

An understanding of demoralizing market for Ayurvedic health products in Gaur Banga with special reference to Nadia district, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The historical background of GourBanga is available to many of us. But the history that encompasses in this paper may not be known to all, and that is its history and legacy with ayurved. Medicines prepared from the extracted ingredients of locally available herbs and plants which are readily available to people at a very reasonable prices if not nothing. Before the penetration of allopathic medicines, demand for ayurvedic medicines was very high in the market due to its low price, very effective and no side effects. But as day progresses particularly post 1970s the demand for it gradually started falling and after COVID pandemic it dropped drastically. We enquired the facts responsible for this paradigm shifting effects of ayurvedic medicines in this area. The plantation of these types of plants and herbs are nowadays very rare and limited due to rising demand for cash crops along with regular crops; increase in urbanization and pressure of real estate, lands availability for such cultivation is either very limited or used for various other purposes, governmental policies to promote ayurved as an easy and low priced medicines are found prominent in this regard. We tried proposing some way outs to promote this age-old and ancient medicinal practices in India that may cure various critical diseases at a very low cost and without side effects.

Key words: Ayurvedic medicines, GourBanga, Medicinal plants, way outs.

INTRODUCTION

GourBanga, a historical region roughly equivalent to the modern-day districts of Malda, Murshidabad, and parts of Nadia and Dinajpur in West Bengal, has a rich and diversified cultural legacy. Ayurveda, being an ancient system of Indian medicine, has a strong presence in this region. GourBanga, noted for its historical significance and old culture, was impacted by several dynasties, including the Mauryas, Guptas, and, subsequently, the Bengal Sultanate. Ayurveda, which is an important aspect of Indian culture, was practiced and developed during these times. The region's status as a center of trade and cultural interchange aided the expansion and practice of Ayurveda. Ayurvedic knowledge and practices were transferred, along with products and other cultural components. Various rulers of GourBanga encouraged the practice and growth of Ayurveda. This patronage included financing for Ayurvedic practitioners, building dispensaries, and assisting with the documentation and preservation of Ayurvedic manuscripts.^[4] GourBanga has been home to numerous scholars who have contributed to Ayurvedic literature and practices. Manuscripts and texts from this region contributed to the spread of Ayurvedic knowledge. GourBanga's abundant biodiversity offers a multitude of medicinal plants and herbs for Ayurvedic treatments. Local Vaidyas (Ayurvedic practitioners) applied Ayurvedic principles to properly use these resources. During Raja Krishnachandra's rule over Nadia district in the 18th century, Ayurveda played an important part in the region's healthcare system and cultural practices. Raja Krishnachandra Roy was a renowned *zamindar* of Nadia, recognized for his support of art, culture, and education. His reign is often regarded as a golden moment in Nadia's cultural and intellectual development. This time period saw a renaissance of classical learning and traditional practices, such as Ayurveda. Raja Krishnachandra supported scholars, poets, and practitioners of traditional medicine, including Ayurveda. Raja Krishnachandra helped Ayurvedic practitioners (Vaidyas) by providing resources and patronage.^[1,3] This allowed the Vaidyas to practice and spread their knowledge more efficiently. The king encouraged the establishment and development of educational institutions that imparted traditional knowledge, such as Ayurveda. Scholars and practitioners were invited to his court, creating a milieu conducive to study and cultural exchange. During the British rule, the Ayurvedic system of medicine faced many challenges from different fronts, in the field of education, practice, medicine, and others. From abolishment of the medical education in indigenous languages in 1835 to the establishment of Ayurvedic College in 1916, these 80 years were crucial in the history of Ayurvedic education in India. After the establishment of Calcutta Medical College in

1835, the British policy was to push out the indigenous medicine of India and to patronize the western medical system. It became very difficult to get interested students and to make them learn Ayurveda in the Sanskrit language. [2] Another difficulty that has arisen in the study of Ayurveda is the availability of Ayurvedic medicines. Initially, imported and then manufactured allopathic treatments displaced indigenous Ayurvedic medicines from the market. An influx of allopathic pharmaceuticals posed a challenge to Ayurvedic remedies. This issue was met by Ayurvedic physicians who established numerous Ayurvedic medication production units. The indigenous response to this dilemma took two distinct ways. One approach involved the regeneration of genuine ancient Ayurvedic remedies, a sort of resuscitation of the historical legacy. In contrast, there was acceptance of new ingredients and procedures in order to meet the demands of the moment.

Further, as per Economics & Political weekly, [5] pressure on agriculture & cultivation was increasing gradually. Report says, approximately 90% of farmers in West Bengal are small and marginal. High population pressure on land, causes subdivision and fragmentation of landholdings, making it difficult for them to accomplish their objectives. As land pressure grew, farmers were obliged to exploit their land for livelihood support, which led to environmental degradation and soil health degradation, resulting in food and nutritional insecurity, affecting the livelihoods of future generations [Halder J. 2012].

