

# NATUROPATHY IN INDIA: CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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## Abstract:

Naturopathy is an old science based on philosophy founded on natural principles of healing. We find mention of health promotive, disease preventive, curative and rehabilitative values of different Naturopathy practices in ancient Indian texts. Recognizing and realizing the need for developing naturopathy system on the basis of its own principles, the Government of India established Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy (CCRYN), New Delhi and National Institute of Naturopathy (NIN), Pune, Maharashtra. Approximately 500 Naturopathy hospitals are currently functioning in the country having indoor and outdoor treatment facilities. These hospitals are engaged in the propagation of positive health, treatment and management of various life style and psychosomatic disease conditions and are serving the suffering masses.

In this paper the author giving the brief history and present status of naturopathy in India throws light on the future challenges for naturopathy to make its maximal utilization in the national health care.

**Keywords:** Naturopathy, Life style disorders, Psychosomatic diseases, Evidence- Based Medicine

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## Introduction

Naturopathy is one among the various systems of traditional health care available in India. This is also called as the science of healthy living. The naturopathy system of healing is based on philosophy of natural healing with its own concepts of health, disease and their management. Naturopathy lays equal importance on both preventive and curative aspect of health care. Moreover, naturopathic practices are easy to follow and can be integrated well in the daily routine of people as may be required. This is one of the reasons that Naturopathy is becoming popular globally.

## History of Naturopathy

The evolution of Naturopathy may be traced as old as the history of mankind and the history of eruption of diseases. In a bid to find remedies to their day to day sufferings, early civilizations took the respite of nature. These health care practices gradually enriched with continuous observations evolved as natural methods of healings. *Panchmahabhutas* or the five eternal components of universe could have been the easiest resource to mitigate the sufferings for their ready availability. It is easy to comprehend that the present form of Naturopathy is the

outcome of a continuous evolution based upon the observation of natural process healing methods and ways of healthy living.

Naturopathy is a traditional system of healing based on time-tested principles which govern life and health. These principles of healthy living, prevention and healing are firmly integrated in the customs and culture of people living in India since antiquity. Many of these fundamentals are well documented in the ancient Indian scriptures like *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and Epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

The sages of the *Vedic* period had clear concept about the therapeutic values of earth, water, air and sun. A good description is available in *Atharvaveda* and *Yajurveda* narrating the qualities and therapeutic potentials of these elements. Earth is narrated as 'Mother, Water is considered as *Amrita* (Panacea) and Sun was equated to *Brahma* (Creator). There is extensive mention of *Vayu* (air) in *Rigveda* and it is considered to be the divine force of all activities, sensations and peace. Perhaps these considerations had lead to different cults which worship trees, rivers, sun, and which culminated into personification of natural resources as deity like Gods of rain (*Indra*), God of air (*Varuna*) etc.

In *Rigveda* fasting is considered as supreme medicine having a capacity to eliminate the accumulated toxins from the body. The *Manu Smriti* prescribes rules and regulations about personal hygiene. The *Bhagavat Gita* has elucidated in detail regarding the three varieties of food vs. *Sattwik*, *Tamasik* and *Rajasik* and its effect on human body and mind. Ganges, throughout ancient *Sanskrit* literature, finds mentioned as a Holy river and water of Ganges is considered to have property of healing the diseases and detoxifying the body and mind. Thus, it can be concluded that use of water, air, sun (heat), earth etc. was widely prevalent in ancient India since *Vedic* period for their healing as well as health promotion potential.

### Modern Development of Naturopathy

The modern development of Naturopathy was started simultaneously in America, Germany and other Western countries with the development of Water Cure (Hydrotherapy). In 1820s, Dr. Isaac Jennings of America codified the principles of Naturopathy and an Austrian farmer Vincent Priessnitz (1799-1851) developed a Hydrotherapy Centre in Gräfenberg.

Thereafter, Louis Kuhne of Leipzig, Germany propagated the 'Principle of Unity of Disease and Unity of Cure' and provided a theoretical base to Nature Cure. His book "New Science of Healing" became so popular throughout the globe that it was translated into more than 100 languages including Indian languages like Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam and Telugu.

According to a report of Department of AYUSH (2008) the status of naturopathy hospitals, beds and physicians in the country is as under (Table 1) (3) –

Table 1: The state wise distribution of hospitals, beds and dispensaries in naturopathy by management status as on 1.4.2008

S. No.	No. of hospitals		Total	No. of beds		Total	No. of dispensaries			Total
	Govt.	Others		Govt.	Others		Govt.	Local bodies	Others	
1.	11	159	170	216	5441	5657	15	08	209	232

### Current Status of Naturopathy in India

Approximately 500 Naturopathy Hospitals (big and medium) spread throughout the country are providing outdoor/ indoor health care services to common public of rural as well as urban areas in an effective manner with or without Government support.

