

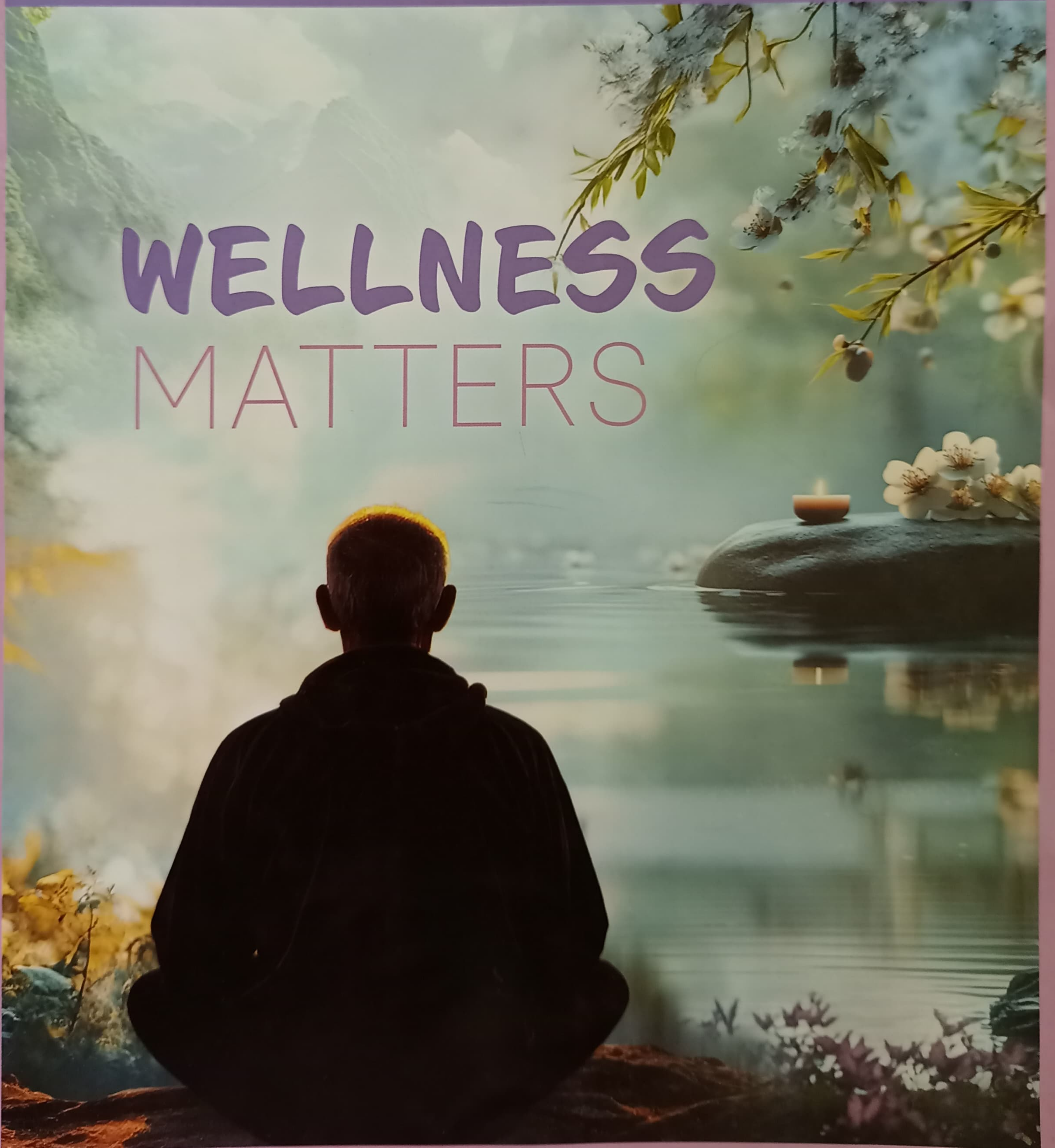
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WELLNESS MATTERS



Wellness: Our New North Star

For decades, the word “health” was often relegated to the sterile hallways of hospitals or the fine print of insurance policies. It was something we addressed only when it broke. But today, a profound shift is taking place in the Indian psyche. We are moving away from a purely reactive model of “sick-care” toward a proactive, deeply personal pursuit of wellness.

In this edition of Yojana, we explore why wellness is no longer a luxury for the few, but a survival imperative for the many.

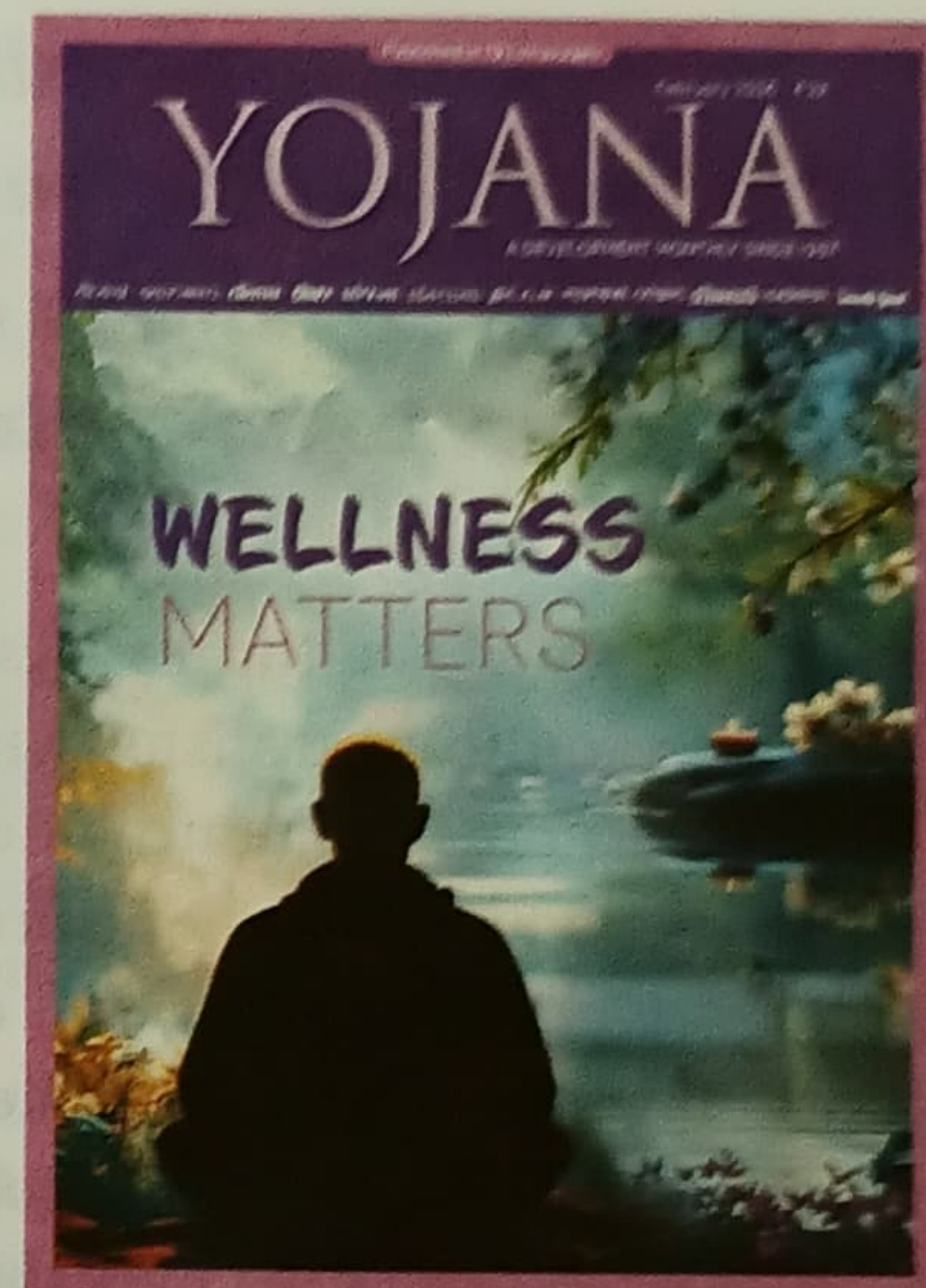
While we have made monumental strides in eradicating infectious diseases, a different kind of shadow is stretching across our modern lives. Our progress has come with a hidden tax: stress, anxiety, and depression. In our hyper-connected, high-velocity urban existence, the mind is often the first to fracture. Mental health is finally being recognised for what it is—the foundation upon which all other health is built.

The data for India paints a sobering picture. We are often referred to as the “diabetes capital of the world,” and the rising graph of cardiovascular diseases among young adults is a clarion call for change. These aren’t just “medical issues”; they are lifestyle manifestations. Our transition to sedentary desk jobs and processed diets has created a metabolic crisis that requires more than just a prescription—it requires a cultural pivot back to mindful living. Addressing this necessitates a return to nutritional wisdom and simpler habits: reintroducing nutrient-rich millets into our daily diet, making a habit of a short walk after meals, and consciously reducing sugar intake. By cutting out trans fats and heavily processed foods, we can begin to reclaim our physical vitality from the ground up.

Wellness is far more than an individual responsibility; it is an environmental imperative that thrives only when our surroundings support it. As rapid urbanisation continues to reshape our skylines, there is an increasing disconnect between our built environments and the natural elements that keep us grounded. The ongoing challenge of urban air quality remains a significant focal point, as the simple act of breathing should ideally be a source of vitality rather than a health concern. This is further complicated by the ‘concrete jungle’ effect, where the expansion of infrastructure often comes at the cost of the ‘commons’—those essential parks, playgrounds, and open public spaces that serve as the lungs of a city. When these green pockets shrink, the human spirit can feel claustrophobic, deprived of the necessary room to walk, play, or find a moment of stillness under a tree. Integrating nature back into our urban design is not merely an aesthetic choice but a fundamental necessity for a healthy, resilient society.

Wellness is not about a perfect yoga pose or a restrictive diet. It is about resilience. It is the ability of a student to handle exam pressure without breaking, the ability of a worker to find balance, and the ability of a city to provide clean air and green corners for its elderly.

As we navigate this era of rapid change, let us remember that our greatest national asset is not just infrastructure or our technology—it is the collective health and vitality of our people. Wellness matters because, at the end of the day, a nation is only as healthy as its heartbeat. □





Mainstreaming Ayush for Holistic Health Ecosystem

As India moves towards its vision of “Swasth Bharat,” the integration of Ayush into the national health framework stands as a convergence code for sustainable well-being, where tradition and science, prevention and cure, individual and community health come together to shape a healthier nation.

India's healthcare system is undergoing a significant transformation. The rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), mental health challenges, lifestyle disorders, ageing population, and escalating healthcare costs has compelled policymakers to reimagine health beyond episodic, curative care. India's epidemiological transition, from communicable diseases to chronic and lifestyle-related conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, stress-related disorders, and mental illness, demands long-term management, behavioural change, and preventive approaches.

In this evolving context, convergence of Ayush with modern medicine and public health systems offers a strategic pathway to build a resilient, preventive and people-centric health ecosystem. Ayush systems, with their emphasis on holistic wellbeing, preventive care, personalised treatment, lifestyle regulation, dietetics (*Aahara*), and mental well-being, complement modern medicine and align closely with the goals of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and sustainable healthcare.

India's National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 provides a strong policy foundation for this integration by endorsing a pluralistic healthcare approach. Holistic health, as envisaged in India's traditional systems, integrates physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellbeing, an approach increasingly recognised by global health institutions. India thus represents a unique healthcare model where modern medicine

and traditional systems coexist within an evolving public health framework, with growing emphasis on preventive and promotive care.

Growth of Ayush in Public Health

The establishment of the Ministry of Ayush in 2014 marked a turning point in recognising traditional medicine as a strategic pillar of national healthcare. Since then, Ayush has progressed through strengthened

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institutional frameworks, regulatory reforms, and targeted programme implementation.

Rising public acceptance is evident from the National Sample Survey (79th Round, 2022–23), which reports awareness of Ayush among 95% of rural and 96% of urban populations, with nearly half of respondents using Ayush interventions for prevention or treatment. India's leadership in traditional medicine has also gained global recognition through the establishment of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre (GTMC) in Jamnagar. By mainstreaming Ayush through robust domestic convergence frameworks, India enhances its global credibility and soft power, enabling international collaboration, standard-setting and the export of wellness services and products. Collectively, India's pluralistic health model offers a replicable pathway for sustainable and culturally rooted healthcare systems worldwide.

Convergence Mechanism

Convergence is not merely institutional co-location; it is a governance approach that promotes synergy, efficiency and outcome-oriented service delivery. Mainstreaming Ayush requires structured convergence across four critical dimensions: public health service delivery, education, research, and digital health.

Public Health Service Delivery

Flagship initiatives such as the National Ayush Mission (NAM) and the *Ayushman Arogya Mandirs* (AAM) have provided structured platforms for integrating Ayush services at the primary healthcare level. Co-location of Ayush services in public health facilities has expanded access, particularly in rural and underserved areas, while enhancing patient choice and trust. At the primary care level, Ayush practitioners play a vital role in preventive healthcare, lifestyle counselling, management of chronic conditions, and promotive interventions such as dietary and lifestyle practices including Yoga. Integrative Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), referral protocols, and collaborative care pathways enhance patient outcomes while reducing the burden on secondary and tertiary facilities.

To support clinical integration, Standard Treatment Guidelines (STGs) for Ayush systems are being developed by the Ayush Vertical under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). STGs for six common musculoskeletal disorders (2024) and five common metabolic disorders (2025) were published,

followed by national-level Master Trainer programmes in collaboration with the Central Health Education Bureau, with cascading training across States and Union Territories.

Ayush-based wellness interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in managing NCD risk factors, improving quality of life, and supporting rehabilitation. Strengthening referral linkages between Ayush and allopathic systems remains critical to ensure continuity, safety, and quality of care.

Integration at Secondary and Tertiary Levels

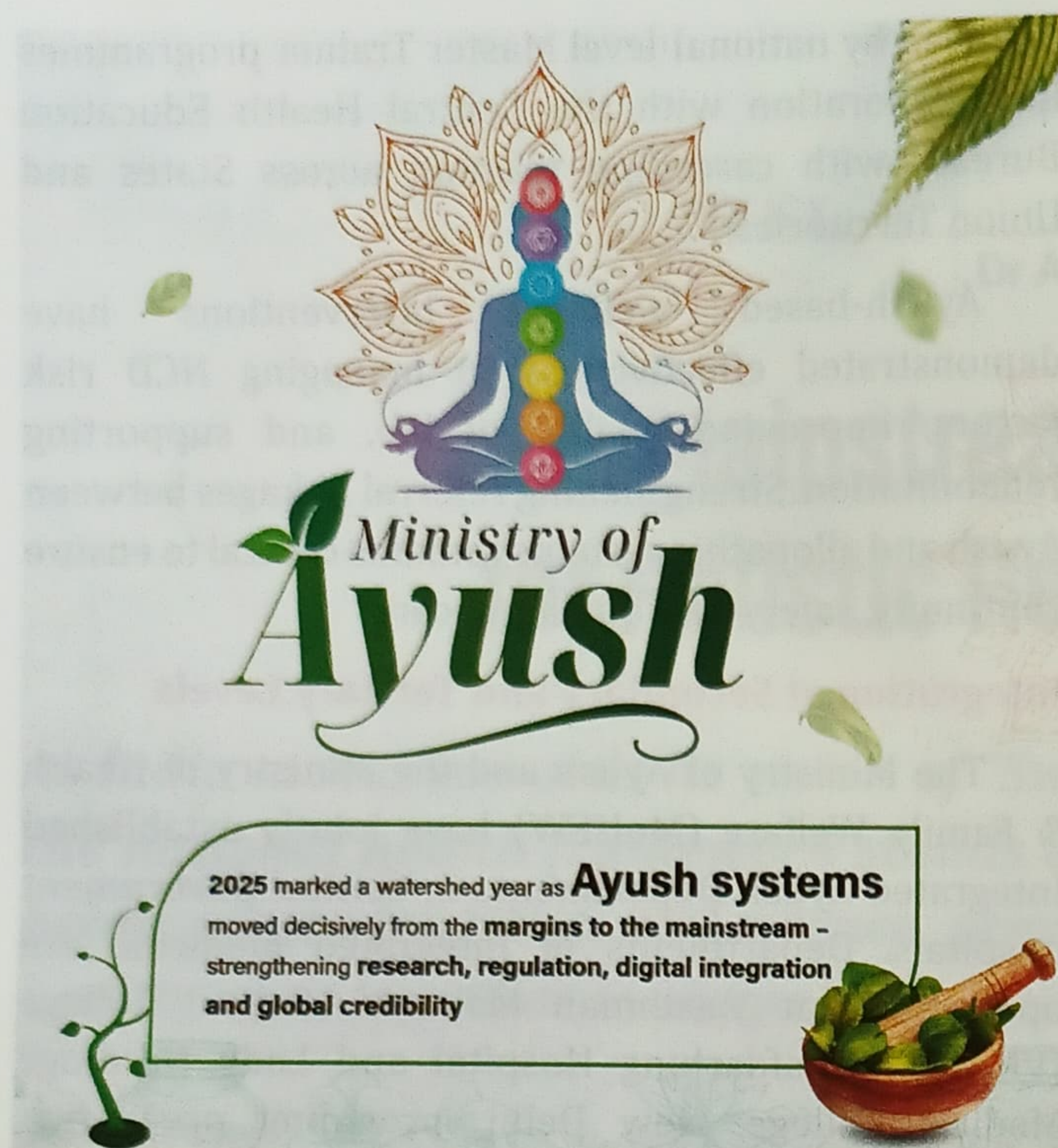
The Ministry of Ayush and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) have jointly established Integrated Ayush Departments in Central Government hospitals. Departments of Integrated Medicine are operational at Vardhman Mahavir Medical College (VMMC) & Safdarjung Hospital and Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, providing preventive, promotive, and therapeutic services, including *Panchakarma*. Extended OPD (Outpatient Department) services by Ayush Research Councils are also available at these institutions and at Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital.

Specialised models such as the Integrative Cancer Care Centre at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), Jhajjar, demonstrate the role of Ayush in supportive oncology and rehabilitation. Integrative mental health department at National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) further illustrate the potential of integrative healthcare through comprehensive service delivery, advanced research, and interdisciplinary education.

Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and Co-location of Ayush

AAM represent a shift from selective care to comprehensive service delivery spanning preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative care. As of 30 November 2025, 180906 AAMs have been operationalised nationwide, with Yoga and wellness services integrated into daily care. A significant proportion of Community Health Officers in these centres are Ayurveda doctors. Out of these, 12,500 AAM (Ayush) have been operationalised by the States/UTs under National Ayush Mission (NAM).

Under the National Health Mission, Ayush facilities have been co-located at 482 District Hospitals, 3103 Community Health Centres, and 6158 Primary Health Centres, among other facilities.



24,266 Ayush doctors, 3416 pharmacists, and 2275 paramedics are providing services under NRHM.

Integration with National Health Programmes

Following successful pilot studies in six districts, Ayush integration with the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS) is being implemented in coordination with MoHFW. Ayush units are being established at District NCD Centres and Community Health Centres in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, with plans for nationwide expansion.

Ayush and Preventive care

Ayush is inherently aligned with preventive and promotive healthcare, a priority area for India's long-term health sustainability. Rooted in lifestyle regulation, dietary discipline, mental well-being, and community-based practices, Ayush offers scalable public health solutions that address the root causes of disease rather than merely managing symptoms.

Initiatives such as the International Day of Yoga, school health programmes, workplace wellness initiatives, and community-based lifestyle interventions have demonstrated the wide acceptability and scalability of Ayush-based preventive health models. These interventions have contributed to improved physical fitness, stress reduction, mental well-being, and behavioural change at the population level.

In nutrition, the *Ayurveda Aahara* framework offers contextual, seasonal, and personalised dietary guidance that complements modern nutritional science. In mental health, yoga and meditation practices have gained global acceptance as effective non-pharmacological interventions. Mainstreaming these practices through structured public health programmes can significantly reduce disease burden and healthcare expenditure over time.

Education and Capacity Building

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and education reforms including those brought out by the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) & the National Commission for Homoeopathy (NCH) further underscore the need for interdisciplinary learning and integrative healthcare delivery. For convergence to succeed, healthcare professionals must develop mutual respect, interdisciplinary understanding, and evidence literacy. Yoga has been integrated into the undergraduate MBBS curriculum, a mandatory one-week Ayush internship has been introduced for medical graduates, and a Post Basic Nursing Diploma in Ayush has been initiated. These reforms foster collaboration rather than competition between systems. Capacity-building initiatives can equip frontline health workers with foundational knowledge of Ayush-based preventive practices in nutrition, mental health and lifestyle management, while advanced training at different levels will strengthen Ayush healthcare professionals' clinical competence, interdisciplinary collaboration and evidence-based practice.