From the above two facts it is heart breaking but reality which showcased the lack of motivation & culture to grow necessary raw materials to produce homemade ayurvedic medicines, health care products etc.

The Ayurvedic Practises in GourBanga:

"PrathamikSwasthya Kendra" or Primary Health Center often refers to a basic healthcare center that provides basic medical services at the community level. While Ayurveda is valued as a traditional medical system, Primary Health Centers often focus on providing a wide range of basic healthcare services to meet the community's current healthcare needs. Primary Health Centers frequently follow government health policies and standards that emphasize conventional or allopathic medicine as the primary way of healthcare delivery. These policies could represent national healthcare goals and funding allocations. Primary Health Centers seek to provide universal access to basic healthcare services, which are frequently consistent with modern medical standards. These services include preventive care, maternal and child health, family planning, and common illness treatment, which are more standardized and universally recognized in the healthcare system. Healthcare professionals working in Primary Health Centers at major instances have received training primarily in modern medicine, such as Allopathy, and are unfamiliar with Ayurvedic techniques. Furthermore, the infrastructure and resources available at these facilities are not that much suited for traditional medical care. In some areas, modern medical procedures may be perceived as more familiar and trustworthy than ancient systems such as Ayurvedic medicine. As a result, Primary Health Centers prioritize services that are more popular among the local community. Furthermore, Primary Health Centers in West Bengal follow government health policies that prioritize allopathic medicine as the primary healthcare system. Irrespective of Central or State Government, healthcare programs and initiatives frequently promote allopathic treatment modalities. Healthcare workers, such as doctors and nurses, who work in these facilities often obtain formal education and training in allopathic medicine. Their training program and licensure criteria are based on allopathic medical ideas. As part of its healthcare programs, the government frequently provides necessary allopathic drugs and medical supplies to Primary Health Centers. This ensures that the facilities can provide basic healthcare to the community. Allopathic medicine is frequently structured and evidence-based, with well-defined treatment methods for common health problems. This makes it easier to provide consistent and effective care in primary health centers. Many societies favor allopathic medicine because of its perceived efficacy and familiarity. Patients may be more likely to seek care from Primary Health Centers that provide allopathic services. Allopathic medicine is integrated into India's national healthcare system, which includes government-funded programs such as the National Health Mission (NHM). Primary Health Centers play an important role in executing national healthcare objectives. While Primary Health Centers are primarily concerned with allopathic treatment, there are initiatives underway to incorporate other medical systems, such as traditional and complementary therapies, into the healthcare system. This could include initiatives like AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) programs, which encourage the merging of traditional Indian medicinal systems with allopathic medicine. Due to the aforementioned considerations, allopathic treatment continues to be the primary focus of Primary Health Centres in West Bengal and throughout India.

On the other hand, as per <https://www.wbhealth.gov.in/>(2024) & Shiksha.com(2024), no Ayurved colleges exist in Nadia or Gaur Banga providing BAMS(Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery) degree, but Medical colleges providing MBBS(Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery). Beyond districts, the state of West Bengal has 5 Ayurvedic colleges, 3 of which are public and 2 of which are private. However, when it comes to medical colleges that specialize in allopathy, the state currently has 24 government colleges and nine private colleges. Hence, adequate institutions/colleges are not available to train the professionals/youths about the traditional effective Ayurveda. Several factors can be considered responsible for the above distinction. Historically, medical education in India has focused on allopathic medicine, which adheres to Western medical concepts. This has resulted in the formation of more institutions offering Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degrees than colleges offering Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS). Government policy and financing goals have always favoured allopathic medicine

over indigenous systems such as Ayurveda. As a result, there has been increased investment in allopathic medical education, including the development of medical schools and hospitals. Many students and parents believe that allopathic medicine provides more career and job options than Ayurveda. This could affect the demand for medical college seats and the formation of new colleges. The regulatory system for medical education in India, which is overseen by organizations such as the Medical Council of India (MCI) and the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM), has historically favoured allopathic medicine. This could have impacted the creation and accreditation of Ayurvedic colleges. Creating and maintaining a medical college requires considerable infrastructure, resources, and faculty. Ayurvedic colleges may have a more difficult time achieving these requirements than allopathic medical colleges. Ayurveda, being a traditional medical system, faces difficulties in combining with today's healthcare system, which is mostly founded on allopathic concepts. This could influence the perceived relevance and demand for Ayurvedic education.