The Government of India also recognized the need of systematic research for the development of Naturopathy and formed two autonomous organizations under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Department of AYUSH to look after its development.

(i) The Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy (CCRYN), New Delhi is founded in 1978 with an objective to conduct scientific research in the field of Yoga & Naturopathy and to establish the efficacy of Yoga & Naturopathy in various disease conditions. The Council runs its activities with the help of various schemes i.e. clinical research scheme, literary research scheme, running OPDs and conducting keep fit yoga classes for public. The Council provides financial assistance to premier Medical as well Yoga and Naturopathy Institutions in the country for undertaking research studies on these systems (1).

(ii) National Institute of Naturopathy (NIN), Pune is founded in 1986 with the objective to conduct, facilitate & encourage research activities in all aspects concerning human health and to develop naturopathy as a system of medicine and as a way of life is it's another objective (2).

- The distribution of bed strength in AYUSH hospitals for naturopathy is 5657 (8.5%) only in 2008.
- The average no. of hospitals per crore populations for naturopathy is 1.48 in 2008.
- The inpatient capacity per crore populations under AYUSH hospitals for naturopathy is 49.4 in 2008.
- The no. of registered practitioners of naturopathy as on 1.1.2008 was 1049 which comes to 9 only per crore populations.

As presently there is no Central Regulatory Body for Registration of Practitioners of Yoga & Naturopathy, Standardization of courses and Accreditation of Naturopathy Hospitals, the progress of naturopathy is not reaching up to the expected level. However, some of the States have provision of Registration of these practitioners as under-

- a. Board of Indian Medicine, Secunderabad, Govt. of A.P. and Andhra Board of Ayurveda, Secunderabad, Govt. of A.P.
- b. Karnataka Ayurveda, Unani & Naturopathy Practitioners Board, Bangalore, Govt. of Karnataka
- c. Tamil Nadu Board of Indian Medicine, Chennai, Govt. of Tamil Nadu
- d. M.P. Ayurveda evam Prakritik Chikitsa Board, Bhopal
- e. Chhatisgarh Ayurvedic, Unani tatha Prakritik Chikitsa Board, Raipur

Some more States are actively considering for introducing regulation on the practice of Naturopathy. Some have also made Naturopathy Development Boards for the furtherance of the system of Naturopathy in their States.

### **Education**

A number of colleges of naturopathy affiliated to respective Medical or State Universities/ Deemed Universities are imparting degree level education of 5 or 5½ years duration leading to the degree of Bachelor of Naturopathy & Yogic Sciences. Three colleges are run by State Governments one each by Government of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu respectively. Some universities also offer Diploma/ PG Diploma level education in the field of

Naturopathy. Some Open Universities have also started courses in Naturopathy, however, there is no uniformity in the curricula.

### **Naturopathy Hospital Setup**

Hundreds of naturopathy hospitals having more than 50 beds facility are functioning in rural and urban areas in different parts of the country on private initiative. Some of them are quite big and having more than 150-200 beds strength with all requisite treatment facilities. In Kerala two Government Naturopathy Hospitals are working since long.

Similarly hundreds of naturopathy clinics are working on outdoor basis and providing naturopathy health care facilities to the patients.

### **Research Infrastructure**

In view of increasing role of Naturopathy as a therapeutic intervention in various psychosomatic and lifestyle disorders, the scope of research to establish the efficacy of Naturopathy is also increasing. Efforts are being made to explore the potentials of Naturopathy at various research institutions of Naturopathy and also Modern Medicine. The findings are indicative that Naturopathy is quite useful and can play a substantial role in the management of various diseases/disease conditions including psychosomatic disorders.

The research infrastructure in respect of Naturopathy in the country is gradually taking a shape. Naturopathy Hospitals are showing interest in research activities. Hopefully research activities of Naturopathy will gain a momentum in future with or without support from Government. Research publications are also brought out for dissemination of the information.

### **Therapeutic Approach**

Naturopathy is having its specific therapeutic approach which is different from other systems of medicine. It treats the body as a whole. The fundamental difference of Naturopathy with other systems is that its theory and practice are based on holistic view point where as the later approach is reductive. Naturopathy does not believe in the specific cause of disease and its specific treatment but takes into account the totality of factors responsible for disease such as one's unnatural habits of living,

thinking, working, sleeping, relaxing, sexual indulgence etc. and also considers the environmental factors which disturb the normal functioning of the body on the whole which leads to a morbid, weak and toxic state. For treatment, it primarily stresses to correct all the factors involved and allows the body to recover itself. Hence, the Naturopath helps in nature's effort to overcome disease by removing the obstacles in the way of self correcting efforts of the body by applying correct natural modalities and controlling the natural forces to work within the safe limits.