Evidence-Based Research and Validation

A key challenge in mainstreaming Ayush has been the perception gap regarding scientific validation. Strengthening research ecosystems through Ayush research councils, academic institutions, and collaborative studies with modern medical institutes is essential. Evidence generation should focus on clinical outcomes, safety, standardisation, pharmaco-vigilance, and cost-effectiveness. Through collaboration with Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Ayush research councils are undertaking multi-centric clinical trials, including studies on anaemia and other public health priorities. The Ayush-ICMR Advanced Centre for Integrative Health Research (AI-ACIHR) has been established at 4 AIIMS institutions to generate policy-relevant evidence. Practice-based evidence, real-world data,

and community-level impact assessments can complement classical research methodologies and enhance policy confidence.

Digital Health and Innovation

Digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities to mainstream Ayush. Integration of Ayush services into national digital health infrastructure, such as the Ayush Grid and Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), can enable standardised data capture, interoperability, and patient continuity. Tele-Ayush services, digital wellness platforms, mobile applications for yoga like Y break, m-yoga and lifestyle management, and AI-driven diagnostics rooted in traditional knowledge can improve access while ensuring quality and accountability.

Challenges and the Way Forward

Despite progress, challenges remain. These include variability in infrastructure, uneven quality of services, limited interdisciplinary exposure, and the need for stronger regulatory and accreditation mechanisms. Addressing these requires sustained political commitment, institutional coordination, capacity building and outcome-driven monitoring.

A clear convergence code, anchored in policy coherence, clinical governance, patient safety, and evidence-based practice, can guide future integration efforts. Equally important is strengthening public awareness and community participation to foster informed choice, trust, and ownership among citizens.

Mainstreaming Ayush is not about replacing modern medicine, it is about complementing it to build a healthcare ecosystem that is preventive, affordable, culturally rooted, and future-ready. Convergence between Ayush and modern systems represents India's unique opportunity to demonstrate that holistic health is not an alternative paradigm but an essential one.

As India moves towards its vision of "Swasth Bharat," the integration of Ayush into the national health framework stands as a convergence code for sustainable well-being, where tradition and science, prevention and cure, individual and community health come together to shape a healthier nation. □

(The co-author, Dr Roshini Rajan is the Domain Expert at Ayush Vertical, Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS))

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Naturopathy and Holistic Wellness

In a world increasingly burdened by lifestyle diseases and mental stress, the Indian model of Naturopathy stands as a reminder that true wellness is not achieved through pills alone but through conscious living, self-discipline, and harmony with natural laws. By embracing these principles, individuals can move beyond disease management toward a life of vitality and holistic well-being.

In an era marked by fast-paced lifestyles, chronic stress, and lifestyle-related diseases, the quest for sustainable health solutions has never been more important. Modern medicine has achieved remarkable success in managing acute illnesses and emergencies, yet it often falls short in addressing the root causes of chronic ailments. This gap has led to a renewed interest in Naturopathy, a holistic wellness system of medicine. This system of healing promotes the prevention of diseases, teaches self-healing methods, and strives to attain balance between the body, mind, and spirit.

India, with its rich heritage of traditional health systems, has been a global torchbearer of holistic healing. Indian Naturopathy, deeply influenced by ancient philosophies, places special emphasis on fasting, Yoga, and natural therapies as tools to restore balance and promote long-term well-being.

Understanding Naturopathy

Naturopathy is a drugless, non-invasive system of medicine that focuses on enhancing the body's inherent ability to heal itself. It is based

on the principle that disease arises when the body's natural balance is disturbed, and health is restored when this balance is re-established through natural means.

The core principles of Naturopathy include:

- Healing power of nature.
- Treating the root cause, not just symptoms.
- Holistic treatment of the individual.
- Prevention is given importance over cure.
- Patient education and self-responsibility.
- Rather than suppressing symptoms, Naturopathy seeks to remove obstacles to healing, allowing the body's innate intelligence to function optimally.

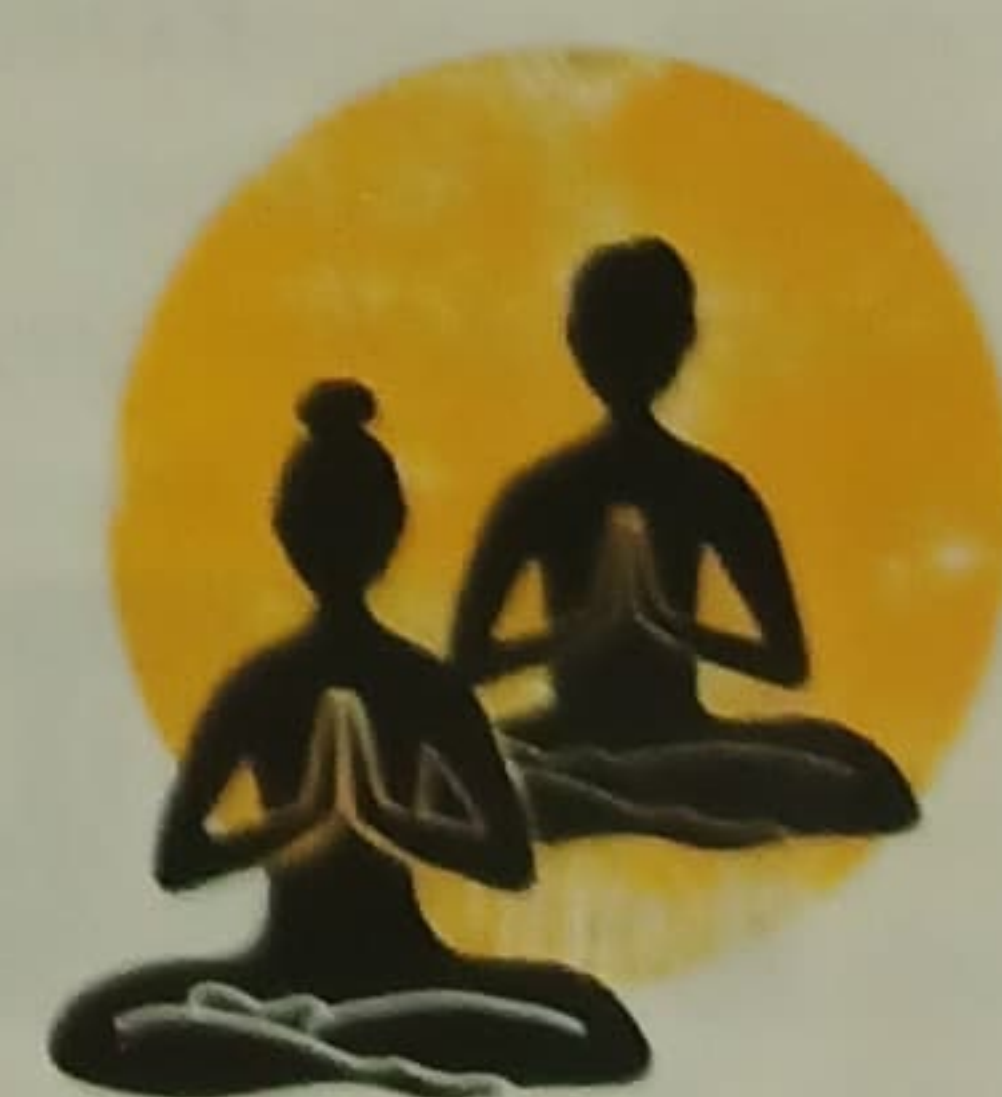
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Holistic Wellness: Beyond Physical Health

Holistic wellness extends beyond the absence of disease. It recognises that health is multidimensional, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. According to holistic philosophy, an imbalance in any one of these dimensions can manifest as illness.

Indian traditions have long embraced this integrated view of health. Ancient texts such as the *Upanishads* and Yogic scriptures describe human existence as a combination of body (*Sharira*), mind (*Manas*), intellect (*Buddhi*), and consciousness (*Atman*). Naturopathy aligns closely with this worldview, making it a natural fit within India's cultural and philosophical framework.

Emerging scientific research underscores this holistic approach. Studies from institutions like the National Institute of Naturopathy (NIN) in Pune demonstrate how naturopathic interventions reduce inflammation markers and improve quality-of-life scores in patients with metabolic syndrome, bridging traditional wisdom with modern evidence.

Indian Naturopathy: Roots and Evolution

Indian Naturopathy draws inspiration from several sources, including ancient yogic practices, Ayurvedic

principles, and Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of simple living. Gandhi was a strong advocate of nature cure and believed that the human body could heal itself when supported by natural laws such as proper diet, fasting, fresh air, sunlight, and physical activity.

Post-independence, Naturopathy gained institutional recognition in India. Today, it is officially recognised under the AYUSH system (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy), with dedicated colleges, hospitals, and research centres across the country. The Ministry of AYUSH has further propelled its growth through initiatives like the National Naturopathy Mission, fostering clinical trials and integrating Naturopathy into public health programs.

Fasting: A Cornerstone of Indian Naturopathy

One of the most distinctive aspects of Indian Naturopathy is its advocacy of therapeutic fasting. Fasting is not viewed as starvation but as a conscious, supervised rest given to the digestive system, allowing the body to redirect energy toward detoxification and repair.

Indian Naturopathy believes that many diseases are caused by accumulation of toxins (*Ama*) due to improper diet, overeating, and poor lifestyle habits. Fasting helps in eliminating accumulated toxins, improving digestive efficiency, enhancing metabolic balance and strengthening immune function.

Types of Fasting in Naturopathy

In Naturopathy, different types of fasting are practiced, including water fasting (under medical supervision), juice fasting, fruit fasting, and mono-diet fasting. These fasting methods are often combined with rest, hydrotherapy, Yoga, and meditation to promote physical and mental detoxification. Importantly, Indian Naturopathy emphasises an individualised approach to fasting, taking into account factors such as age, health condition, and vitality to ensure it is both safe and effective.

Yoga: The Integrative Healing Practice

Yoga is inseparable from Indian Naturopathy. While globally Yoga is often perceived as a physical exercise, its traditional form is a comprehensive system of self-regulation and inner transformation.

Role of Yoga in Holistic Wellness

Yoga works on multiple levels:

- *Asanas* (postures) improve flexibility, strength, and circulation.

- *Pranayama* (breathing techniques) regulate the nervous system and enhance oxygenation.
- *Dhyana* (meditation) calms the mind and reduces stress.
- Yogic relaxation techniques promote deep restorative rest.

In Naturopathy, Yoga is prescribed as a therapeutic intervention for conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, digestive disorders, anxiety, and musculoskeletal issues. Clinical evidence from randomised trials supports its efficacy, showing significant reductions in HbA1c levels for diabetics practicing daily Yoga protocols.

Diet Therapy: Food as Medicine

Indian Naturopathy strongly advocates a natural, plant-based diet, emphasising whole, unprocessed foods. The belief is that food is not merely fuel but information that influences bodily functions. Key dietary principles in Naturopathy emphasise the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and sprouts, and nuts and seeds in moderation, along with maintaining adequate hydration while avoiding refined, processed, and artificial foods. This approach resonates strongly with the concept of “*Satvik Ahara*” (a pure and balanced diet), which not only supports physical health but also fosters mental clarity and emotional stability.

Other Naturopathic Therapies in Indian Practice

In addition to fasting and Yoga, Indian Naturopathy incorporates several natural therapies:

- **Hydrotherapy:** Uses water in different forms—hot, cold, steam, compresses—to stimulate circulation, relieve pain, and detoxify the body.
- **Mud Therapy:** Application of natural mud packs to the abdomen, eyes, or joints helps absorb toxins, reduce inflammation, and calm the nervous system.
- **Sun Therapy:** Controlled exposure to sunlight enhances vitamin D synthesis, boosts immunity, and supports mental well-being.
- **Massage Therapy:** Manipulative techniques improve circulation, relax muscles, and support lymphatic drainage.
- **Acupressure and Reflexology:** Based on stimulating specific points to restore energy flow and organ function.

Mental and Emotional Healing

A unique strength of holistic Naturopathy is its emphasis on mental and emotional health. Stress, suppressed emotions, and unhealthy thought patterns are recognised as major contributors to disease.

Through Yoga, meditation, counselling, and lifestyle education, patients are guided toward emotional awareness, stress management, positive thinking, and mindful living. This holistic mind-body integration is particularly significant in modern society, where mental health challenges are becoming increasingly prevalent.

In today's urban India, Naturopathy addresses rising issues like burnout and digital overload by incorporating digital detox protocols alongside traditional practices, helping professionals reclaim mental equilibrium.

Naturopathy in Modern India

Today, Naturopathy is increasingly integrated into preventive healthcare and lifestyle medicine in India. Wellness centres, Yoga retreats, and Naturopathy hospitals attract individuals seeking natural solutions for chronic conditions and overall well-being.

The Indian government's promotion of Yoga at the global level and the growing popularity of fasting protocols reflect a broader acceptance of traditional wisdom supported by modern research. Programmes like Fit India and *Ayushman Bharat* are expanding access, with Naturopathy clinics now embedded in primary health centres nationwide.

Naturopathy, a holistic wellness system, offers a timeless yet relevant approach to health—one that respects the intelligence of the human body and the healing power of nature. Indian Naturopathy, with its strong emphasis on fasting, Yoga, and natural therapies, provides a comprehensive framework for sustainable health and inner balance.

In a world increasingly burdened by lifestyle diseases and mental stress, the Indian model of Naturopathy stands as a reminder that true wellness is not achieved through pills alone but through conscious living, self-discipline, and harmony with natural laws. By embracing these principles, individuals can move beyond disease management toward a life of vitality and holistic well-being. □



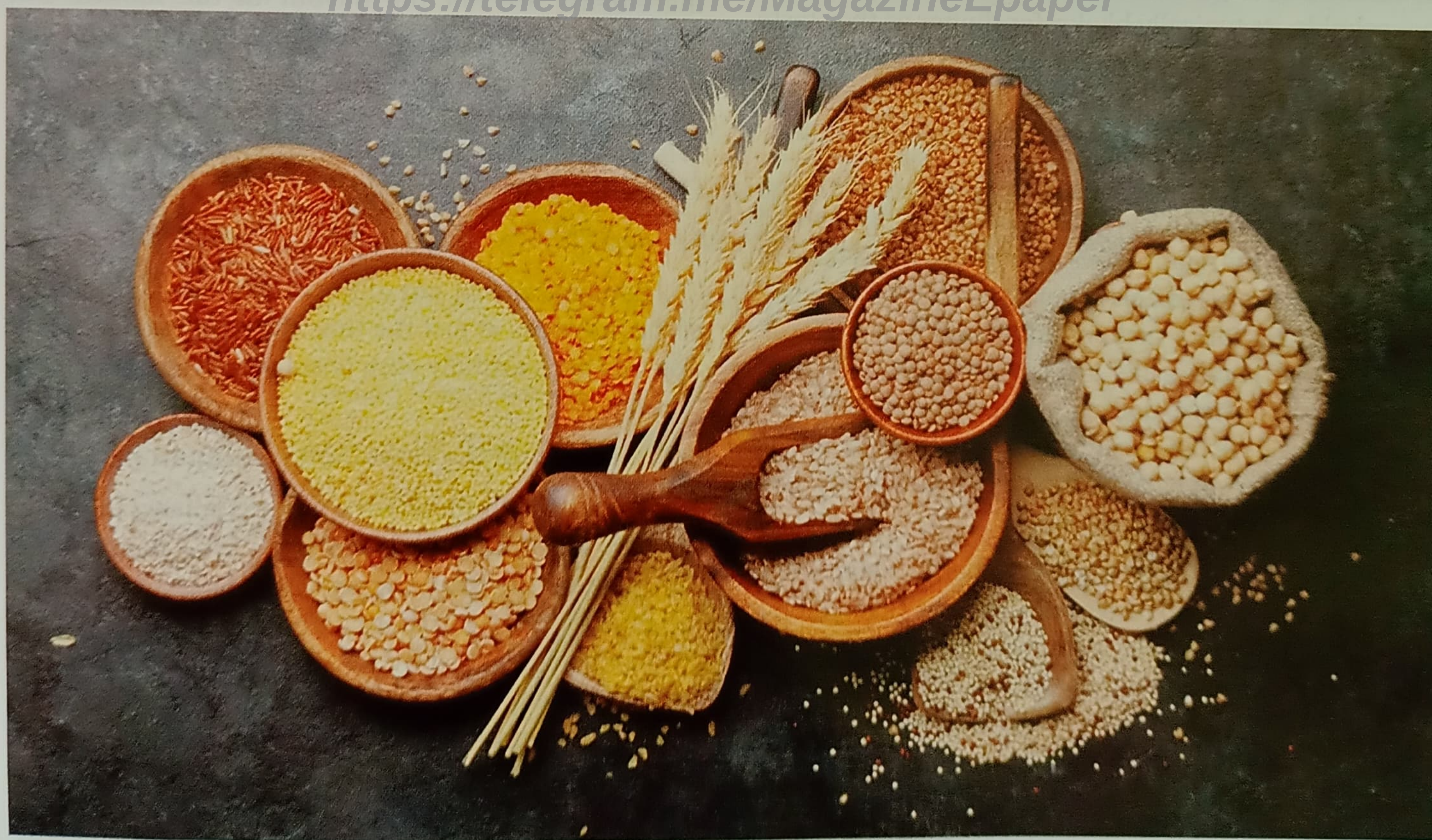
Millets in the Right Context

Everything that was once made with maida – biscuits, cakes, breads, noodles, etc., is now being made with millets so that more profit can be made by positioning it as healthy. But as we now know, good health isn't about replacing x with y, it is about understanding the context and then if needed reintroducing it in our daily diets.

Sometimes, we begin a reintroduction of all things ancient in our diet without a context. Millets have gone through something like that. I could write a whole book on their goodness but there's a good chance that you may already know it all – they are rich in micronutrients, they are dense in fibre, they can help regulate blood sugars, blood

pressure and even help with weight loss. And with that information, millets are the new, and breaks my heart to say this, maida. Everything that was once made with maida – biscuits, cakes, breads, noodles, etc., is now being made with millets so that more profit can be made by positioning it as healthy. But as we now know, good health isn't about replacing x with y, it is

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Season	Millets	How & when	Heritage dishes
Winter	Bajra (Pearl millet)	a. Khichadi - Lunch or Dinner b. Puri/Chakli - Evening snack c. Laddoo - Evening snack	• Kadboli (Chakli) - mix of jowar & bajra flour • Bajra lasan laddoo
	Raajgira (Amaranth)	a. Thalipeeth - Breakfast b. Laddoo - Evening snack	• Thalipeeth (Amaranth & Banyard millet)
	Kuttu (Buckwheat)	a. Puri - Breakfast b. Halwa - Breakfast or Evening snack	
Summer	Jowar	a. Bhakri - Lunch or Dinner b. Thalipeeth - Breakfast	• Red pumpkin spicy gcharge (Jowar flour) • Thalipeeth (Jowar & Rice)
	Samoke chawal (Banyard millet)	a. Upma - Breakfast b. Khandvi - Evening snacks	• Khandvi (Samo)
	Kangni (Foxtail millet)	a. Khichadi - Lunch or Dinner b. Upma - Breakfast	
Monsoon	Ragi	a. Sattva - Breakfast b. Dosa - Breakfast or Dinner c. Laddoo - Evening snacks	• Ragi laddoo • Vadi (Ragi flour) • Ragi dosa

about understanding the context and then if needed reintroducing it in our daily diets.

As a Maharashtrian, I have grown up eating *bhakri* or millet roti for one meal daily. In the farming communities, it is *bhakri* for lunch. In working Marathi households, its typically *bhakri* for dinner as they taste nicer when consumed hotter. Also, because we now lack the skill or competence that is required to make them in a way where they taste great even when they are no longer hot.

This is a practical, sensible adaptation. One rooted in ground reality. Adaptations of all good things have to be thought through or else they are #epicfail. Anyone who works in policy making understands the 'glocal' concept. Just because it's a great policy that worked wonders somewhere, doesn't mean you can pick it up and dump it here. You will have to make revisions or adapt only a part of it, so that the outcomes are as you desired.

If the outcome you wish out of millets is – lean body, great figure, better Hb levels, lower blood sugar, blood pressure, etc., then replacing all things maida with it, won't help. Nor will it help that you now have your gauc with millet chips, your stew with millet noodles or your veggies with millet pasta or the lettuce with pearl millet.

It means that you must learn how to roll a *bhakri* and have it with your *sabzi*. Or you pick on an

easier recipe and make a ragi dosa instead. Or you could make the easy lassi, *kheers* or *laddoos* with it. The problem is that we want the millets without the baggage they come with – the labour, the sugar, the ghee, the pulses, etc. Only because these other ingredients are not the flavour of the month. But that's not how digestion works. This baggage that it comes with is actually agents that make it easier for your body to assimilate the goodness of millets. Without this, it is just another trend that is waiting to get replaced by another.

