

## Editorial

# Connoting the Relevance of Traditional Systems of Medicine in Modern Era

“Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire.”

— Gustav Mahler



Traditional systems of medicine (TSM) are native to individual countries which have developed based on the cultural background of the local populace. The scientific wisdom of various TSM has been passed down from generation to generation among which some are with documented evidences and some without <sup>[1]</sup>. TSM has a vast history of managing health care needs of the people which dates backs to time immemorial and thus commands them to consider it as the backbone of modern civilization. The principles of TSM are predominantly experience based which are the result of various trial & error undergone since ages. The existence and applicability of these principles till today in spite of medical pluralism indeed suggests that no single system of medicine is sufficient to cure all the ailments of the mankind completely.

An article published in lancet reports, ageing of the world's population is leading to a substantial increase in the number of individuals with sequel of diseases and injuries <sup>[2]</sup>. Even though the disease burden has been controlled and expectancy of life has increased due to significant advances in modern medicine, the rate of mortality too has increased. In addition to the above instances, irrational use of drugs leading to evolution of drug resistant micro-organisms and new diseases are becoming the biggest challenges to the medical fraternity which may remain same in the imminent times too. Though the advances in science and technology have reduced the physical burden on the people, they have made the mankind languid with addictions to unhealthy lifestyle. These have developed as the roots for manifestation of many lifestyle disorders which are one of the most alarming causes of morbidity and mortality. In this instance the role of various TSM should be measured as magnanimous in the context of maintenance of health, prevention of the diseases and their management.

The emphasis on health promotion in almost all TSM remain as an integral part of managing a disease. Most of these systems use health enhancement approaches that cover diverse areas. Hence defining them remains

a challenging task. However WHO defines traditional medicine as including diverse health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal, and/or mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises applied singularly or in combination to maintain well-being, as well as to treat, diagnose or prevent illness <sup>[3]</sup>.

The basic health care needs of a common man requires a better quality of life with minimum interventions of therapeutics unless warranted. The aim of therapeutics of traditional medicine (TM) is to support the normal physiology of an individual and to eliminate the pathogenesis from its root cause. Probably this may be the reason why TM is variable in their effect.

Herbs are the primary source of medicines in almost all TSM which uses the drug as a whole. Even though the methods of extraction are many, there happens no separation of specific alkaloids from them. The drug as a whole possess in them the constituents which counteract with those which may cause side effects or adverse reactions. Hence TM stays a comparatively safer choice of treatment for both acute and chronic conditions and even for longer durations of therapy.

Most of the well-established drugs of modern medicine have a strong base of traditional knowledge. For instance, isolation of reserpine in 1952 from the herb *Rauwolfia serpentina* that has been employed in India for many centuries by the natives to treat snake bites and mental illness <sup>[4]</sup> is worth highlighting. TM is applied in the management of almost all systemic disorders and the noteworthy applicability remains in managing chronic disorders. In communicable diseases such as malaria, HIV, dengue, chicken pox, chickungunya etc. TM has widely proved its worth. Two of the major drugs used in malarial management such as quinine and artemisinin are derived from traditional medical knowledge of Peru and China respectively <sup>[5]</sup>. A recent survey showed that 78% of patients living with HIV/AIDS in the USA use

complementary and alternative medicines<sup>[3]</sup> and similar patterns have been reported in many other developed and developing countries. A number of systematic studies on the efficacy of traditional management methods are slowly emerging suggesting antiretroviral, immunomodulatory and opportunistic infection reducing effects<sup>[6]</sup>.

TSM are linked with the changes in tradition and therefore much of their concepts are either lost or modified due to changes in civilization. This has even brought in major changes in their status due to the influence of newer systems of health care and attitude of public. Hence summarizing the contribution of this ancient wisdom in few words would be prejudiced. Although some name TSM as an old and outdated system of medicine, the new research findings have re-established the benefits of these systems for the welfare of mankind. TSM have and are being continuously providing a safer and effective health care as a reassuring option of life when all the alternatives fail; just like a small child gets back home crying for support after all failures.

It is indeed a matter of privilege to pen the editorial for inaugural issue of the Journal of Research in Traditional Medicine. The original article section contains the work of identification of new medicinal drugs in the Telegu Cantos of Basavarajeeyam which would be a significant contribution to herbal materia medica. The pharmacological section highlights the memory and learning enhancing effect of *Swarnaprashana* (Administration of gold formulation) which is a much debated topic in the field of Ayurvedic Pediatric practice. The case study section opens a new avenue for practical application of *Ksheerasutra* (a modified form of *Ksharasutra* - herbal seton) in children as well as adults. I hope that the inaugural issue will be a resourceful treat for researchers, clinicians, students and consumers of traditional systems of medicine to satisfy their hunger for knowledge and be benefitted by the new approaches in managing health.

**Srihari Sheshagiri**  
**Editor-In Chief,**  
**Journal of Research in Traditional Medicine (JRTM)**

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