and clinics.**
- Building **institutes of excellence in teaching and research** in AYUSH which would help in furthering the credibility and awareness of traditional medicine.
- Under the **Ayushman Bharat Mission**, 12,500 dedicated AYUSH **health and wellness centres** are planned to be set up.

Measures to be taken for integrating AYUSH

- Strategising for facilitating **meaningful cross-learnings and collaborations** between the modern and traditional systems on equal terms.
- Envisioning the **integration of education, research, and practice of both systems** at all levels.
- Including training of AYUSH practitioners in modern medicine through **curriculum changes** and vice versa.
- However, prerequisites of such integration need **substantial groundwork**:
 - Building a strong traditional medicine research and scientific evidence corpus.
 - Delineating the relative strengths, weaknesses, and role of each system.
 - Negotiating the philosophical and conceptual divergences between systems.
 - Standardising and regulating AYUSH practices and qualifications.
 - Addressing the unique issues associated with research into AYUSH techniques.
- India can **learn from the Chinese example of integrating Traditional Chinese Medicine with Western medicine**.
- Recently, the **National Medical Commission Bill, 2019** was passed, despite the opposition from the orthodox medical community which shows the political will to work towards the goal.

Way Forward

- A middle path needs to be found out by an **integrated framework- merging** the two systems of medicine while also leaving enough scope for their **autonomous growth**.
- Medium and long-term plans for seamless integration should be developed expeditiously in view of the **massive drive for achieving universal health care** already underway in the country.
- Through this India will be able to **address the subservient status of AYUSH and foster its legitimate inclusion into mainstream health care**.

Drishti Mains Question

What are the challenges faced by the AYUSH System with respect to its integration in the mainstream medical system? Suggest measures to overcome it.