Practical Guide to Eating Millets the Right Way

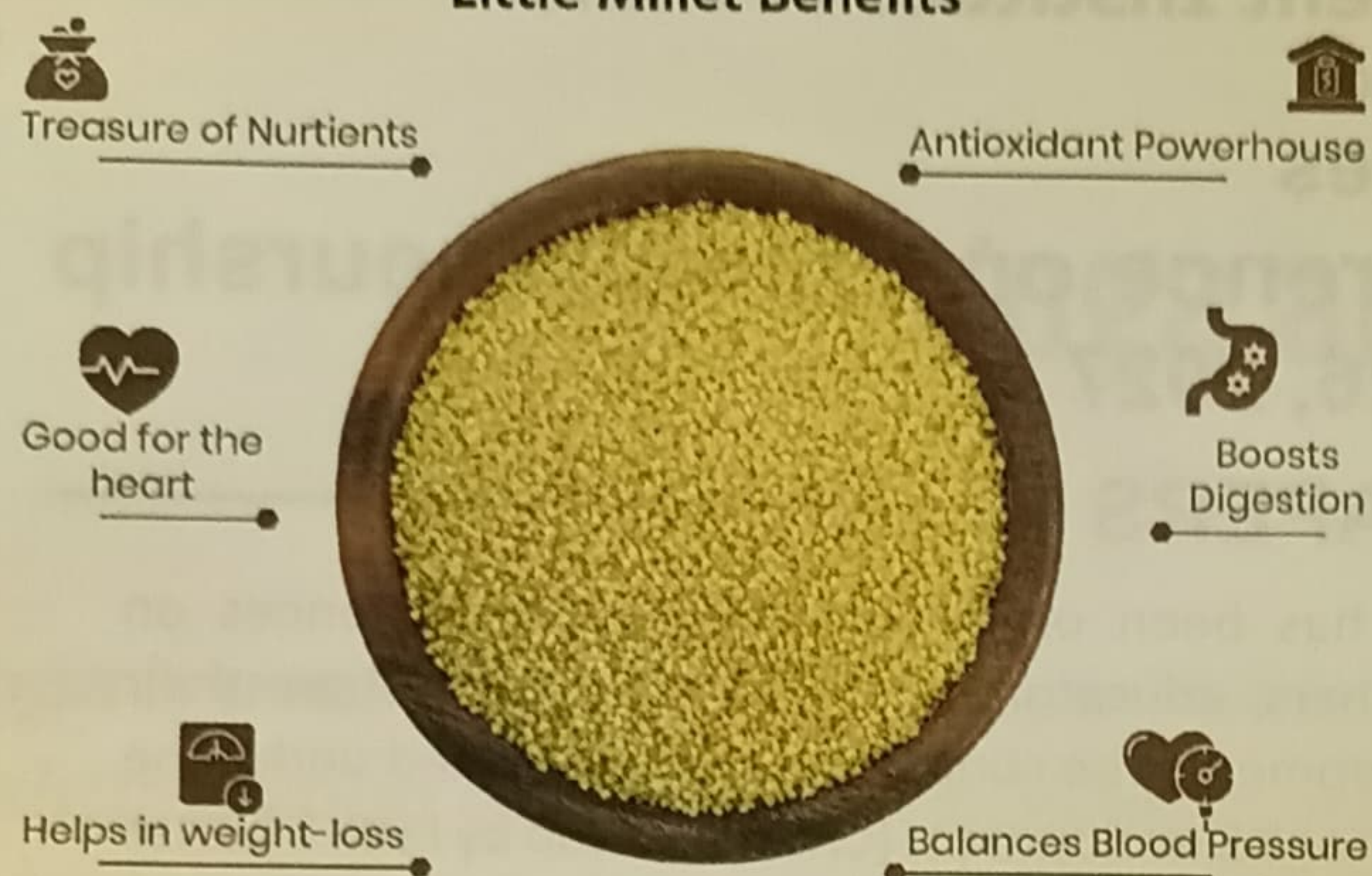
Eating seasonal not only ensures easy availability of the nutrients at just the time they are needed, but it also ties in beautifully with farming practices and crop cycles.

Eat millets with the right food combinations

Combining millets with pulses, spices, fats, etc., ensures that limiting amino acids are compensated for, protein quality/ digestibility is improved and the effect of anti-nutrients is reduced. Millets which are particularly hard to digest, like bajra, even come with rules – always have with a dollop of *makhan* or a teaspoon extra of ghee and never without jaggery. One can't but marvel at *dadis* and *nanis ke gharelu nuskhe* and *saral, sasta* and *sundar* methods of turning every meal into a joy, long after it's been consumed.

Small Grain, Huge Impact

Little Millet Benefits



Eat millets in all forms

The diversity in the ways we can consume millets is staggering. The germination and fermentation for satva, kheer or porridge, the soaking and heating for *khichdis*, *bhakris* and *laddoos*, also ensured that there is no taste fatigue or boredom while eating nutritious, healthy food.

Don't replace all grains with millets

Lastly, know that millets are not a replacement for rice and wheat. At least not a complete replacement. Again, it comes to sustainability and common sense. So, continue with the rice and/or wheat for normal

consumption but don't forget the weekly *bhakri*, and the seasonal *laddoos* and porridge.

The magic is in the process

Nostalgia, like memory, is a funny thing. It can hyper focus on one aspect and miss out on the big picture. We can forget how this one detail fitted into the big scheme of things. A bit like that has happened to not just millets but all things "ancient", be it the food - seeds, spices, etc., or practices like fasting, *kriyas*, etc. And when we forget how it fits in the larger scheme of things, we reduce it to what it is not, a miracle molecule or worse, a miracle cure.

Basically, if you have something to say *jo dil ko chhoo jaye*, you have to say it right. Similarly, the *tareeka* or method or style or process is as critical for the individual ingredients too, to deliver the promise of health and happiness. And that's why cooking or cuisine is the mainstay of all ancient foods and practices. It teaches you a step-by-step guide to using the ingredient to its full potential, both in terms of taste and efficacy. Culture teaches you how frequently to eat it, celebration or routine, and even guides you what to mix it with, ghee, milk, jaggery or rice, based on the occasion. Climate teaches you how to store it and what time of the day to eat it. Essentially, it is difficult to separate culture, climate, cuisine from one another and without fully utilising them, you stand to only lose from all things ancient. □

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Yoga and Wellness

Yoga is a means and measure to achieve positive health and wellness. Sage Patanjali's Ashtangyoga and holistic wellness: Ashtanga's holistic model is organised into eight interconnected stages, moving from external social conduct to internal states of consciousness.

Yoga, one of India's most profound contributions to human civilisation, is far more than a physical discipline—it is a timeless science of life and wellness. Rooted in the wisdom of Sage Patanjali, it offers a holistic path that harmonises body, mind, and spirit. In an age where stress and lifestyle disorders dominate, Yoga stands as a rational, non-invasive, and universally accessible practice that nurtures resilience, balance, and inner peace. It is not merely exercise or therapy, but a way of living that empowers self-discipline, fosters positive health, and illuminates the deeper dimensions of human existence. This article explores Yoga as connectivity, enlightenment, empowerment, and wellness—revealing how its principles continue to enrich modern life with vitality and harmony.

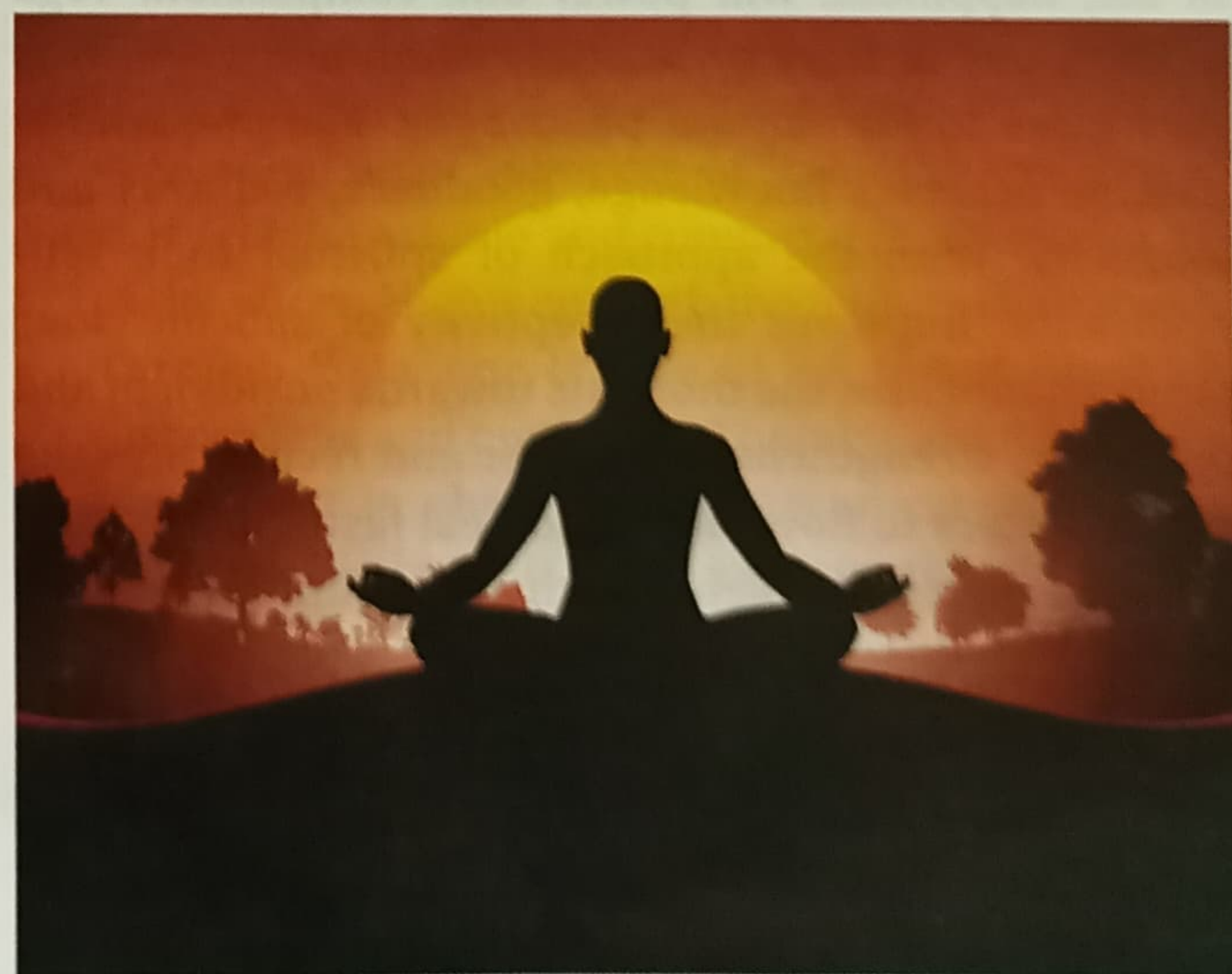
Yoga is Connectivity

Yoga is a science of breath and movement. It is the most ancient and traditional science. It is a practice and practical aspects of one's life. Yoga is a way of living right. It is self-discipline, which leads to wellness. Yoga is being happy at each and every moment. Yoga is not just physical exercise. It is neither a gymnastic exercise nor an acrobatic skill. Yoga is not an alternate therapy for any disease control or cure. It is not to be experimented or proved. Yoga is a special form of physical exercise through mind-regulation. It is an adjunct therapy to heal. Yoga is a methodical and

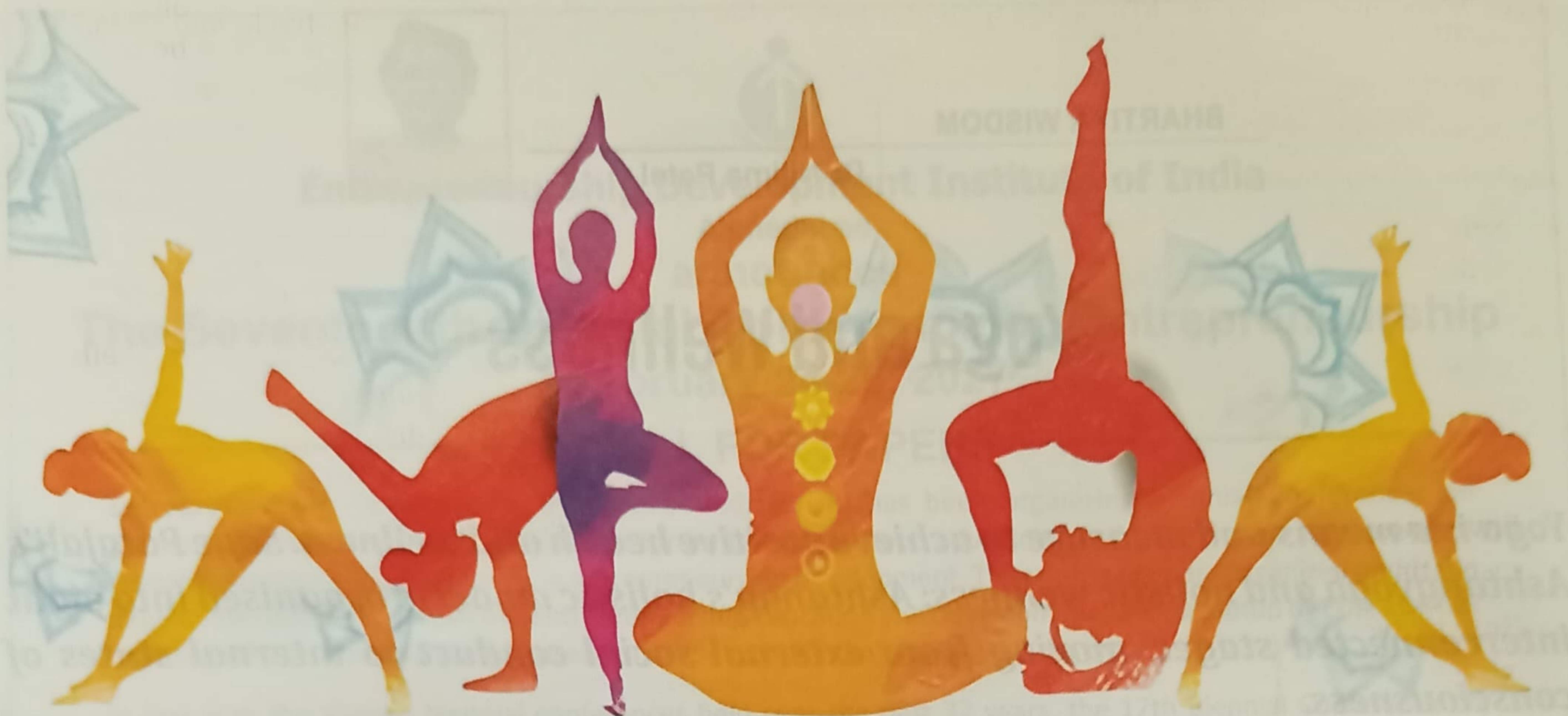
sincere practice of its disciplines. It is practiced to gain supreme harmonisation of body, mind and soul. Yoga is a means and measure to achieve positive health and wellness. Yoga is supposed to be experienced and felt.

Yoga is Enlightening

Prana is the vital force of energy within oneself and has great powers. The finest manifestation of vibrating *prana* is the mind. The diaphragm (breathing muscle) which contracts and relaxes because of some nervous energy is due to *Prana*. The activity of the heart is regulated by this energy. The power of *Prana* is that it is the source of all mental functions and wellness. Enslaved by materialistic gain, we tend to gradually



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weaken this *Prana* and lose the power to conserve its energy that fosters wellness. Yogic practice is to know this *prana*, understand its mechanism and strengthen its function, on which, our autoimmune system functions and one experiences wellness.

Yoga is Empowering

The practice of Yoga empowers us to have 'Belief in the Self'. Our past experiences, friends, company and our own attitude shape the stability and peace in our life. Yoga empowers the mind, thoughts and actions. Yoga shapes the core values of knowledge, purity (in thought, speech and action), love for all, peace in life, happiness, will power and compassion. Yoga enables one to have an attitude of humility, which is very close to *Karmayoga* philosophy. The one who is humble achieves knowledge, goodness, wellness and longevity. With the approach of spiritual tool, self-realisation improves the receptivity of subconscious mind, channelises the thoughts towards positivism and optimism, strengthens will power and recuperates the nerve centers to flow energy, to heal faster and better; and experience complete health and wellness.

Yoga encourages one to understand the fact that to mold one's attitude is more important than changing the physique. Healing the mind heals the body. Yoga enables one to implement relaxation postures, practice regulated breathing techniques and develop communication skills, irrespective of the disorder or dysfunction. Empathetic communication lessens the

pain significantly and improves the acceptance and tolerance levels, leading to emotional and physical wellness. Yoga harnesses energy and prevents it from being wasted in tension, so that one can experience wholistic wellness.

Yoga enriches one with the knowledge that 'air is food'. It is the most essential food and one should seek to breathe air at the highest nutritional value, which means highly it should be charged with *Prana* or life-force. The most vitalising air, it is believed, is by the sea, mountains, forests and large open spaces. With the knowledge of 'sensible eating', one should always have food as per the hunger (physiological need) and not as per appetite (desire). Moderation in eating is very important for positive health.

Wellness: Wellness is a state of having and being in high-level health. Every decision one makes in a day will affect their wellness either positively or negatively. Current theoretical models, such as the 7 Dimensions of Holistic Wellbeing (7DHW), categorise wellness into key pillars that must be in balance for optimal health. Wellness, as per National Wellness Institute, comprises of:

- **Physical wellness:** Through diet, activity, exercise, sleep, hydration, movement.
- **Mental and Emotional wellness:** Focusing on self-awareness and psychological resilience. Through understanding, acceptance, self-care, emotional

regulation, building positive relationships, gratitude.

- **Intellectual wellness:** Through decision-making, wisdom, learning, creativity, managing stress, curiosity and cognitive therapies.
- **Spiritual wellness:** Through meaning and purpose of life, connecting to something larger than oneself, rituals, purpose.
- **Occupational wellness:** Through work.
- **Social wellness:** Through interaction, connection with loved ones, community support.
- **Environmental wellness:** Being aware of and respecting the surroundings.
- **Holistic wellness:** It is a comprehensive approach in which the person is interconnected as a whole. It is not just the absence of disease. It emphasises on experiencing a balance, self-awareness and integrating practices like mindfulness, proper nutrition, exercises, stress management and addressing limiting beliefs to achieve lasting well-being and inner peace.

In Yoga, the five principles for wellness include: proper relaxation, proper exercise, proper breathing, a proper diet, positive thinking and meditation.

The yogic psychophysical concept includes the facts that tension is disease and relaxation is health. The stress hormone affects adrenaline, has anti-insulin effect and raises blood sugar level. Chronic stress leads to insulin deficiency.