^[7,8] According to the 2011 Census, West Bengal's population was 9.13 crore, up from 8.02 crore in 2001. The most recent census data shows a total population of 91,276,115, with 46,809,027 men and 44,467,088 women. In 2001, the total population was 80,176,197, with 41,465,985 men and 38,710,212 women. The population growth rate over the last decade was 13.84 percent, and 17.84 percent in the preceding decade. In 2011, West Bengal's population accounted for 7.54 percent of India's overall population, and 7.79 percent in 2001. Out of which, rural areas are home to around 68.13% of the state's population. Between 2001 and 2011, West Bengal's rural population increased by 7.68%. In these rural areas, moreover the average literacy rate in West Bengal's rural districts is 72.13%, demonstrating the value of education in these communities. Hence, we can observe a continuous rise in population in West Bengal comprising of Gaur Banga and also we can observe a high illiteracy rate which may have some impact on cultivation of traditional ayurvedic medicine ingredients.^[9] Furthermore, according to the Agriculture Census, all agricultural land holdings totaled 0.760 hectares in 2016. This represents a drop from the prior figure of 0.770 hectares for 2011. All Holdings data is updated yearly, with an average of 0.780 hectares from June 2001 (median) to 2016, based on four observations. The statistics peaked at 0.820 ha in 2001 and dropped to a record low of 0.760 ha in 2016. Hence, the decrease in agricultural land holdings in West Bengal- the State comprising Gaur Banga and consisting Nadia district can be referred to a significant result for the dropdown of traditional medicine ingredients and in the remaining regions, promotion of traditional crops and especially cash crops back-footed cultivation of medicinal plants and herbs seriously.

The Way-out:

Increasing Ayurveda practices as well as Ayurveda awareness in Nadia district as well as other districts under Gaur Banga can be achieved through a variety of strategies that includes raising awareness, improving accessibility, boosting education and training, and gaining government and community support. Some detailed strategies for Promoting Ayurveda in Nadia as well as other districts in Gaur Banga are as follows:

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Organize regular health camps and workshops in both urban and rural locations to teach people about the advantages and principles of Ayurveda. Collaborate with local community centers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Use television, radio, newspapers, and social media to promote awareness campaigns. Emphasize success stories, patient testimonials, and the historical significance of Ayurveda. To attract different demographics, conduct public demonstrations of Ayurvedic treatments and practices at marketplaces, fairs, and festivals.
- **Education & Training:** Introduce basic Ayurveda concepts into the school curriculum to familiarize students with traditional practices from a young age. Encourage universities and institutions to offer specialized Ayurvedic courses and degrees. Introduce colleges that offer BAMS (Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery). Give scholarships and financial aid to students studying Ayurveda.

Also, by establishment of training centers for prospective Ayurvedic practitioners. Provide certification and continuing education opportunities. Conduct workshops and seminars to educate allopathic doctors and nurses on the integration of Ayurveda into conventional care.

- **Improving Accessibility:** Open Ayurvedic clinics in both urban and rural regions to provide universal access to treatments. Mobile clinics can be established in rural areas. Integrate Ayurvedic services within present-day healthcare facilities and hospitals to provide supplementary therapies. Provide subsidies and financial aid for Ayurvedic therapies, particularly for low-income families. Collaborate with insurance firms to incorporate Ayurveda into health insurance plans.
- **Collaboration & Research:** Encourage collaboration between Ayurvedic practitioners and allopathic physicians to create integrative healthcare solutions. Encourage study on the efficacy of Ayurvedic remedies. To increase credibility, support academic and clinical research projects and publish the results.
- **Promotion of Wellness Tourism:** Develop wellness centers and resorts that offer Ayurvedic treatments as part of their offerings. Promote these centers as part of West Bengal's tourism strategy. Market the district(s) as a wellness tourism destination, promoting Ayurveda's availability and benefits.

- **Product Availability:** Set up pharmacies that specialize in Ayurvedic medicines and products. Ensure that they are stocked with high-quality, certified products. Promote local cultivation of medicinal plants and herbs. Provide farmers with training and resources to help them implement sustainable and profitable farming practices.
- **Government Support & Policies:** Setup policies that promote the growth of Ayurveda, such as research funding, practice establishment subsidies, and tax incentives. Create a specialized Ayurveda board within the state health department to oversee the advancement and regulation of Ayurvedic techniques. Encourage collaboration between the government, the commercial sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to fund and support Ayurvedic programs. Allocate government funds to explore Ayurvedic remedies and their efficacy. Collaborate with academic institutions to perform and publish research.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Implement procedures for collecting feedback from Ayurvedic patients to assess satisfaction and outcomes. Collect and analyze data on the use and efficacy of Ayurvedic practices in order to continuously improve services and strategies.

By applying these measures, Nadia district, together with the other districts in Gaur Banga, may significantly increase Ayurvedic adoption and practice, improving healthcare outcomes and maintaining traditional medicine.

Future Scope of Study:

- A detailed study at block levels to know the mindset of Ayurvedic medicine & cosmetic products manufacturers, whether they are motivated towards their work or not.
- Understanding their mindset, we need to find out the ways to rectify the points of demotivation (if exists). And the points of motivation are also to be spreaded among common people so that we may able to promote startup programs among youths to create employment opportunities & side effect free health practises.
- Advocating various awareness campaigns to curbing the mind set of farmers not to focus exclusively on cash crops but to some medicinal plants, hers which will surely provide necessary remedies for health care issues;
- Detailed study is required to find out the reasons underlying the sell out agricultural lands to real estate promotion of to industries;

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