This specific therapeutic approach is the actual strength of naturopathy.

### **Future Challenges**

Naturopathy system is having enormous potential with reference to management of various disease conditions but not fully utilized due to various reasons. Naturopathy system can prove its metal if full scope is given for its development as per its principles. It is found effective in the treatment and management of many of the life style related disease conditions i.e. Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), Diabetes Mellitus, Bronchial Asthma, Arthritis, Hypertension and Anxiety etc. where other systems have almost no relief. The metropolitan life is becoming more hectic and mechanical every day. Hence, the importance of naturopathy is increasingly realized by the people to adopt it as a part of their daily routine and life style to make them healthy (4). Rastogi (2008) has shown an inclination of patients towards non-pharmacological and non-invasive therapies of naturopathy (5). WHO estimates that India will have the highest no. of CAD patients in the world and India is ill equipped to manage this increasing demand for care (6).

Naturopathy is an experienced science having its definite role and importance in the treatment and management of various disease conditions. A new trend of integrating the practices of naturopathy in ameliorating suffering of patients by leading practitioners of other systems is developing which indicates the importance of naturopathy today and its possible role in future.

Some of the future challenges for naturopathy fraternity, policy makers and health planners are given below:

1. To standardize the treatment procedures of naturopathy to make them more effective and result oriented.
2. To develop a research oriented attitude among the naturopathy physicians to make them more focused towards evidenced based research.
3. To develop common protocols of naturopathy for the treatment and management of various disease conditions i.e. Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), Diabetes Mellitus, Bronchial Asthma, Arthritis, Hypertension and Anxiety etc. so that these could be adopted/ followed by the researchers to see its impact and effectiveness as an effective mode of treatment.
4. To prepare standard text books on various subjects of naturopathy for students based on up to date information, knowledge and evidences.
5. To improve the quality of treatment in naturopathy hospitals by fixing the minimum standards.
6. To adopt better documentation techniques for preparation of case histories and maintenance of treatment and follow up records etc.
7. To establish naturopathy as an evidence based medicine (EBM) and make it a globally accepted mode of treatment.
8. To prepare data bank of naturopathy hospitals, clinics, books, photos of treatment procedures and practitioners functioning in the country.
9. To take steps to cut down the increasing expenses in health care delivery and to reduce the burden of treatment from the common people by disseminating the message of naturopathy for prevention of diseases.
10. To develop naturopathy hospitals as research centers for treatment of specific disease conditions.
11. To take necessary measures to realize the dream of health for all in comparatively shorter period of time by adopting naturopathy.
12. To integrate naturopathy as add on therapy in research studies and also in the treatment and management of life style related disease conditions.

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13. To highlight the preventive aspects of naturopathy.
14. To promote the traditional Indian life style/positive life style and its benefits among the people.
15. To study on the attitude/ level of awareness of the physicians with reference to naturopathy system of medicine with a view to utilize the collected data to convince such physicians to refer the patients to naturopathy hospitals.
16. To enhance the level of awareness among the people regarding the health care benefits of naturopathy.
17. To study the perception of patients visiting naturopathy hospitals for improving the quality and facilities of treatment.
18. To set up naturopathy information and documentation centre (NIDC).
19. To encourage pilot studies/ research studies on various modalities of naturopathy like mud therapy (10), fasting therapy etc. and their possible impact on various disease conditions.
20. To review the scientific literature about various therapies under naturopathy and to interpret them in reference to its application to practice of naturopathy.

### Limitations

While discussing the future challenges, attention should also be paid that naturopathy system of treatment with a lot of merits also have certain limitations in terms of taking more time in showing the results. One of the reasons behind this may be that the patient considers taking naturopathy treatment as a last resort. Moreover, naturopathy needs patience from the patients. In accidents and surgical cases naturopathy has a limited role to play. However, in post operative cases it can be used effectively (6).

### Conclusions

Based on the information presented, it may be concluded that naturopathy has enormous potential and can become an effective mode of treatment in various disease

conditions, however, a research oriented scientific approach is required to be adopted to meet the future challenges and to establish the system of naturopathy as evidence base medicine (EBM) and a globally accepted mode of treatment (8). This task requires collective efforts of stake holders in a phase wise/time bound manner with a focused vision (9).

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