Sage Patanjali's Ashtangyoga and holistic wellness: Ashtanga's holistic model is organised into eight interconnected stages, moving from external

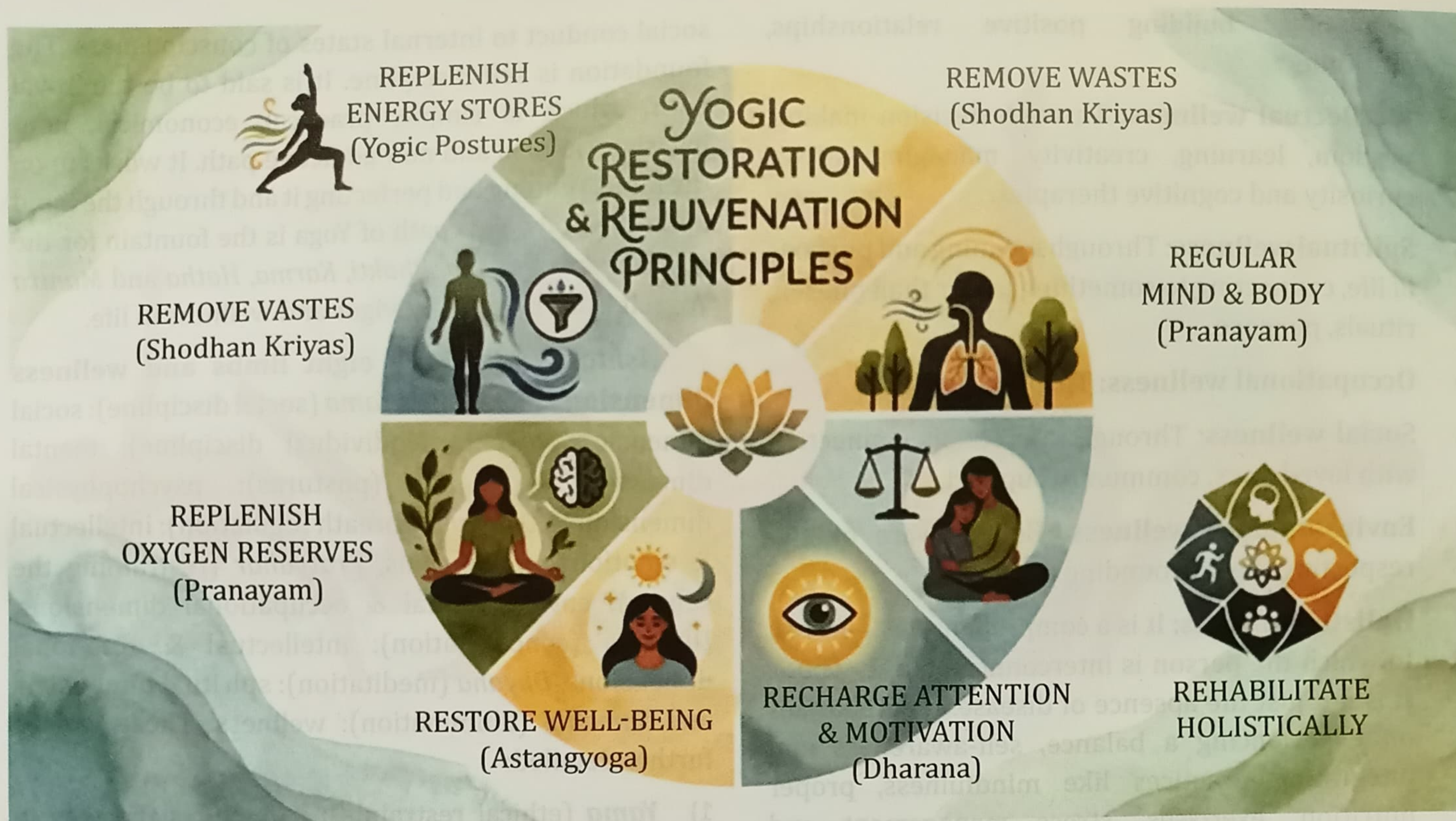
social conduct to internal states of consciousness. The foundation is self-discipline. It is said to be the 'royal path', which is simple, practical, economical, non-invasive, rational and non-addictive path. It works upon the mind, refining and perfecting it and through the mind upon the body. This path of Yoga is the fountain for the other paths of *Gyana, Bhakti, Karma, Hatha* and *Mantra* Yoga. It is for the vitality, vigor and wellness in life.

Ashtangyoga - the eight limbs and wellness dimensions: Comprises *Yama* (social discipline): social dimension, *Niyama* (individual discipline): mental dimension, *Yogasana* (postures): psychophysical dimension, *Pranayama* (breath regulation): intellectual & emotional dimensions, *Pratyahar* (restraining the senses): environmental & occupational dimensions, *Dharana* (concentration): intellectual & emotional dimensions, *Dhyana* (meditation): spiritual dimension, and *Samadhi* (illumination): wellness. These can be further detailed:

- 1) **Yama** (ethical restraints): it includes the way in which we relate to the world. Five factors are moral commandments for living a socially disciplined life ie., non-violence (*Ahimsa*), truthfulness (*Satya*), non-stealing (*Asteya*), moderation (*Brahmacharya*), and non-possessiveness (*Aparigraha*). These promote integrity, social harmony and social wellness.
- 2) **Niyama** (personal observances): Our inner discipline and personal observances for inner growth, including purity (*Saucha*), contentment (*Santosha*), discipline (*Tapas*), self-study (*Svadyaya*), and surrender to a higher power (*Ishvara Pranidhana*) nurtures mental wellness.
- 3) **Yogasana** (Ashtangyoga): *Sthirsukhamasanam, Prayatnashaithilyam, Anantasamaptibhyama* – this is Sage Patanjali aphorism of *Yogasana*. Posture is that which is stable and comfortable. By letting go of the effort, alignment with the infinity is attained. Through Yoga, one is able to be unperturbed by distractions and opposites. Thereby, a veil over the inner light is obtained. The technical dimension nurtures the body. It is the experiential dimension of *Yogasana* that nourishes the mind and spirit, leading to wellness.
- 4) **Pranayama, The yogic breath awareness:** Breath awareness is a key to relaxation and healing. Breath awareness helps the body to detox, repair, regenerate, breathe out stress, induce calmness serenity and peace, invigorate compassion and



A state of attention, introspection and an uninterrupted flow of concentration



Yogic Wellness : Outcomes

understanding. One can have conscious control over the autonomic nervous system and can foster mental, emotional and spiritual wellness.

- 5) **Pratyahara** (restraining the senses): The bridge between external and internal practice, where attention is drawn inward, by detaching from external sensory distractions. This takes care of financial, environmental and occupational dimension, through restraining the senses, lifestyle modifications, education and guidelines.
- 6) **Dharna** (concentration): This approach focuses on mental and social discipline. It includes: biologically clocked lifestyle; the practice of 'early to bed, early to rise, makes a person healthy, wealthy and wise'; to be frank, free, fresh and flexible in communication always; to practice the state of 'I am okay, you are okay and everything is okay'; and regularity in practice i.e., *Abhyaas*.
- 7) **Dhyana** (meditation): The practitioner becomes absorbed in the object of focus. Concentrative meditation can include mantra meditation; *Savasana dhyana*, i.e., breath-watching meditation; *Maun dhyana* i.e., experiencing the silence; Mindfulness meditation which strengthens parasympathetic nervous system activity, thereby aiding vascularity, oxygenation, tissue nourishment to *pranic* energy channels

and muscular relaxation, which foster spiritual and wholistic wellness.

- 8) **Samadhi**: it is the ultimate state of bliss and enlightenment, which is characterised by a profound sense of unity with the universe.

Yogic principles have deep impact on sleep and wellness: Yoga regulates the heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate. Yoga improves digestion and maintains normal blood sugar levels. It reduces activity of stress hormones, muscle tension and induces relaxation. Yoga is science and spirituality to enrich, empower and nurture wellness.

At its core, Yoga is a living philosophy—an ever-relevant science that teaches us how to align with balance and purpose. Beyond postures and breath, it is a discipline that nurtures resilience, compassion, and clarity in a world often marked by stress and distraction. The foresight lies in recognising that wellness is not a destination but a continuous practice, cultivated through conscious choices and mindful living. By embracing the eightfold path of *Ashtangyoga* and the principles of holistic wellness, one discovers that true health radiates outward—strengthening the body, calming the mind, and enriching the spirit. The reader is thus invited to reflect: the future of wellness is not found in external cures, but in the inner capacity to live with awareness, harmony, and joy. □



Next-Gen Nutrition Strategy for Child Wellness

India's nutrition challenge is no longer limited to undernutrition; the coexistence of stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising obesity reflects a growing triple burden that demands differentiated, preventive responses across the life course. As India advances towards its long-term development goals, ensuring optimal nutrition across the life course remains central to building a healthy, productive, and equitable nation.

India continues to face a persistently high burden of child undernutrition, underscoring nutrition as a critical determinant of survival, growth, and long-term human capital. The national response is increasingly oriented towards a life-cycle approach that begins with preconception care, extends through pregnancy and the first 1,000 days, and is embedded within the RMNCAH+N (Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, Adolescent Health plus Nutrition) framework. Evidence from large implementation studies like Women and Infants Integrated Interventions for Growth Study (WINGS) and RajPusht reinforce the importance of addressing maternal nutrition and early-life risks before and during pregnancy to break intergenerational cycles of undernutrition. By strengthening linkages between facility-based services, community platforms, and households, and leveraging home-based care, behaviour change communication, and digital systems, the strategy reflects a shift from deficit correction to advancing child wellness as a development priority.

Why Child Nutrition Defines India's Development Trajectory?

Child nutrition shows how well a country is doing and helps shape its future. It reflects the strength of health care, education, sanitation, social protection

and gender equality, while also building the nation's human potential. Despite sustained economic growth, India continues to face a high burden of malnutrition, underscoring the need for a more integrated, preventive, and wellness-oriented nutrition strategy that adopts a life-course perspective, beginning from

Ministry of Information
and Broadcasting
Government of India

New Momentum for Nari Shakti

Declining Maternal Mortality Rate



A notable reduction of
50 points



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preconception, to address nutritional risks early, break intergenerational cycles of malnutrition, and improve birth outcomes, child growth, and long-term health and development.

Worldwide, undernutrition is still one of the biggest causes of child deaths, almost half of all deaths in children under five are linked to it. At the same time, the world is witnessing a growing nutrition paradox: 149 million children are stunted, 45 million are wasted, and 37 million are overweight, while 1.9 billion adults are overweight or obese and 462 million are underweight. This coexistence of deprivation and excess defines the global and Indian nutrition challenge.

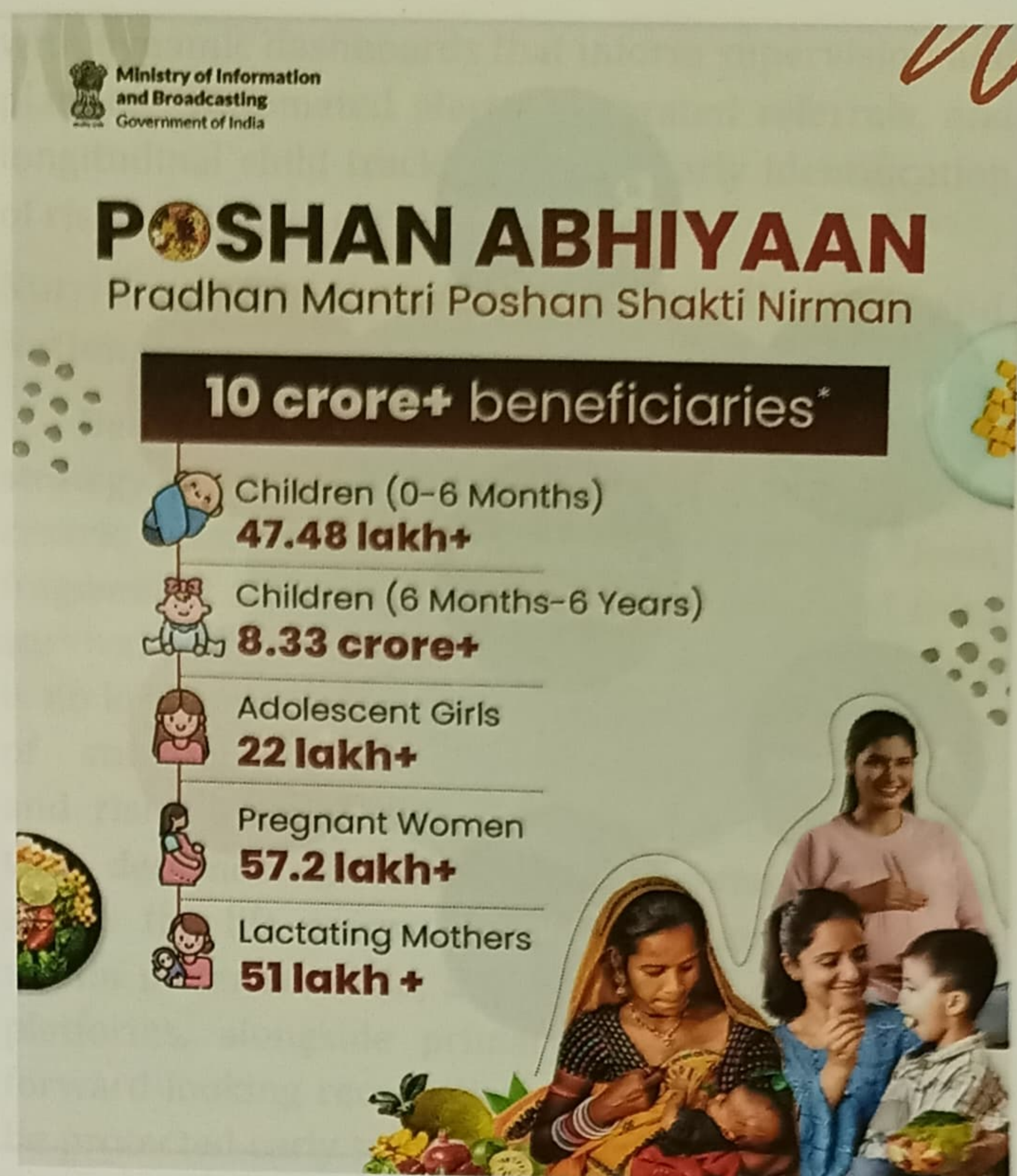
India's Malnutrition Burden: Scale, Persistence, and Inequality

India's nutrition indicators reveal both scale and persistence. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21), 35.5% of children under five are stunted, 19.3% are wasted, 32.1% are underweight, and 7.7% are severely wasted. Notably, 3% of children are already overweight, signaling the early emergence of overnutrition alongside undernutrition. While a gradual decline in undernutrition has been observed from NFHS-2 to NFHS-5, the pace of improvement remains slow and uneven.

Malnutrition among women and adolescents worsens child health and sustains intergenerational undernutrition. Anemia and poor nutritional status across the population reflect deep-rooted life-course vulnerabilities that influence pregnancy outcomes and child growth. Preconception health is a critical but often missed window, as poor nutrition before pregnancy increases the risk of low birth weight and other adverse outcomes. Globally, around 20 million low-birth-weight babies are born each year, with India accounting for nearly 40% of this burden; a large share of these infants are either preterm or small for gestational age and fall within the category of small vulnerable newborns (SVN), which account for more than half of neonatal deaths.

From Survival to Wellness: The Strategic Shift

India's approach to tackling malnutrition has shifted from just food-based schemes to a broader child wellness model that brings nutrition together with health, care, and development systems. This shift is rooted in the understanding that malnutrition is not merely a consequence of inadequate food intake, but of a complex interplay between maternal health,



infections, caregiving practices, sanitation, education, and social norms.

The adoption of the RMNCAH+N life-cycle framework marks a decisive strategic shift. Launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare following the Government of India's Call to Action Summit in February 2013, it integrates reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health with nutrition and embeds a life-course approach to reducing maternal and child morbidity and mortality. Figure 1 (see page 24) illustrates the strategic interventions across the RMNCAH+N continuum. A central focus is the first 1,000 days, from conception to two years of age, when nutrition critically shapes survival, growth, and development. This approach is reinforced by national guidance such as the India Newborn Action Plan and preconception care recommendations from the Indian Academy of Pediatrics. Recent evidence from India shows that targeted investments can yield results; initiatives such as RajPusht and WINGS have reported reductions in low birth weight of over 20%, underscoring the importance of strengthening preconception and maternal nutrition within child health strategies.

Newborn Nutrition: Anchoring Wellness at Birth

India's newborn-centric approach is a key component of its next-generation nutrition strategy. More than 70% of infant deaths in India are due to

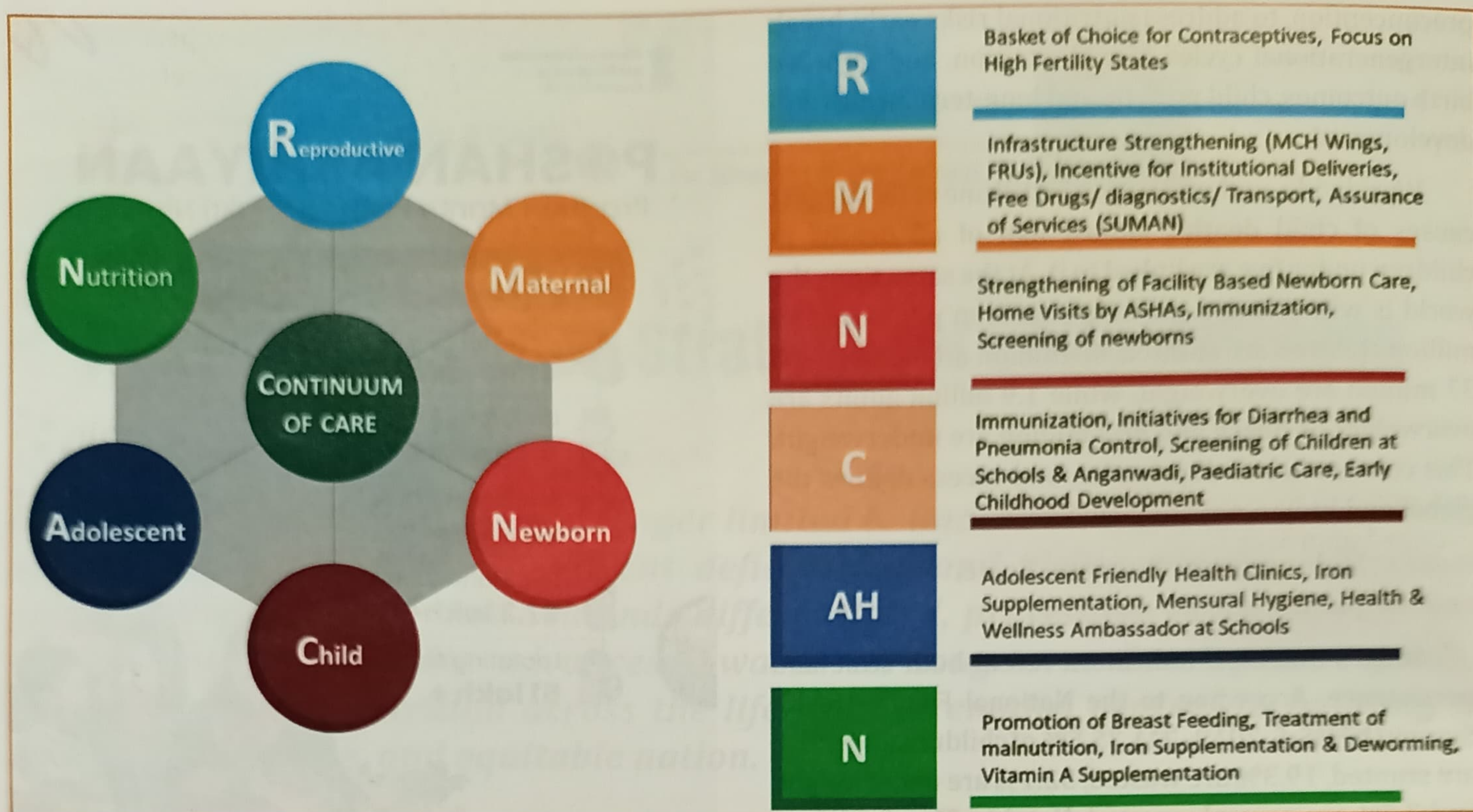


Figure 1: Strategic Interventions under RMNCAH + N

newborn causes, many linked to low birth weight, prematurity, and feeding difficulties. Therefore, addressing nutrition from birth is essential to a child's well-being.

The expansion of newborn care platforms such as Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs), Newborn Stabilisation Units (NSUs), and Mother-Newborn Care Units has strengthened early nutrition and clinical support for vulnerable newborns. By keeping mothers and low-birth-weight or sick infants together, these platforms enable early breastfeeding and skin-to-skin care. Kangaroo Mother Care exemplifies this integration, reducing neonatal mortality by about 32% and mortality up to six months by 25%, while also lowering hypothermia and infections and improving exclusive breastfeeding and growth outcomes.

Home-Based Newborn Care (HBNC) and Home-Based Care for Young Child (HBYC)

Launched in 2011 and updated in 2014, the Home-Based Newborn Care (HBNC) program aims to lower neonatal mortality and morbidity, especially in rural and remote areas with limited access to health facilities. Under HBNC, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) conduct scheduled home visits for all newborns up to 42 days of life, with additional visits for preterm, low birth weight (LBW), sick newborns, and those discharged from Special Newborn Care Units. These

visits focus on counselling families on essential newborn care, early and exclusive breastfeeding, identification of danger signs, follow-up of sick newborns, and timely referral to health facilities, along with counselling on postpartum care and family planning.

The Home-Based Care for Young Child (HBYC) programme, launched in 2018 under the National Health Mission and POSHAN Abhiyaan, extends home-based support to children aged 3–15 months. Through five scheduled ASHA home visits, HBYC promotes exclusive breastfeeding up to six months, appropriate complementary feeding thereafter, early identification of growth and developmental delays using the Mother and Child Protection Card (MCP card), prevention and management of common childhood illnesses, and timely referral of sick children. Together, HBNC and HBYC strengthen the continuum of care from birth through early childhood by embedding nutrition, health, and caregiving support at the household level.

From Facilities to Families: Strengthening Community-Centred Child Nutrition

India's evolving nutrition strategy recognises that lasting child wellness cannot be achieved through facility-based care alone and must be sustained within homes and communities. Community-based approaches, particularly the management of acute malnutrition through existing Anganwadi and primary

health systems, enable early identification, counselling, nutritional support, and follow-up for children who can be safely treated at home, reducing avoidable hospitalisation and improving continuity of care. Importantly, these efforts are embedded within existing health and ICDS platforms rather than operating as parallel programmes. Alongside this, growing emphasis is placed on feeding practices, dietary diversity, caregiving behaviours, and household environments, with behaviour change communication and WASH integration delivered through routine community platforms. Together, these shifts reflect a move away from episodic treatment towards a more holistic and sustained approach to child growth, development, and wellbeing.

Digital Enablement: The Backbone of the Next-Gen Strategy

What distinctly differentiates India's current nutrition approach from earlier efforts is the strategic use of digital systems. Platforms such as the Reproductive and Child Health portal, Poshan Tracker, decision support systems, and digital tracking tools enable real-time monitoring of low-birth-weight babies, at-risk children, and nutrition service delivery across facility and community settings.

Nutrition-specific digital platforms complement health systems by replacing paper-based reporting

with dynamic dashboards that inform supervision and planning. Automated alerts, integrated referrals, and longitudinal child tracking enable early identification of risk and timely corrective action.

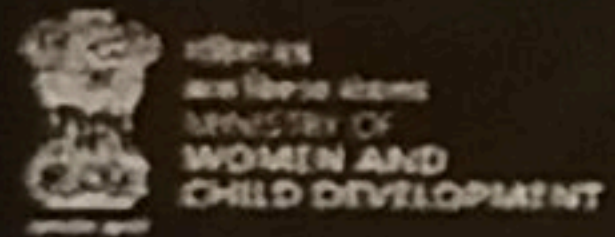
Nutrition as the Foundation of Child Wellness and National Progress

Decoding India's next-generation nutrition strategy reveals a clear paradigm shift—from food-centric interventions to life-course wellness, from fragmented schemes to integrated systems, and from survival alone to thriving. India's nutrition challenge is no longer limited to undernutrition; the coexistence of stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising obesity reflects a growing triple burden that demands differentiated, preventive responses across the life course. The integration of nutrition within maternal, child, adolescent, and school health platforms, alongside primary healthcare, signals a forward-looking recognition that child wellness must be protected early to prevent both undernutrition and future non-communicable diseases.

Targeted investments promoting integrated interventions have shown that progress is possible. Evidence from large scale implementation studies such as WINGS and RajPusht demonstrates that improving maternal nutrition can reduce low birth weight by approximately 20%, reinforcing the value of upstream,

preventive action. At the same time, programmes such as HBNC and HBYC extend this continuum into households, ensuring that nutrition counselling, early identification of growth faltering, and timely referrals continue beyond health facilities. Together, these efforts strengthen links between newborn survival, community nutrition, and long-term child development. Achieving child wellness at scale will require sustained political commitment, adequate financing, stronger frontline capacity, and deeper convergence across sectors. As India advances towards its long-term development goals, ensuring optimal nutrition across the life course remains central to building a healthy, productive, and equitable nation. □

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DID YOU KNOW?

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), launched in 1975 and now known as Mission **Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0**, is the world's largest programme for children aged 0–6 years.



As the sun rises over the iconic Victoria Memorial in Kolkata, a group yoga session illustrates a growing national trend. This collective embrace of ancient wisdom amidst historical grandeur highlights how community-driven wellness is taking deep root in modern India.



Photo Credits: Subir Halder, Photo Division

A Life Guided by Nature and Value

*From planting millions of trees to inspiring a generation to reconnect with nature, **Peepal Baba (aka Swami Prem Parivartan)** has dedicated his life to environmental conservation, sustainable living and value-based leadership. In this engaging conversation with YOJANA, Editor of this Magazine, **Shuchita Chaturvedi**, he shares the influences that shaped him, the lessons he learned growing up in an army environment, and his hopes for greener cities, responsible citizenship and a more harmonious relationship between people and nature.*

Q. You often say that your life's work was not something you consciously planned, but something that evolved naturally. Could you share how your early influences and experiences shaped this journey towards environmental work?

A. I never saw my work as the result of a planned decision. It developed naturally because of the people and the environment around me. One of the strongest influences was my teacher, Mrs Williams, who taught us for almost four years. Her way of teaching was very different from what we usually see. She never limited herself to textbooks. She spoke about animals, birds, geography, history and cultures from different parts of the world.

She used to bring magazines like *National Geographic* and show us photographs. Through those images, she helped us understand the planet and its diversity. Whatever she taught, she explained through stories and real-life examples. That way of learning stayed with me. Even today, when I reflect on my own years of teaching and working, I realise that the foundation she gave us shaped my thinking about nature and education.



Peepal Baba

Growing up in an army environment teaches discipline, but it also teaches you how to live in an organised and balanced way. Cantonments are among the best examples of such living in our country. They have open spaces, greenery, walking paths and areas where people can cycle. A human being does not need only buildings to live well. One needs good air, clean water and enough space to live peacefully.

When you grow up in such surroundings, you understand that development does not mean crowding people into small spaces. Today, many cities are growing vertically, stacking people one above the other. But cantonments show that a healthy ecosystem creates healthier human beings. That lesson remained with me and later became central to my understanding of sustainable living.

Q. Cantonments as models of sustainable living, What can be the takeaways for urban planning?

A. Cantonments show us how life can be designed in a balanced way. There is space for people, space for trees and space for birds. You can walk, you can cycle and you can breathe.

In many cities today, if a cycle track is built, it soon gets occupied. Footpaths turn into market spaces. Slowly, there is no place left for people to walk peacefully. Cantonments, however, still preserve green areas and quiet corners. They remind us that development and greenery do not have to be in conflict. Both can grow together if planning is done thoughtfully.

Q. Your organisation has worked across many states and regions. What has this long journey taught you?

A. Over the years, we have worked in many districts and regions of the country. One clear lesson from this journey is that people respond more to action than to words. When they see someone planting trees, restoring land or living responsibly, they feel encouraged to do the same.

Change does not happen only through meetings or speeches. Real change happens on the ground. When people see practical work being done consistently, they begin to understand its value and become part of it themselves. Over time, this creates a sense of shared responsibility.

Q. You have travelled to many countries. What lessons do you draw from international best practices?

A. Whenever I travel, I try not to look only at buildings or infrastructure. I try to understand the vision behind them. From places like Singapore, Dubai and Australia, I

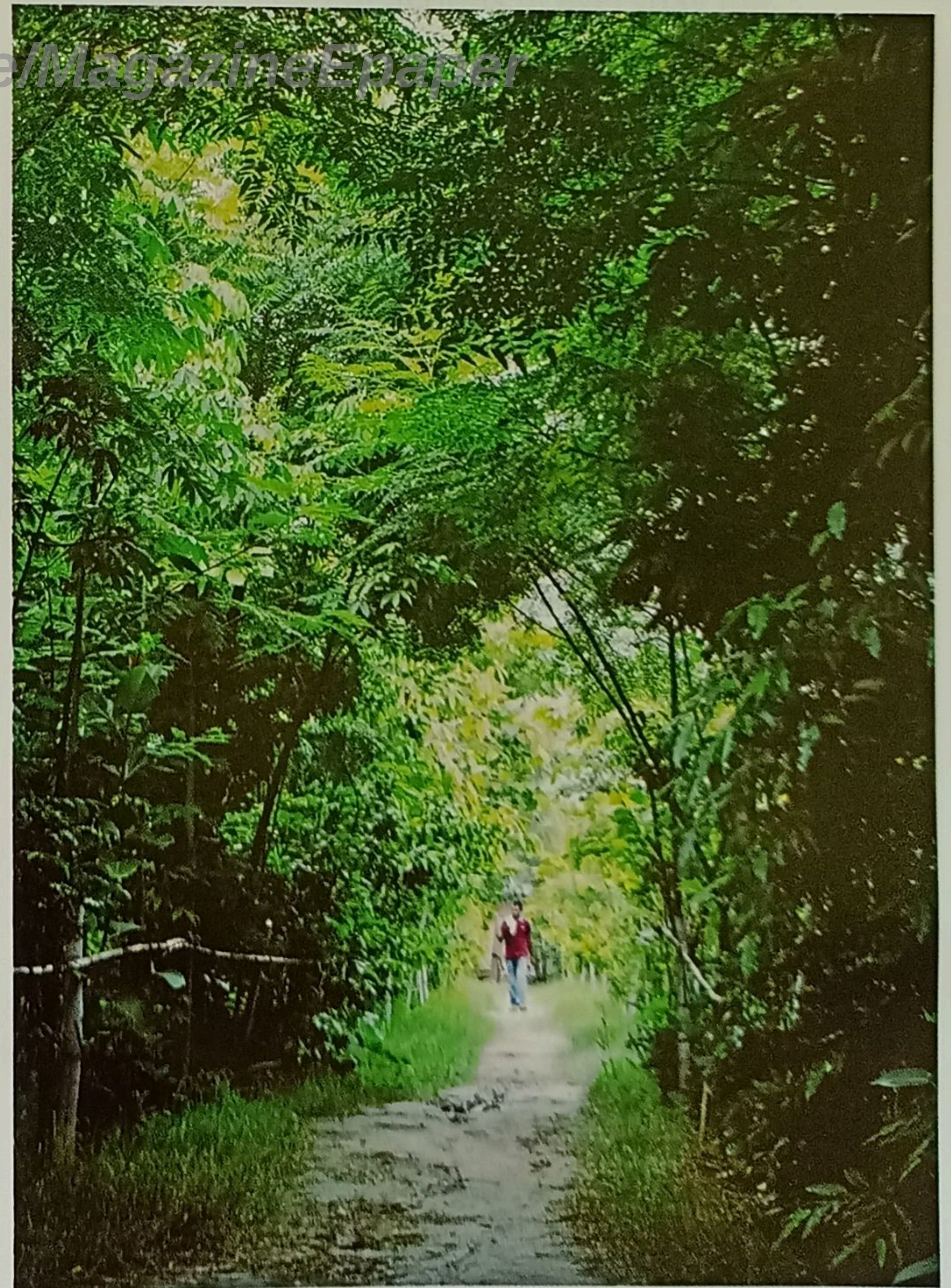
have learned that real development begins with clarity of purpose.

Singapore decided very early that it would become a garden city. That was not just an idea on paper. Greenery was placed at the centre of planning. Roads, housing and public spaces were all designed around trees and parks. Even with limited land and a dense population, they ensured that people had access to open spaces.

Dubai taught me another lesson. It is built in the middle of a desert, yet it has created modern infrastructure and green areas. What stands out is the confidence to imagine differently. It shows that natural limitations do not have to become excuses.

Australia reflects the importance of respecting nature while developing. Large green belts and conservation areas are treated as essential, not optional.

What connects all these examples is not money alone. It is clarity of vision, discipline in execution and long-term thinking. For India, the lesson is clear: if we place environment and human well-being at the centre of planning, our cities can become far healthier and more liveable.





Q. Indian cities today face pollution and acute stress. What practical steps can ordinary citizens take for healthier living?

A. We cannot wait for everything to change from the top. Each of us must begin where we are.

First, surround yourself with plants. Even if the air in your city is polluted, you can improve the air around your home. A few plants can change the atmosphere of a place and also calm the mind.

Second, if possible, grow a little of your own food. Even a small effort changes your relationship with what you eat. It makes you more aware of natural processes and brings a sense of responsibility.

Third, reduce stress by choosing carefully what you watch, read and listen to. Urban life already creates stress because of noise and crowding. We should not add more stress through constant negativity.

Q. Speaking of responsible lifestyles and reducing one's impact on the environment, how do you explain this idea in simple terms?

A. I often use the term "carbon footprint" to explain this idea. It simply means how little harm you cause to the Earth. It does not have to be a complicated concept. Use public transport when possible. Avoid plastic. Choose

steel, glass and simple materials.

These may look like small actions, but over a lifetime they make a big difference. When many individuals follow such habits, it creates collective responsibility. In that sense, social change is nothing but the result of consistent individual action.

Q. Environmental responsibility is deeply connected with spirituality, how do you see this relationship?

A. For me, spirituality means awareness — awareness of oneself, of others and of nature. When you live close to nature, you naturally become calmer and more responsible. You begin to understand that your actions affect not only you, but everyone around you.

Young people today face pressure and confusion. They are surrounded by competition and uncertainty. When they reconnect with nature, they rediscover balance. That balance helps them live healthier and more meaningful lives.

Q. What role do parents and teachers play in building this awareness among children?

A. Parents and teachers play the most important role in shaping the values of the next generation. Today, many children grow up without any real connection to nature.

They have never seen a village pond, a well, or a working farm. They know packaged food, but not how food is grown. They know brands, but not the value of labour.

This distance from real life slowly weakens their understanding of responsibility. That is why adults must consciously bring children closer to soil, to farms and to everyday realities. A child who understands where food comes from automatically learns respect — for farmers, for nature and for life itself.

Values cannot be taught only through lectures or textbooks. They are learned through example. When children see parents and teachers caring for the environment, living simply and respecting resources, they absorb these habits naturally. Such learning stays with them for life and helps build not just informed individuals, but responsible citizens.

Q. Is there a need to rethink agriculture and food systems in today's content?

A. We must return to more natural ways of farming. Excessive use of chemicals harms soil, water and human health. Over time, it weakens the very foundation of agriculture. Across the world, people are now realising that sustainable farming is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

When I travel to other countries, I see the same concern being addressed in different ways. In many places, there is a growing effort to reduce chemical dependence and move towards practices that respect soil and biodiversity. Farmers are being encouraged to adopt methods that protect land for the next generation, not just maximise short-term yield.

This international experience reinforces what we need to understand in India as well — that agriculture cannot be separated from ecology. Food is not just a product that we buy and sell. It is life. When we respect that, our systems automatically become healthier and more balanced.

A society that respects its food also learns to respect its farmers and its land. Only then can we build a food system that is truly sustainable, both for people and for the planet.

Q. You have been a long-time reader of YOJANA. What place does the magazine hold for you?

A. For many of us, YOJANA was our first serious source of understanding development, rural issues and public policy. At a time when information was not easily available, YOJANA served as our encyclopedia. It helped

us understand how the country works, how policies are shaped and how social and economic issues are connected.

When I teach, I often encouraged my students to read YOJANA regularly. I tell them that it should not just be casual reading, but an essential part of their academic life. We did not read it casually. We read it slowly, often with a pencil in hand — underlining important lines, making notes and reflecting on what we read. That habit built wisdom, not just information. It trained us to think deeply rather than react quickly.

Even today, I believe that magazines like YOJANA play a very important role. In an age of instant news and short attention spans, such publications give readers the opportunity to pause, reflect and understand issues in a more meaningful way. They help create thoughtful citizens who look at nation-building with a sense of responsibility and awareness.

Q. Finally, what message would you like to give to our readers?

A. My message to readers is simple — never underestimate your individual power. Many people feel that change happens only through big systems and major decisions, but in reality, transformation begins with small, consistent actions in everyday life.

Planting a tree, saving water, reducing waste and choosing to live responsibly may seem like ordinary acts, but together they create lasting impact. When individuals act with care, society naturally moves towards balance.

I also feel that passing on good values to the next generation is one of our greatest responsibilities. Teaching children to respect nature, understand the importance of honest work and care for others shapes a stronger future.

Patriotism, in my view, is not merely expressed through slogans. It is reflected in action. When we protect our environment, respect our resources and live responsibly, we serve our country in the truest sense. □

(The interaction with Peepal Baba reinforces the importance of aligning development goals with environmental responsibility and social well-being. His perspectives highlight that sustainable progress depends not only on policy frameworks, but also on informed individual action and collective commitment. Together, these elements form the foundation for a more balanced and resilient model of growth.)



Leveraging Grassroots Innovations for Public Health

India's traditional knowledge systems, enriched by grassroots creativity, have long emphasised plants-based remedies for holistic wellness. Local communities continuously adapt and refine these practices, making medicinal plants a key part of primary healthcare in rural India.

A report of World Health Organization (WHO) notes that about 65% of India's rural population uses Ayurveda and herbal remedies to meet primary care needs. Globally, 65–80% of the world's healthcare practice involves the use of traditional medicines in the form of complementary and alternative medicine.

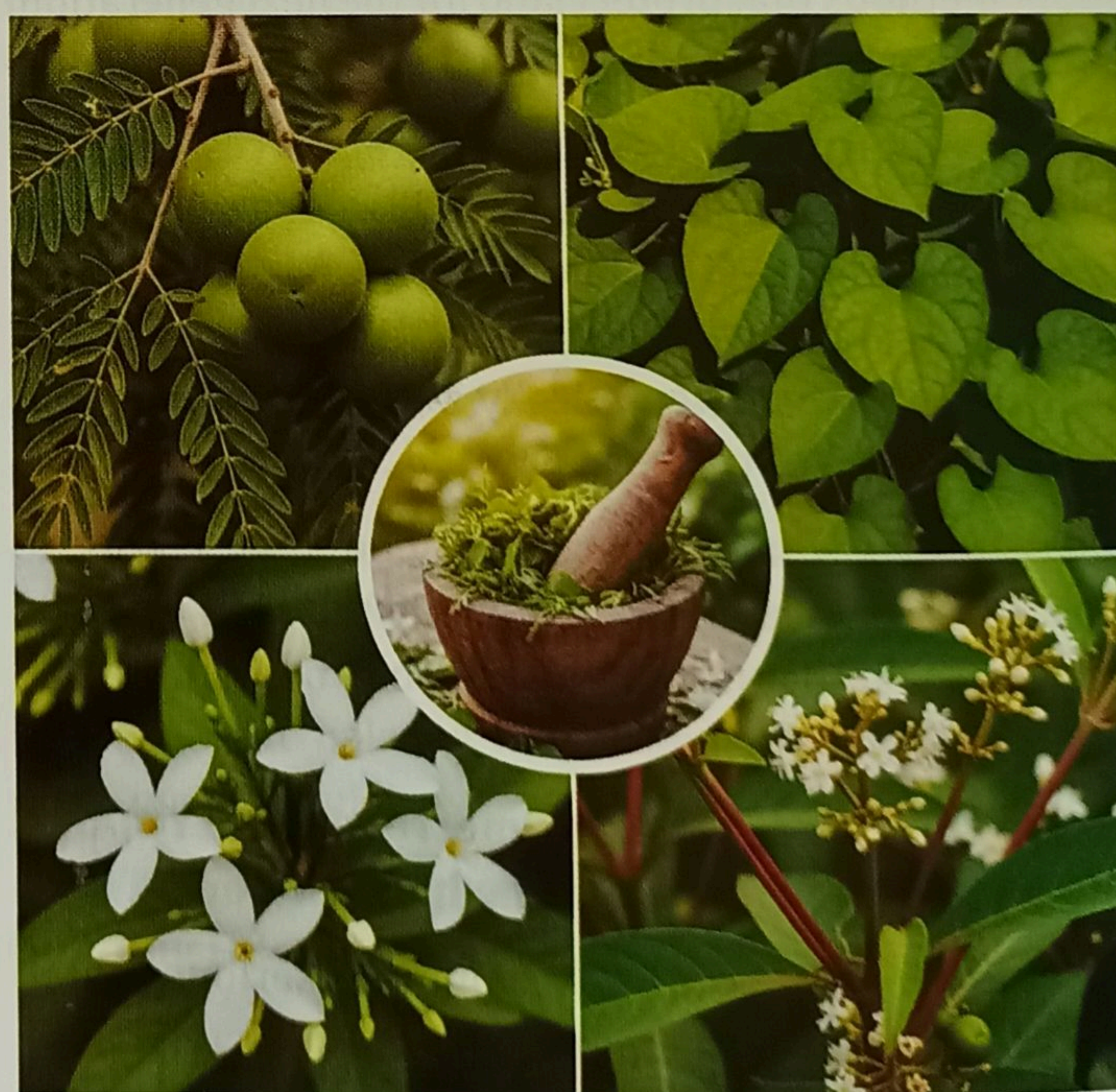
It has been found that roughly 17% of Indian plant species are considered to have pharmacological properties. These plants carry phytonutrients and bioactive compounds that modern science is increasingly validating and utilising. In many cases, traditional knowledge has identified applications far ahead of formal research, for example *Catharanthus roseus* (locally known as *Sadabahaar/Nayantara*), originally documented in India to lower blood sugar, later yielded important anti-cancer alkaloids called vinblastine and vincristine. In India, such practices are embedded in cultural heritage, yet this wealth of knowledge is unevenly documented or integrated into formal healthcare, presenting both an opportunity and a challenge for mainstream integration into public health.

May 2024 marked a significant moment for India and the Global South with the announcement of World Intellectual Property Organisation's (WIPO) treaty on 'Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, and Traditional Knowledge', which introduced mandatory disclosure norms for patent applications concerning genetic materials. The treaty mandated that patent

applications involving genetic resources and traditional knowledge must disclose their origins. Thus, the obligatory nature of this provision introduces a binding international standard, holding all 193 WIPO member countries accountable. This harmonisation will help reduce the legal loopholes often exploited by powerful nations and corporations.

Grassroots Innovation and Indigenous Knowledge

At the grassroots level, farmers and local healers continue to innovate and explore multi-dimensional benefits of native plants. For example, *Tinospora cordifolia* (Giloy) is utilised for an array of ailments:



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its leaf or stem preparations are prescribed for fever, asthma, diabetes, jaundice, intestinal worms, migraine and even piles. Likewise, *Moringa oleifera* (drumstick tree/*Sahijan*) is used for treatment of asthma, diabetes, joint pain, sprains and snakebite. Furthermore, *Ocimum sanctum* (*Tulsi*), has been widely applied for respiratory and circulatory health; *Adhatoda vasica* (*Adusa/Vasa*) is very effective for cough and asthma; and *Andrographis paniculata* (*Kalmegh*) for fever and digestive issues.

These examples highlight how a single plant can serve as a 'pharmacy' to various diseases. To protect such vast volumes of grassroots knowledge from erosion and to translate these into scalable public health value, National Innovation Foundation – India (NIF) has emerged as a critical national institutional infrastructure working relentlessly to nurture and fortify community knowledge.

The sophistication of this indigenous knowledge is exemplified by numerous grassroots innovators formally recognised and protected through intellectual property rights (IPR) facilitated by NIF. Some of such innovations are profoundly critical to defend human health against grave illnesses. For example, Mila Ram Medhi from Assam developed herbal composition for epilepsy treatment (Patent No. 295175) using *Lasia spinosa* (*Kukkuṭa Sringī*), *Costus speciosus* (*Keukand*), *Curcuma longa* (*Haldi*) and *Streblus asper* (*Sihora*), demonstrating how traditional practitioners combine botanical sources to address complex neurological conditions.

These patents represent not merely solutions but generations of empirical observation, experimentation and refinement at the community level across diverse ecological and cultural landscapes of India. NIF's database comprises numerous herbal and plant-based innovations for health and general wellness.



Sonia Devi from Bihar formulated a remedy (Patent No. 297386) to treat Filariasis using *Sansevieria roxburghiana* (*Mural/Murva*) with *Ferula asafoetida* (*Hing*) and mustard oil, while Baidhar Biswal from Odisha created a medication (Patent No. 298858) from various parts of *Capparis sepiaria* (*Kanthari/Chaili*) specifically targeting nerve disorders, neuronal injuries and neuro-degeneration.

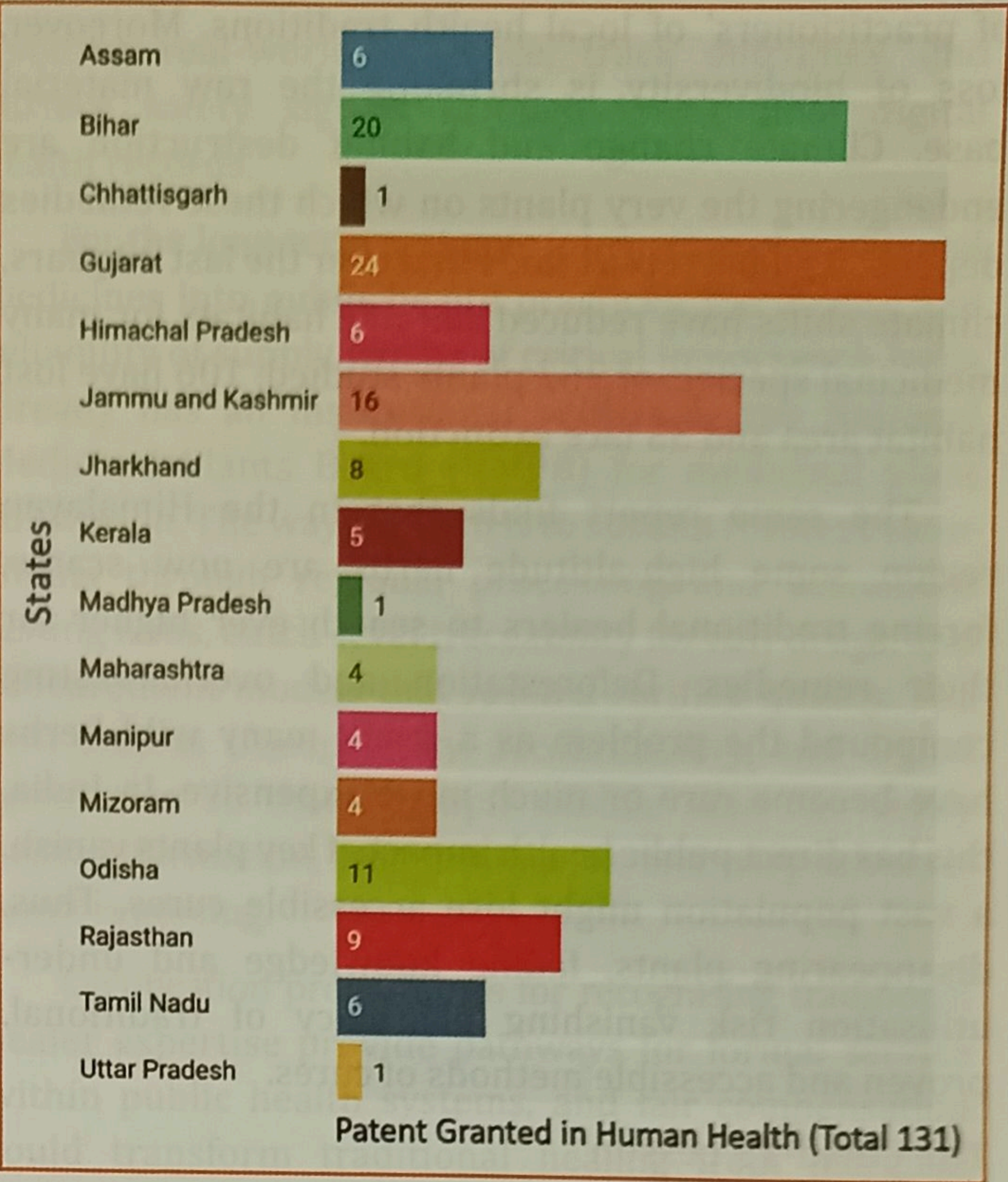


Chart: Human Health Related Patents Granted to Grassroots Innovators

The institute has so far filed over 279 patents for human health related grassroots innovations, with 131 patents granted. These patents span a diverse range of conditions, including critical ailments like tuberculosis, osteoporosis, kidney malfunctions, fatty liver, neurological disorders, etc.

Challenges before Traditional Practices

Despite their critical value, grassroots herbal practices face growing threats as socio-economic changes have eroded intergenerational knowledge transfer. Younger generations migrate to cities and prefer modern medicine, causing a 'dwindling number

From the northeastern state of Mizoram, Lalmuanzova developed a multi-plant composition (Patent No. 328894) for liver disorders, skillfully integrating leaves from *Ampelocissus latifolia* (*Pani-bel*), *Lantana camara* (*Raimuniya*), *Eupatorium odoratum* (*Jaljali ghaas*), *Achyranthes aspera* (*Apamarg*), and *Tridax procumbens* (*Ghamra*). These are only a few among hundreds of innovations protected and patented in the name of knowledge holders by NIF across the domains of human health and veterinary science.

of practitioners' of local health traditions. Moreover, loss of biodiversity is shrinking the raw material base. Climate change and habitat destruction are endangering the very plants on which these remedies depend. A global report finds that over the last 20 years, climate shifts have reduced suitable habitats for many medicinal species: of 367 plants studied, 106 have lost habitat area and 33 face extinction.

The same report finds that in the Himalayan region some high-altitude herbs are now scarce, forcing traditional healers to search ever higher for their remedies. Deforestation and overharvesting compound the problem as a result many wild herbs have become rare or much more expensive. In India, this has direct public health impact, if key plants vanish, a vast population might lose accessible cures. Thus, disappearing plants, fading knowledge and under-utilisation risk vanishing pharmacy of traditional, proven and accessible methods of cures.

The Covid-19 Lesson

The pandemic revealed resilience of grassroots knowledge-based healthcare. Public health studies show that when hospitals and clinics were overwhelmed during Covid-19, many communities turned to 'foodmedicines', culinary plants and herbal supplements used as home remedies for respiratory symptoms and immune support. A rapid ethnobiological survey spanning global urban centers (Wuhan, Milan, Madrid, New York, Rio de Janeiro) and rural regions (across Asia, Europe, and the Americas) documented a marked rise in the use of teas and spices as first-line care for Covid-like symptoms.

Across these regions, people repurposed household remedies normally used for colds and flu: ginger, garlic, onion, turmeric, and lemon were globally utilised. Similar patterns were reported in India, Peru, Sri Lanka, Libya, Qatar, Lithuania, Central Himalaya, and multiple African countries, where medicinal plants and kitchen spices were used to prevent infection or to manage cough, sore throat, and other respiratory and pulmonary complaints.

National Initiatives

With immense potential for affordable healthcare and pharmaceutical innovations, grassroots medicinal knowledge remains vulnerable to erosion, biopiracy, and commercial misappropriation. Recognising this, the Government of India has launched comprehensive initiatives to document, protect, integrate, and



commercialise traditional medicine. Few critical initiatives include:

National One Health Mission: Launched in 2022, under National One Health Mission Central and State Ministries coordinate across health, animal husbandry, environment, agriculture, and disaster management sectors. This integration proves essential for ethnomedicine, where medicinal plant ecosystems, wildlife health, and human well-being form an indivisible continuum. Traditional knowledge practitioners have always practiced this spirit of unity treating humans, animals, and environmental balance as interconnected.

Ayushman Arogya Mandirs: The Ayushman Arogya Mandir initiative aims to transforming Sub Health Centres and Primary Health Centres into facilities delivering preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative care. So far over 1,81,873 Arogya Mandir have already been operationalised. These centers integrate yoga sessions, dietary counseling based on traditional principles, management of common ailments using herbal medicines, and medicinal plant cultivation awareness. This creates practical pluralism where patients access both AYUSH and allopathic care under one roof based on their needs and preferences.

Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL): TKDL has documented over 5,15,788 formulations from Indian Systems of Medicine and Yoga comprising Ayurveda (1,48,456), Unani (2,64,196), Siddha (88,403), Sowa Rigpa (8,197), and Yoga practices (6,536), and translated into five international languages using the Traditional Knowledge Resource Classification system. TKDL is preventing biopiracy by making traditional knowledge visible to patent examiners worldwide, avoiding expensive litigation. The Union Government

recently approved widening TKDL access beyond patent offices to researchers, pharmaceutical companies, and academic institutions for drug discovery, promoting innovation under the New Education Policy 2020's *Bharatiya Gnaana Parampara* framework.

National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB): NMPB coordinates policies and programmes for medicinal plant conservation, cultivation, trade, and export. NMPB supports school herbal gardens with assistance, making younger generation acquainted with essential Indian medicinal plants.

Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homoeopathy (PCIM&H): PCIM&H is India's central institution for formulary specifications and pharmacopoeial standards for traditional medicines, strengthening quality, identity, and purity. Importantly, compliance with standards is tied to the Drugs & Cosmetics regulatory framework for manufacturing, which is foundational for safe commercialisation of plant-based and traditional products at scale.

Recently Ministry of AYUSH has included in Indian Pharmacopoeia 48 medicinal plants originating from grassroots knowledge holders supported by NIF, thereby giving them regulatory recognition for R&D activities for healthcare and industrial use.

The Future Course

India is developing a strong foundation for protecting and strengthening traditional and grassroots health knowledge. In the continuation, onboarding various scattered initiatives into an integrated system will safeguard community rights, improve evidence, and deliver reliable services at the last mile. Knowledge scouting and documentation process will have to be expanded and strengthened as it is one of the critical components to record, preserve and resurrect grassroots knowledge practices.

Integration of grassroots knowledge into public health is also underway as AYUSH services are being co-located under National Health Mission. Establishing streamlined mechanisms for condition-wise, referral-linked integrated care pathways will strongly augment primary care through explicit red-flag and green-flag protocol guidance. In this regard, Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) is substantially important for

building real-world evidence, track outcomes, and surface safety signals through longitudinal digital health records.

For the long-term systemic integration of traditional medicines into public health practices, the quality and reliability of supply will be of critical importance. India already has an institutional vehicle in the National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) for medicinal plant cultivation. The way forward is to sustain resilient value chains through regional processing and accredited testing hubs, batch-level traceability for raw drugs, and procurement models that reward verified quality. The next leap is transparency, accountability, and digital integration so that a simple mobile scan can verify batch information, test summaries, and easy adverse-event reporting.

Certification programmes for recognising traditional healer expertise provide pathways for formal service within public health systems, and fair compensation could transform traditional healing from marginal livelihood to respected profession. In addition, integrating locally relevant ethnobotany with school curricula can help children learn medicinal plants native to their ecosystems from early age.

India represents over 17% of the global population with immense ethno-cultural heterogeneity creating a wide knowledge base where region-specific medicinal traditions endure locally-validated

therapeutic wisdom. Rising antimicrobial resistance, accelerated by indiscriminate use of modern chemical-based drugs, make practice-based traditional and grassroots care innovation pathway more urgent than ever.

Moreover, traditional health practices can become a major engine of dignified rural employment and local enterprise. This shift will strengthen population health, extend healthy life-years, and support a healthier demographic dividend by reducing avoidable disease burden and out-of-pocket expenditure. Most importantly, it advances cultural confidence and community ownership, turning India's living health heritage into the pillar of *Atmanirbhar*, and *Viksit Bharat*. □

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Mental Health In The Digital Age

*Sarve bhavantu sukhinah..sarve santu niraamayah...A prayer to the Almighty...
May all be happy and may all be free from illness!*

Be it the age-old Sanskrit peace mantra associated with the *Upanishadas* and *Puranaas*, which highlights the interwoven relationship between happiness and health or the modern-day definition of Health as defined by the WHO, as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease, the importance of health cannot be undermined.

This becomes even more relevant in the modern-day chaotic world where we have an almost unlimited access to any or all information! Poor attention spans, too much information, absence of any filtration/boundaries, risk taking, adventure seeking and need for immediate gratification have made it almost impossible for the present-day youngsters to keep pace with whatever is happening around them. Constant comparisons both at a personal/professional level with no or poor value-based decision-making capacity, adds to the chaos to their internal world as well.

But before proceeding any further its important to understand what is truly meant by a positive mental health.

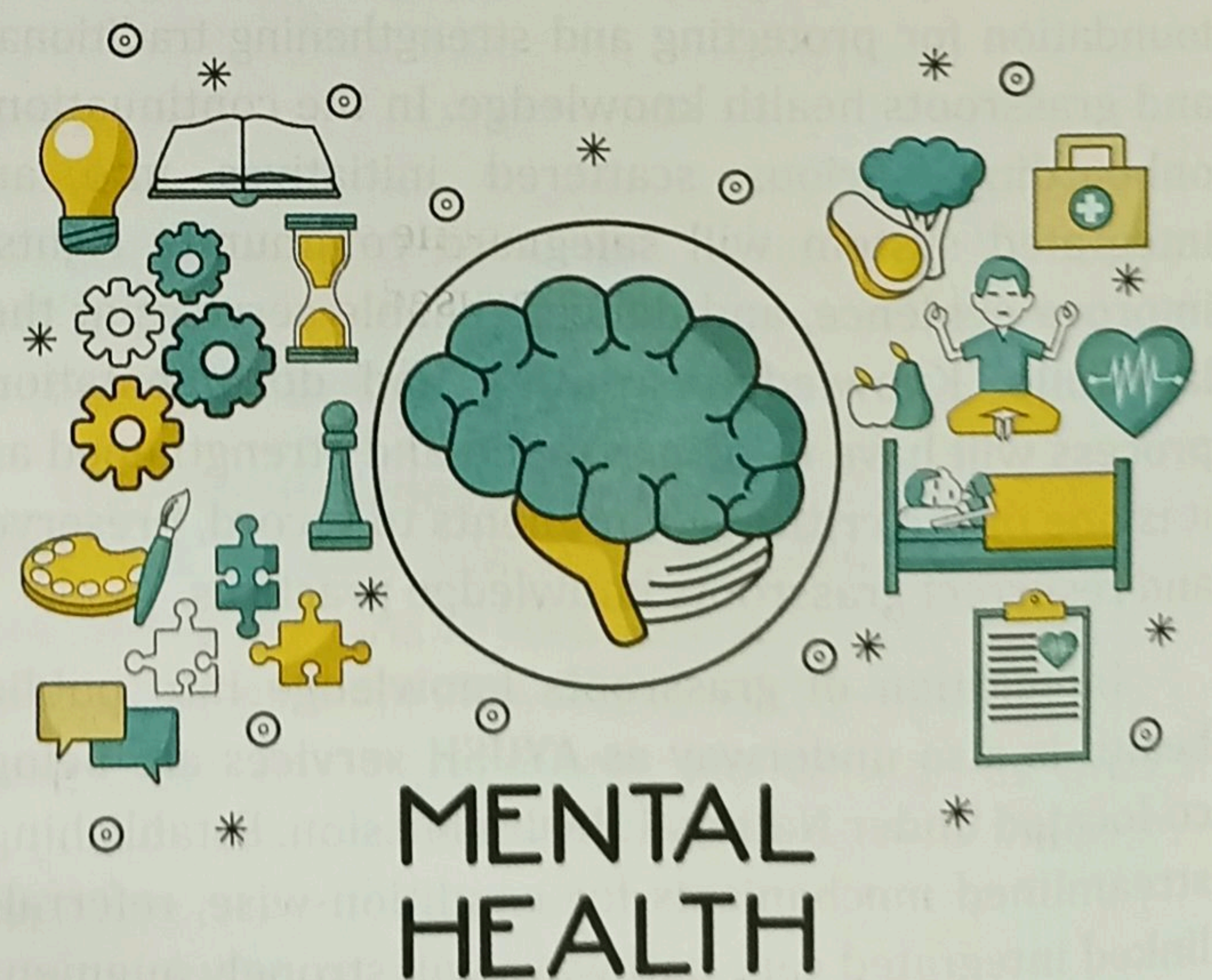
The 7 C's of mental health offer frameworks for well-being, emphasising on personal growth, relationships, support and stress management.

- **Competence:** Feeling capable in one's abilities and actions.
- **Confidence:** Believing in oneself and having a positive self-image.
- **Connection:** Building meaningful relationships.
- **Coping:** Developing healthy ways to manage stress.

- **Compassion:** Practicing kindness towards self and others.
- **Community:** Feeling part of a larger supportive group.
- **Care/Calmness:** Prioritising self-care and finding inner peace.

As stated, these principles help build resilience, manage stress, and foster a positive mindset by focusing on skills, self-belief, relationships, ethics, and empathy for oneself and others.

Social media can make us feel all sorts of conflicting feelings, from anxious and isolated to connected and excited. Most research, however, suggests that social media can have an overall negative impact on mental health depending on who is using it and how.



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- **Negative Impacts:** Increased anxiety, depression, cyber bullying, social comparison, loneliness, poor sleep, attention issues, poor frustration tolerance, emotional dysregulation and other behavioural problems.
- **Positive Impacts:** Awareness and education, enhanced social connections, access to support communities and broader information access.
- **Vulnerable Groups:** People with pre-existing vulnerabilities face higher risks for addiction and mental illness due to excessive device use.
- **Developmental Concerns:** Potential for delayed language, social, and emotional skills, especially in young children due to lack of in-life real exposures.

However, there are ways to make the online experience positive, including setting limits around usage. To be mindful about social media use, there is a need to know when it is becoming too overwhelming or triggering.

Here are seven ways to make Social media work to our benefit:

Connect With Others

Instead of aimlessly scrolling, spending time online texting a family member one hasn't talked to in a while, leaving a positive comment on a post from someone who is struggling, or starting a communication thread with a group of old friends can be a more gratifying experience. The "social" part of social media is one of the biggest mental health benefits. Research shows that people who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression and a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Join an Online Group

Private Facebook groups, online communities, and safe forums such as a group focused on a health issue that one may be struggling with, a support group for a particular challenge one is facing or a group dedicated to a common hobby can provide opportunities for connection, community, support, and resources. It is important to remember that there are all kinds of groups, so be sure to choose the ones that encourage healthy and positive behaviours that leave one feeling better, not worse.

Set Some Boundaries

It's important to know (and respond to) signs that one has had enough time online, but boundaries can also help to keep a good online experience from

transforming into a negative one. Here are some limit-setting strategies:

- Track time on apps. Some apps have built-in timers that can help track time and set reminders to exit the app. One could also set a timer to be mindful about usage.
- Turn off push notifications. Notifications are designed to get us to check apps, which increases the likelihood that we'll start scrolling. Turning them off can help to stay off apps.
- Moving social media apps off from home screen. That can make one less likely to use them.
- Set up 'no phone zones' and 'no phone times' where one doesn't use the phone, such as the bedroom after a certain time, at the dinner table, or Sunday mornings.

Connect With People In Real Life/Time

If the days are spent wisely, talking or walking with a friend, one will have less time to overdo it scrolling. This will also allow time to make in-real-life friendships and bonds, which are a key part of physical and mental health. Having people, one can turn to, helps feel more connected and less alone, and it can decrease stress.

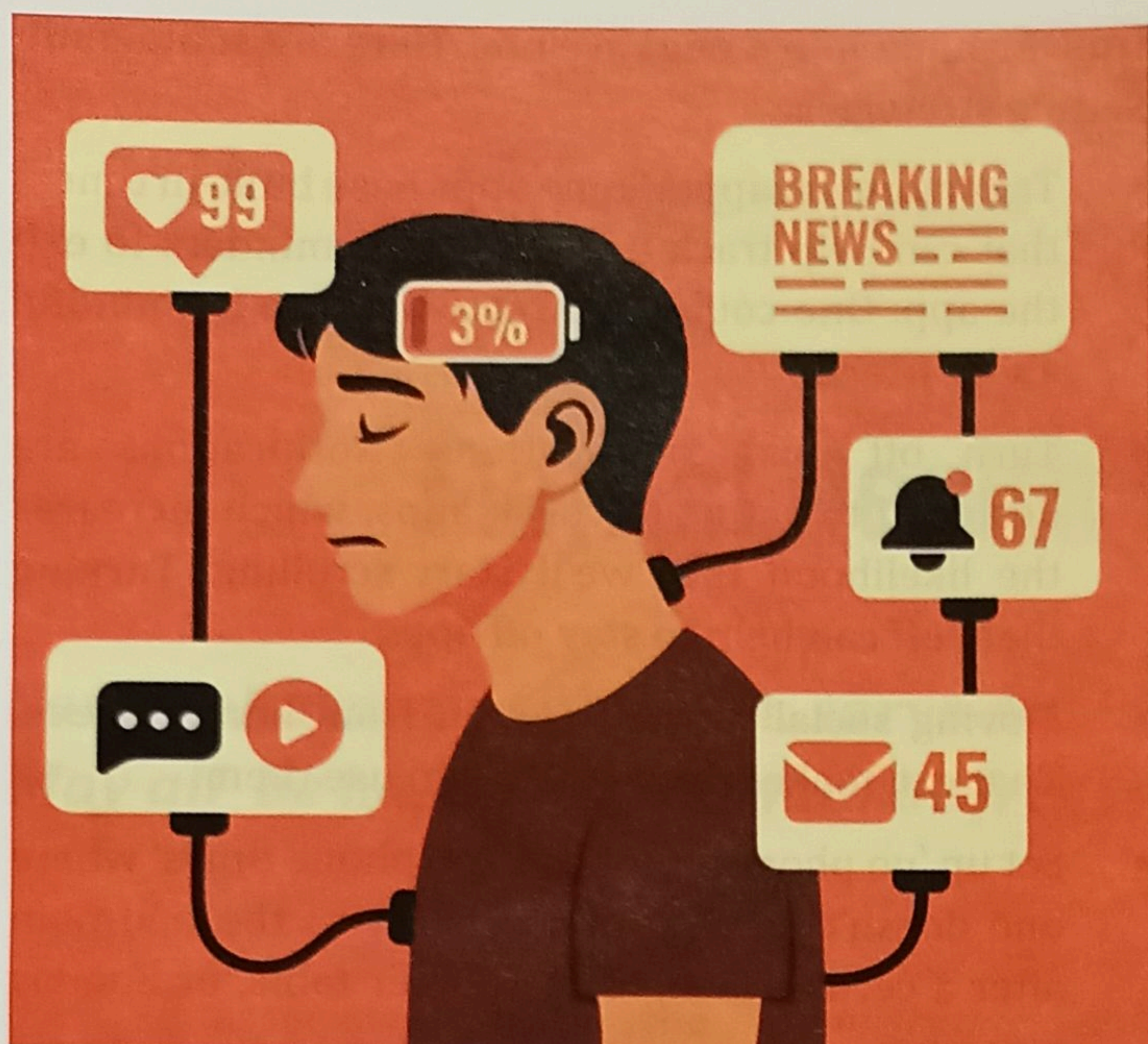
Focus on Facts

Even though it can certainly feel like it, social media is not real life. Posts are designed to grab attention, not reflect life outside the app. Remind yourself of these facts if you start to feel low:

- Social media apps have strong algorithms that control what content makes it onto one's feed.
- Influencers are paid to post, wear certain things, or look certain ways.
- Brands pay to target audience with ads.
- Filters and apps that change people's appearances are common, and they're regularly used to make people look different than they do in real life.
- People post only their highlights and share when they're feeling their best.

Clean Up the Feed

How does scrolling social media feed make one feel? Take note of how certain people or specific posts leave one feeling. If it is disturbing, unfollow them and fill the feed with accounts that feel good. Consider following different kinds of accounts, such as:



- Photographers who post shots of nature.
- Experts who post motivational quotes.
- People who share both the ups and the downs.
- People who reflect all different body types and sizes.
- Funny reels that make one laugh, such as animal videos or memes.
- Accounts that share awe-inspiring imagery, such as waterfalls and mountains.
- Educational content that helps one feel more informed.

Know When You're Struggling

If one tries all of this and still feels down in the dumps when online or find it difficult to kick the habit, it's okay. Social media is designed to keep one on the app. Sometimes, however, a mental health condition can colour the experience — and the most important thing one can do is ask for help (or get a friend help if they're struggling). Depression, anxiety, disordered eating, sleep disturbances and suicidal thoughts should never go ignored. Contact a mental health provider as soon as possible. And as a concerned guardian, these are some of the Strategies, which may be helpful:

Empower children and young people to be responsible online participants:

Children and young people should be empowered and supported to use digital technology well, so they can further reap benefits that social media provides. By talking with children about their use of social media, parents and carers should adopt an approach

that works best for their child's age, interests and needs. This should be proportionate – maximising the protection against online risks without restricting the opportunities and benefits, or undermining the child's ability to explore, learn and express themselves freely.

Educate yourself/ families about appropriate digital use and risks:

By developing digital knowledge and confidence, parents and carers can actively engage with technology and model constructive and balanced digital habits.

Encourage industry to develop appropriate, regulated and accessible content:

Governments should encourage online broadcasters, digital developers and entrepreneurs to produce technology that fits a child's development via 'age-appropriate' content, as well as ensure that inappropriate content is not accessible.

Ensure that anybody who shows signs of mental illness gets help at the earliest:

It is imperative to intervene early when children and young people show signs and symptoms of mental illness. Child and adolescent mental health services are equipped to treat individuals with the most severe disorders and the most acute needs.

To conclude, children and young people's mental health in the digital age involves both risks (anxiety, depression, cyber bullying, addiction from social media/screen time) and benefits (stronger networks, access to support), requiring balanced approaches focusing on digital literacy, parental guidance, and school/ community support.

Strategies & Recommendations

- **Parental/Adult Role:** Set device limits (e.g., no phones at meals), lead by example, foster open communication, teach digital literacy, and model healthy tech habits.
- **School/Community Role:** Increase mental health professionals, provide teacher training, develop anti-bullying policies, and implement digital wellness programs.
- **Youth Empowerment:** Encourage self-awareness, teach emotional regulation, and promote responsible online behaviour.
- **Tools & Resources:** Utilise mindfulness apps, school-based interventions, and resources focused on online safety and resilience. □



Digital Tools that Simplify Wellness

We know that there are over 1 billion phones in India, so using apps for providing basic wellness services to citizens is a perfect solution to a very big problem. These tools are for us. They are free, available everywhere and powerful. They are helping us in making our villages healthier and cities stronger.

Shanti Jain is an elderly lady living in a small village in Rajasthan. No nearby clinic, dusty roads, and her phone's old but works on a BSNL connection. She worries about her diabetes and grandchild's weight. She doesn't have money for fancy apps to buy for her phone. But one evening, she downloads a free government app. A doctor chats on a video call – from home! No travel, no cost. That's the magic of India's government wellness tools in 2026.

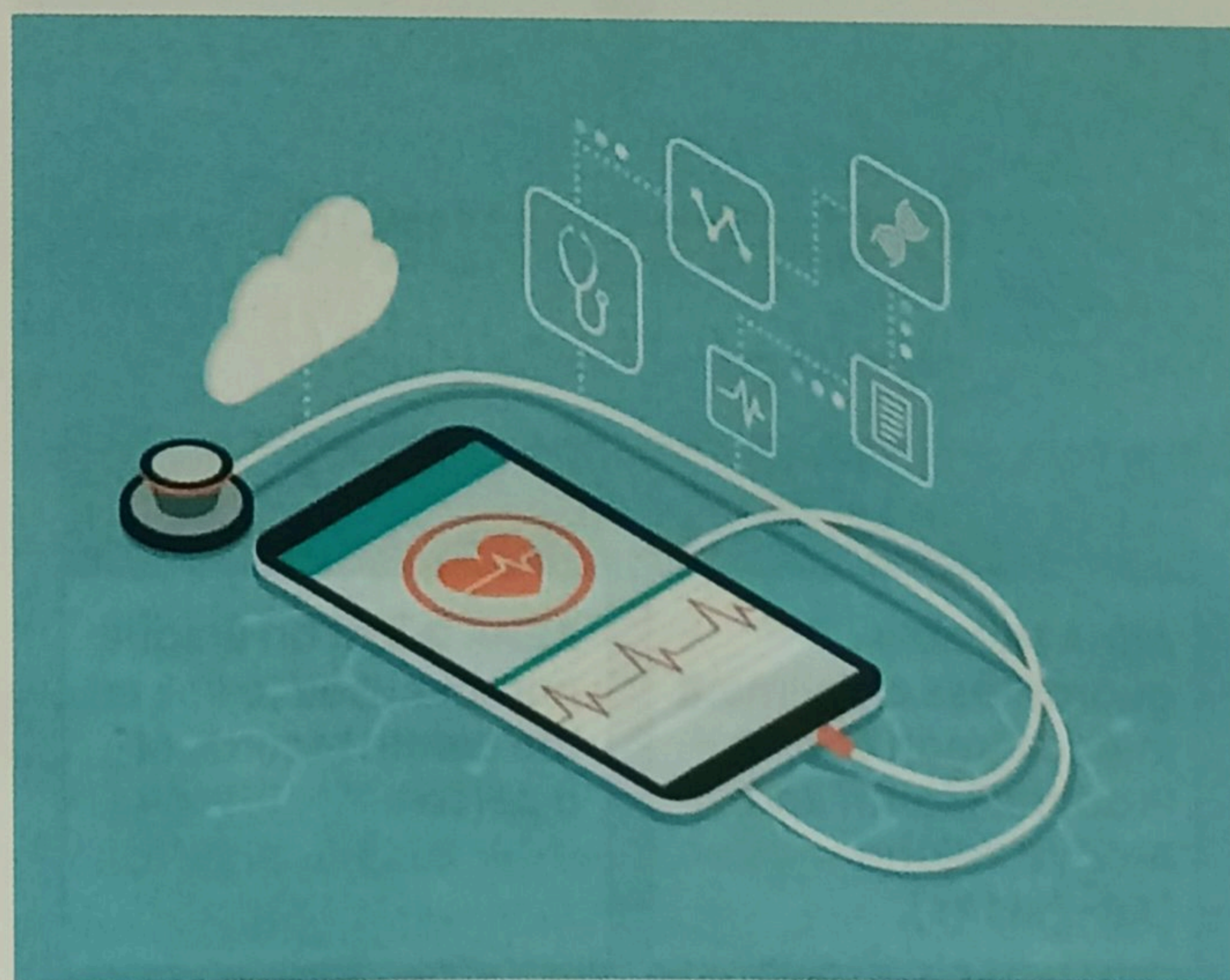
Imagine little Meera Chitre in a village near Pune. Her mom worries because Meera looks thin and tired. The nearest hospital is 30 kilometres away on bumpy roads. But mom has a simple smartphone. She downloads a free government app, types in what Meera ate today, and boom – the app says, "Add one boiled egg and some spinach." Within weeks, Meera's cheeks turn rosy. No doctor visit needed yet!

Or think of Vikram Mazumdar in Kolkata. He's 55, loves his rasgullas, but his blood pressure and sugar levels keep climbing. He downloads another free app from the government. Every morning, it reminds him to check his blood pressure at home. He learns which foods to eat and which to skip. His numbers improve, and the doctor is amazed!

The best part of the above experiences is that the apps in question are either free or super cheap. They have no sneaky ads popping up, and they are built for every corner of India, from Mumbai skyscrapers to Kerala backwaters. They are trusted by millions because they

are from the prominent union government ministries like Health, Sports, and Women & Child. These apps help us to fight our top worries: diabetes (10 crore cases in India), anaemia prevailing in half our women and kids, TB, and lazy lifestyles. Low data use means villages have no entry barrier to start using these apps. On top of that, Hindi, Tamil and more Indian languages are supported by the apps. Hospitals are far for 70 out of 100 villages. Doctors cost money many ordinary citizens don't have. We know that there are over 1 billion phones in India, so using apps for providing basic wellness services to citizens is a perfect solution to a very big problem.

These tools tie into big plans like *Ayushman Bharat* (health for poor families) and *Fit India* (move more). As we discuss the topic in early 2026, crores of people are



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using them. They work even on the slow internet that village towers give.

But here's the beautiful part: as the government says, Let's put doctors, trainers, and nutrition experts into everyone's pocket through their phone! And they did it! By early 2026, hundreds of millions of people use these tools every single day. Kids compete in school fitness challenges. Mothers track baby meals. Farmers have become video-call specialists. Elderly people learn yoga poses from cricket stars!

Let's explore some such amazing free tools today. Each one solves a real problem, such as too much sitting, scattered health papers, no nearby doctors, weak babies, forgotten old remedies, scary diseases, and lack of motivation.

1. Fit India App: Walk, Run, Dance, and Win with Your Whole Village!

The Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs released this free app that turns boring exercise into the most fun game ever. Over 50 million people downloaded it by 2026.

Let's explore how it works. You open the app, keep your phone in your pocket, and get busy doing your daily routine as it observes how well you are managing your wellness. Walking to school? It counts. Running to catch the bus? It counts. Playing Kabaddi with friends? Every step counts! The app shows you a number climbing up – 1,000 steps, 5,000, 10,000. It's like a video game score but for real life. Doctors say 10,000 steps a day keeps you super fit. The app cheers when you hit goals with fun sounds and colourful confetti on the screen.

**Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India**

UNDERSTANDING ABHA and AB-PMJAY!

Myth	Fact
ABHA Number guarantees enrollment in Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).	ABHA is just an unique number used to link all the health records of a person.

Do you remember seeing Virat Kohli hitting sixes on TV? You will find him featured in this app teaching you *Surya Namaskar*. Bollywood dancers show *bhangra* moves. Olympic athletes demonstrate stretches. All free! These are explained through videos which are short, between 5 and 15 minutes long, and perfect for busy mornings or evenings. You can follow the exercises right in your living room or terrace. No gym needed, no fancy clothes, just press play.

Why is Fit India perfect for India specifically? Think about our lives. Festivals every month mean *gulab jamuns*, *jalebis*, *biryani*, and *ladoos*. Delicious, yes! But our bodies need movement to balance it out. Fit India makes that movement exciting, not a boring chore.

2. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM): Your Magic Health ID Card on Your Phone

Imagine if every single thing about your health—every doctor visit, every blood test, every vaccine you got as a baby, every X-ray, every medicine—was stored safely in one place on your phone. And only YOU could decide who sees it. That's ABDM! The Health Ministry created this for free, and they call the ID card 'ABHA' (*Ayushman Bharat* Health Account). Think of it like an Aadhaar card, but for health instead of identity. By 2026, 35 crore people (more than a third of India!) will have this magic ID.

Let's understand step by step. You sign up once and get a 14-digit ABHA number (like 12-3456-7890-1234). This number is yours forever, from birth to old age. It's free. You also get a username like YourName@abdm, which is easy to remember. Now every time you visit a hospital or clinic which is connected to ABDM (over 1 lakh health centres are), they upload your reports to your ABHA account. These are blood sugar tests, heart scan reports, doctor's notes and whatnot! You open the ABHA app on your phone and see everything in well-organised folders. No more hunting for papers or that test report from two years ago, which are generally difficult to find when you need them.

Your ABHA connects to eSanjeevani (video doctor calls, covered next), to pharmacy apps (so your medicine history is there), to insurance companies (claim settlements faster), and to labs. Remember those vaccine cards you got as a child and are lost? ABHA stores all that digitally. Covid vaccine doses, polio drops, flu shots – all listed. Isn't it very useful when you are travelling abroad or joining new schools?

3. eSanjeevani: Talk to a Doctor on Video Call – No Long Lines, No Travel!

This is the Health Ministry's much-talked-about telemedicine app. Telemedicine means getting health care from far away, through video calls on your phone. eSanjeevani is the free app that connects you to real doctors without leaving your home. By 2026, over 28 crore consultations will have happened through this! That means 20 crore times people didn't have to travel to take physical doctor consultations.

You can download the eSanjeevani app or visit the project's website. When using it, choose your problem from a list, like fever, skin rash, stomach-ache, cough, or even mental stress. Select a time slot that is suitable, and you are ready for a virtual consultation with the doctor.

At the scheduled time, you get a notification. Click it, and your phone camera opens. A real doctor appears on the screen! You talk to them, show them the problem (like a skin rash on your arm by moving your phone camera closer), and answer their questions. Just like a real clinic visit, but you're sitting at home in comfortable clothes!

It is not difficult to understand why eSanjeevani is perfect for India. 70 per cent of our population lives in villages, but 70 per cent of doctors live in cities. An expecting mother in a remote Chhattisgarh village can't travel 50 km to the district hospital every week for checkups. With eSanjeevani, a doctor checks on her via video from her own home, saving money and time. Leave aside the convenience of the experience itself.

4. POSHAN Tracker: Helping Mothers Raise Strong, Healthy Kids

POSHAN stands for "Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition." The objective here is to make sure every child eats well and grows strong! The Women and Child Development Ministry released this app especially for mothers, pregnant ladies, and anyone taking care of young kids (0-6 years old). Over 1 crore users, mostly mothers and Anganwadi workers, are using it.

This app works like a complete food diary plus a smart coach. You type or select the food your baby had today, like "1 cup milk, 1 roti, half a bowl dal, some mashed banana." The app calculates if they got enough protein, vitamins, iron, and calcium. Small children need different amounts of nutrition at different ages which the app knows! It will analyse the data and will inform you if you have done a "great job" or just "okay".



Every month, you enter the child's weight and height (you can measure at home or Anganwadi). The app converts it into a chart. Is your child growing as per expectations? If there is anything missing, the app alerts you. It is an early warning that something's wrong. Small children need iron syrup, vitamin drops, deworming tablets. Mothers may forget such tasks in the daily rush of cooking and housework. POSHAN Tracker sends gentle reminders – "Time for Riya's iron dose!" You mark it done, and it tracks if your child is getting medicines regularly.

5. AYUSH Apps: Ancient Indian Wisdom Meets Modern Phones

AYUSH stands for Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy. These are all traditional Indian medicine systems that are thousands of years old. Our grandparents used *tulsi* for cough, turmeric for cuts, and yoga for back pain long before modern medicines existed.

Under the AYUSH apps project, the main app released for everyone's use is called "Ayush Sanjivani." Though this is not the only one. There are over 2 crore downloads of the app by early 2026.

The app combines grandmother's remedies with science and comes up with suggestions that work without complicating your health with side effects. The app asks fun questions: "Do you feel cold easily?" "Do you get angry fast?" "Is your skin dry or oily?" Based on

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India

Benefits of ABHA: Your Healthcare Solution!

- » **Financial Protection:** ABHA covers healthcare costs, reducing out-of-pocket expenses
- » **Efficient Delivery:** Facilitates cashless transactions & electronic health records for streamlined healthcare
- » **Data-driven Decision Making:** Generates valuable insights for effective policy formulation

ABHA User Identifiers:

- ABHA Number: Unique 14-digit health identifier.
- ABHA Address: Easy-to-remember username for accessing digital health records.
- ABHA Mobile App: Convenient solution for secure health data sharing.

answers, it tells your *dosha* (from *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kafa*). Then suggests foods, exercises, and routines customised for you specifically. Like some people should eat warm foods, others should avoid spicy stuff – it's personalised!

The app has a rich knowledge base of home remedies. Thousands of them for common problems like headache, stomach ache, sleeplessness, skin rashes and joint pain. The remedies are all using kitchen ingredients. For example, for headache it will inform: "Apply sandalwood paste on forehead." Similarly, for acne: "Face pack with neem leaves and turmeric." The remedies are based on things tht most Indians have at home. The app shares Yoga videos for your common problems and can help to book an Ayurveda doctor for you as there are over 1.5 lakh AYUSH wellness centres exist across India. The app shows the nearest one on map (uses GPS), their phone number, and you can book an appointment. Like eSanjeevani, this app can also facilitate a video call for you, but with an Ayurvedic doctor.

6. National Health Portal and NCD Tools: Fighting India's Big Health Enemies

The National Health Portal (www.nhp.gov.in) is like a massive online health library created by the Health Ministry. NCD stands for Non-Communicable Diseases. These are the diseases that don't spread from person to person but kill slowly, like diabetes, high BP, heart attacks, cancer, and lung diseases. In India, these are bigger killers than infectious diseases like TB or malaria! The portal and its related apps aim to educate everyone and help manage these conditions at home. Crores

of people visit the portal or use NCD apps across the country.

When you visit the portal, you can type any disease name and the later will explain to you in a simple language: what it is, what causes it, symptoms, treatment, prevention. The information has been written by actual doctors from AIIMS and other top hospitals. The app is available in many Indian languages. It's like having a medical encyclopaedia in our local languages.

7. MyGov Challenges: Making Wellness Fun with Contests and Prizes!

MyGov (www.mygov.in) is the Government of India's citizen engagement portal. Think of it as a website and app where the government talks directly to people. They run contests, ask opinions on policies, and importantly, wellness challenges! Every month or so, there's a new challenge related to health in which you can participate and win prizes! Over 50 lakh people have joined wellness challenges so far.

Here are some examples of the monthly challenges it posted:

- **30-Day No Sugar Challenge:** Give up sugar in tea/coffee for a month. Post a daily selfie holding your sugarless tea. Win certificates, some lucky winners get smartwatches!
- **Yoga Streak Challenge:** Do 15 minutes of yoga every day for 21 days. Upload a picture of your yoga mat or a pose (with face if you want). Win yoga kits!
- **10,000 Steps Daily Challenge:** Sync with Fit India app, walk 10k steps for 15 days straight. Top scorers get fitness bands.
- **Millet Recipe Contest:** Cook a dish using millets, click a nice photo, share recipe. Best 100 recipes get published in a government booklet and win cash prizes (Rs 5,000-Rs 10,000)!
- **Family Fitness Challenge:** Whole family participates. Click a photo of family doing any physical activity together (cycling, dancing, walking). Most creative entries win tablets or family gym memberships.

MyGov Challenges prove that we don't need boring lectures about wellness as awareness can be created through interesting, interactive and participatory activities as well. They can be exciting, social, rewarding, and fun!

These tools are for us. They are free, available everywhere and powerful. They are helping us in making our villages healthier and cities stronger. When are you downloading and using them? ☐



Winning the Inner Game for Peak Performance

The mental aspect of the game often goes unnoticed and is unrecognised by both the audience and sports professionals at times. Yet, behind every moment of sporting brilliance lies in a complex psychological process that is just as trained, rehearsed, and fragile as physical skill.

When India's top batsman hits a six at a crucial moment, we applaud the technique; when India's top shooter hits a bullseye, we marvel at the precision; when a champion wrestler pins an opponent in the final seconds, we celebrate the physical dominance. What we do not acknowledge is the mental awareness while hitting that six, the extreme focus needed for that bullseye or the psychological composure to execute that pin in the final moments. The mental aspect of the game often goes unnoticed and is unrecognised by both the audience and sports professionals at times.

Yet, behind every moment of sporting brilliance lies in a complex psychological process that is just as trained, rehearsed, and fragile as physical skill.

As someone who has lived both as an athlete and now as a sports psychologist, I have experienced this reality from both sides. I know what it feels like to stand on a firing line where silence is deafening, your heart rate feels louder than the crowd, and one intrusive thought can undo months of preparation. I also know what it feels like to sit across from athletes who appear strong, successful, and composed but are quietly battling anxiety, self-doubt, burnout, or emotional exhaustion.

An athlete's journey is filled with excessive psychological demands, whether it is maintaining focus for long periods of time or handling performance pressure in high-stakes competitions.

The mental side of the game requires equal attention and needs to be worked on while training to be an elite athlete. Famous athletes like Virat Kohli, Simone Biles, and Naomi Osaka have spoken openly about mental health challenges that they have faced in their journey. Athletes have often spoken about challenges like burnout, depression, and anxiety due to constant pressure to perform. So it is equally important to take care of the mental well-being alongside the physical well-being.

I remember a competition early in my shooting career where everything looked perfect on paper. My physical preparation was solid, my scores in training



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were consistent, and my own expectations were sky high. Yet, the moment I stepped onto the range, my body felt unfamiliar. My breath shortened, my thoughts raced, and the more I tried to "control" myself, the more disconnected I felt. I didn't perform poorly because of a lack of skill. I struggled because my mind was overloaded.

This experience is not unique. It is simply under-discussed.

Having said that, 'mental toughness' is something that is expected to be innate or to be consistently present in a champion athlete. However, in sports psychology literature, mental toughness is the ability to maintain optimal performance and psychological stability under pressure, utilising skills such as focus, confidence, and emotional regulation. These skills are not inborn but rather can be acquired and developed through consistent practice and psychological skill training. A healthy athletic mindset is not about being relentlessly positive, self-punitive, overstriving, or suppressing emotions. Instead, it is about creating a flexible, resilient, and self-aware relationship with one's thoughts and feelings. True mental strength in sport is not about the absence of vulnerability; it is the ability to face challenges with awareness and adaptability. It is about embracing effort and discipline without obsession and rigidity.

Adding to this, mental well-being in sport is not the responsibility of the athlete alone. Coaches, organisations, and family systems must understand the importance of a healthy environment that fosters individual growth and mental well-being. Encouraging rest, normalising emotional expression, supporting sport-life balance, and valuing athletes beyond results are some crucial steps. A culture that glorifies overtraining, discourages rest, and equates worth with results creates an environment where mental distress is almost inevitable. Conversely, environments that prioritise holistic development foster both performance and longevity.

I still remember a phase in my career when my scores were steady, my training looked disciplined, and from the outside, everything appeared "on track." Yet internally, I was carrying a quiet heaviness. There was no single crisis, just accumulated pressure, expectations, and a growing fear of letting people down. Like many athletes, I had learnt to normalise this discomfort and push through it without questioning it.

One day after training, my coach didn't talk about technique, numbers, or competition plans. Instead, he paused and asked me a simple question: "*How are you doing mentally?*" It caught me off guard. In years of high-performance sport, very few people had asked me that directly. That conversation changed something for me. For the first time, I felt permitted to speak honestly without worrying about being perceived as weak or uncommitted. I spoke about the pressure I felt, the overthinking before competitions and the constant need to feel in control.

While that moment of support made a meaningful difference, it also highlighted something else for me. My coach cared deeply about my well-being, but like many coaches in high-performance sport, he was not formally trained to deal with the mental and emotional complexities athletes experience. At times, this made the experience feel isolating. I had space to acknowledge that I was struggling, but very few structured tools to understand *how* to work with my thoughts, emotions, and pressure responses in a systematic way. It was during this phase that I began to see mental training not just as a personal need, but as a structural gap within the sporting system. I realised that care and intention alone are not always enough; athletes also need evidence-based psychological support.

Mental training, when done professionally, it is not about motivational talks or quick fixes. It is a systematic process, just like physical conditioning, where skills such as attentional control, emotional regulation, acceptance, self-talk, imagery, and pressure management are developed deliberately and progressively. These skills allow athletes to perform effectively not only when things are going well, but especially when they are not.

Talent, discipline, and physical preparation are planned meticulously, yet psychological preparation is still expected to develop organically, through experience, trial and error, or sheer willpower.

Mental well-being and performance are not separate conversations in sport. An athlete who feels psychologically supported is better able to focus, recover from mistakes, regulate emotions under pressure, and sustain motivation across long and demanding seasons. These are not abstract benefits; they directly influence performance outcomes.

Furthermore, working on the mental aspect of the game is not limited to what happens on the field of play

but is impacted by your lifestyle, your support system, and your overall environment.

Having spaces, relationships, and routines that exist outside the field of play becomes important for psychological balance.

For me, one unexpected but deeply grounding presence has been my cat. My cat is an important part of my support system, giving me unconditional acceptance and support that feels rare in a performance-driven environment. On days when training felt overwhelming, or competitions didn't go as planned, coming home to a small, uncomplicated routine created a pause I didn't realise I needed. In those moments, there was no expectation to perform, improve, or be mentally tough.

There was just presence.

Elite athletes often share their lives with pets, finding them to be a source of comfort, stress relief, and unconditional love. Abhinav Bindra, Olympic gold medallist, has repeatedly acknowledged the presence of his furry companions during long and demanding training cycles, and has also expressed a deep sense of gratitude towards his pets during his winning moments.

The big takeaway is that behind the medals, records, and match-winning moments are human beings who need spaces where they are not athletes first. Sometimes, mental recovery does not come from another drill, technique, or performance review, but from a quiet walk, a shared meal, a laugh with someone who knows you beyond your sport, or a cat waiting patiently at home, unimpressed by rankings and indifferent to results.

Mental excellence and well-being are not about the absence of difficult thoughts; they are about the ability to respond to them with awareness and skill. These skills can be learnt, practised and developed in a scientific and structured way with the support of professionals.

Furthermore, mental well-being is influenced by the overall environment of the athlete, including sporting relationships: coaches, team, and organisations, family systems, and the life that they live outside the field of play.

Perhaps the real measure of sporting excellence is not just the six, the bullseye, or the pin, but the mind that learns to breathe and stay present when everything is on the line. □



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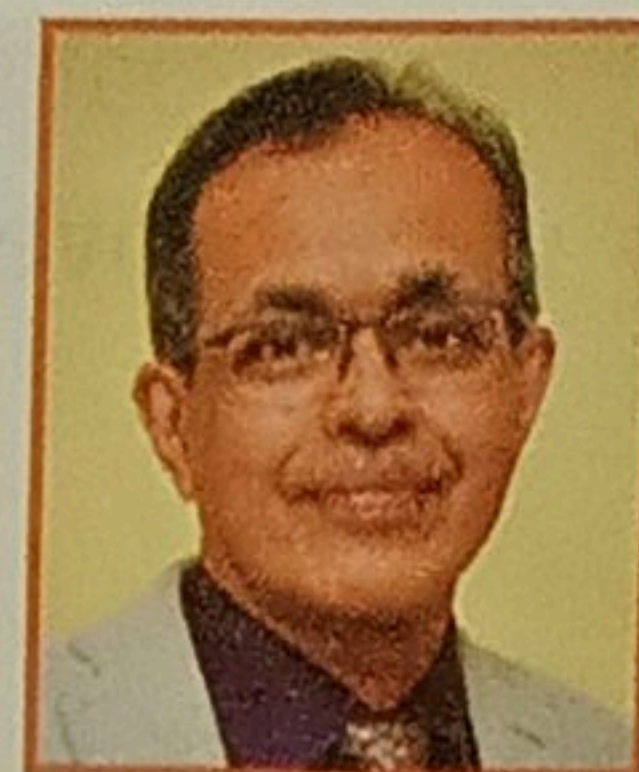


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Bappi Lahiri: A Different Maestro

*"The cast of my films did not matter! My job was to make good songs."
Bappi-da, as he was affectionately known, was always different—in every possible way.*

Four years will have elapsed since Bappi Lahiri attained immortality on February 15. 450 films (in Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Kannada and English) and several non-film albums (including English) have been embellished with his prodigious talent. Bappi-da, as he was affectionately known, was always different—in every possible way. So let us begin at the beginning.

The Different Beginnings

Alokes Ahir (Bappi was his pet name) was born on 27 November 1952 in Jalpaiguri. He was

the only child of his parents, Aparesh and Bansari Lahiri, both Bengali classical singers and musicians. His roots are from Mohanpur, Sirajganj (presently in Bangladesh). The family migrated to West Bengal after the Partition of Bengal in 1947.

Bappi was a mere three years old when he took to playing the *tabla* as if to the manor born. He was initially trained by his parents. Lata Mangeshkar was close to his father—she had blessed him, he said, when he was just four years old and had sat on her lap when she visited the Lahiri home. On her advice, from the age



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of five, his father put him under Pandit Samta Prasad for training in *tabla*.

With his father's encouragement, the first song a 14 year-old Bappi recorded was *Hazar bachhor-pore*, a Bengali song based on Rabindra Sangeet, with Hindustan Records in Kolkata. This song has since achieved cult status in Bangladesh and continues to be performed by multiple singers.

Bappi got a break with the Bengali film, *Daadu* (1969) as one of its four composers with Anil Dutta, Kalipada Sen and Subodh Ray. His first film song was sung by Lata Mangeshkar. He also did the Bengali *Janatar Adalat*, in 1972 as one of two composers with Kalipada Sen. Little did he know that 22 years later, he would score music for the Hindi *Janta Ki Adalat*, which meant the same as the title of his second film!

Bappi's Hindi innings began with *Hari Hari Chhaya*, for which he recorded a song by Mohammed Rafi, but the film never got going. His first release was *Nanha Shikari* (1973), produced by his relative, Shomu Mukerji (Kajol's father): Bappi's mother was related to Shomu's mother.

Three films—the songless *Charitra* (Parveen Babi's debut), *Bazar Band Karo* and *Ek Ladki Badnaam Si*—followed. The first breakthrough came with the musical hit, *Zakhmee* (1975). Its producer, Tahir Husain (Aamir Khan's father) and Bappi went on to do five films till 1986's *Locket*. Bappi also debuted as singer in *Nothing is impossible* with Mohammed Rafi and Kishore Kumar.

The other movie whose audio released in 1975 was *Chalte Chalte* (1976), a non-star-cast film that saw Bappi deliver classics like Kishore Kumar's *Chalte Chalte* and Bappi's breakthrough as a singer in *Jaana Kahaan Hai* with Sulakshana Pandit.

Contrary to what his later image might lead to assume, Bappi's training was completely in Indian classical music, though his open mind and predilection for rhythm took him big-time into all forms of contemporary Western music. After 1975, he delivered an array of small, medium-budget and big-ticket films whose music oozed melody. His songs from *Paapi* (*Shama Jale Ya Na Jale*), *Aap Ki Khatir* (*Bambai Se Aaya Mera Dost*), *College Girl* (*Pyar Maanga Hai Tumhi Se*), *Phir Janam Lenge Hum* (the title-track) and *Toote Khilone* (*Maana Ho Tum Behad Haseen*), for example, were the mainstays of these films. "The cast of my films did not matter!" Bappi told me once. "My job was to make good songs."

The Different Rhythms

It was with *Suraksha* (1979) that Bappi carved a distinct identity. With *Mausam Hai Gaane Ka* and *Dekha Hai Maine Tumhe Phir Se Palat Ke*, he blazed into chartbuster terrain to establish the disco song in Hindi cinema. Emboldened by its success, Bappi went the rhythmic way, with hits like *Hari Om Hari* (*Pyaara Dushman*) and *Mere Jaisi Haseenon Ka Dil* and *Rambha Ho* (*Armaan*) inspired by foreign songs.

"Which major composer has not done that?" he countered when asked about this. "Older composers have even copied complete symphonies as well as *Bandishein* and Indian folk! I have been open about it by choosing very famous songs like *One Way Ticket* for *Pyaara Dushman* or *Lambada* for *Sochna Kya* from *Ghayal*. My Bengali fans will recognise their folk song that I adapted for *Ove Maine Chori Chori* (*Dalaal*) and my Marathi listeners will know from where *Main Tera Tota* (*Paap Ki Duniya*) was inspired. After *Suraksha* and *Pyaara Dushman* my image changed and I was expected to do such songs. But it was my original songs that proved as much, if not more, popular!"

The Different Hit-Machine

Disco Dancer, the monstrous 1982 hit finally clinched Bappi's image in association with Mithun Chakraborty again. The songs became a rage, the film a cult hit also in Russia and China, and Bappi won the China Gold award for Best Music for songs like *I Am A Disco Dancer*, *Yaad Aa Raha Hai* and *Jimmy Jimmy Jimmy*.

The Mithun-Bappi wave (with filmmaker B Subhash or others) continued with *Kasam Paida Karne Wale Ki*, *Dance Dance* and other films.

Alongside, *Namak Halaal* proved to be Bappi's entry into the A-league. The 1980s was the decade of cult Bappi songs, many rendered by him, the start of over 30 Gold and Platinum Discs he won for record and cassette sales, and the Jeetendra-South Indian spree of hits in movies produced largely by the Padmalaya banner. "He would come down South with his harmonium and compose and record there," Jeetendra recalled.

Bappi also won the Filmfare award for the Prakash Mehra musical, *Sharaabi*, and entered private albums and singles arena with *Superuna*, his chartbusting album with Runa Laila. The 1980s was studded thus with a conglomeration of hits led by film scores like *Himmatwala*, *Mawaali*, *Tohfa*, *Saaheb*, *Mohabbat*, *Aitbaar*, *Aandhi Toofan*, *Ilzaam*, *Paap Ki Duniya*, *Hatya*, *Prem Pratigya* and more.

Alongside these mega-hits, Bappi also scored deep melodies that were his true forte, like the *Aitbaar Ghazal* (*Kisi Nazar Ko Tera Intezaar*), the soft croons of Ramsay films like *Aur Kaun?* (*Haan Pehli Baar*) or the semi-classical score of *Sheeshay Ka Ghar*, while most of the above mentioned hit soundtracks had at least one melodic gem.

This was the phase when lyricists Indeevar and Anjaan became, as Bappi put it, "My left arm and my right arm." Bappi often highlighted that any hit song was teamwork and that the words were very important. This, he declared, was a key reason for the success of re-creations and also the poor shelf-life of millennium musicals. What's more, he entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* for recording over 180 songs for 33 films in 1985.

The Different Innovator

In the 1990s and the millennium, trends changed drastically, especially after the exit of Kishore Kumar (Bappi's mother considered him her brother, so Bappi referred to him as Kishore *mama*), the curtailing of work by Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle, and the emergence of a new breed of composers and music barons. But Bappi was unfazed. He scored aces like *Aaj Ka Arjun*, *Ghayal*, *Dalaal* and *Aankhen* and expanded his foreign collabs, turning lyricist, actor and also producer ("Just like my idol, Kishore *mama*!" he told me) with *Rock Dancer* and *Love Story 98*.

His English album, *Habiba*, earned him the name of the "Million-Selling Medallion Man" as he was known for wearing a plethora of gold ornaments ("Gold proved lucky for me, and I was inspired by Elvis Presley!"). And in-film or otherwise, Bappi went global with a vengeance, delivering singles, albums and film soundtracks featuring international artistes Samantha Fox, Apache Indian, Boy George.

Bappi also dubbed for the animation character Tamatoa in the 2016 *Moana*, and for Elton John in the 2017 *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*. His remix of hits, called *Asli Baap Mix*, was recorded in Hollywood. His album with Yoga ace Bikram Choudhury was the first-ever Indian album to be launched by American senator Edward Kennedy. In 2012, his album, *World Peace, Love & Harmony* was among the top five albums being considered for a Grammy nomination. He was also selected to be a jury member in the Grammy Awards. Bappi's son Bappa, is also a singer, composer and record producer today.

Back home, he also acted in Kishore Kumar's *Badhti Ka Naam Dadhi*, *Main Aurr Mrs Khanna* and *It's Rocking: Dard-E-Disco*. From 2006, he began singing under other composers, beginning with Vishal-Shekhar's *Bombai Nagariya* (*Taxi No. 9-2-11*) and A R Rahman's *Guru*, under Sajid-Wajid, Krsna, Anu Malik, Himesh Reshamiya and others, and his songs were re-created in films as varied as *Golmaal 3*, *Chandni Chowk to China*, *The Dirty Picture*, *Badrinath Ki Dulhania* and as we go to press, the Telugu *Raja Saab*.

In the millennium, he also worked as only background music composer in films like *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Maara*, *Love At Times Square* and *Jung*.

The Different Human Being

The composer who, besides himself and daughter Rema, gave breakthroughs to singers like Vijay Benedict, Sharon Prabhakar, Alisha Chinoy and Parvati Khan, was a simple man with only one purpose in life—music. With a high repeat quotient among filmmakers, from Prakash Mehra to B Subhash, K Raghavendra Rao, K Bapaiah, Bapu, Pahlaj Nihalani and later even Dev Anand, he was earlier termed a "poor man's version of R D Burman". However, he stated that his style was more like his icons S D Burman, Madan Mohan and Kalyanji-Anandji and that his only competitors in the 1980s and early 1990s were "good friends Laxmikant-Pyarelal". He was also the only film composer to actually join a political party: the BJP, in 2014. Whichever way we looked at him, the legend was different. □

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