

## Repackaging Ayurveda in Bengal: An Entry into the Global Market (1990-2010)

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**Abstract:** *The present paper attempts to highlight how Ayurveda has been geared up to an entirely new dimension where it has bypassed the traditional mode and has acquired a commercial undertaking bound by market imperatives such as 'nice-packaging', 'good pricing structure', and over-the-counter selling of the products. This shift in the paradigm is the resultant urban demand where the urban- middle class has become the most important consumers for large manufacturers such as Dabur, Himalaya. Hence, the paper will indicate the means as to how traditional Ayurveda repackaged itself and entered the global market.*

**Keywords:** *Ayurveda, Advertisements, Bengal, Consumerism, Global Market, Media, Pharmaceutical Companies, Repackaging, Urban Demand.*

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In postcolonial India the new age economy with burgeoning commercial pharmaceutical industry offered a new space for the traditional knowledge, which, nevertheless, required a new packaging into a scientifically proven format. However, certain peculiar socially oriented outcomes could also be noted in the form of phenomena like the growing demand for something claimed as an 'Ayurveda life style'.<sup>1</sup> Here we take the instances of how advertisements and other social media enhanced the rapid dissemination of commercialization of Ayurveda. It is observed from the scholarly writing of Madhuri Sharma that in the colonial period dissemination of medical entrepreneurship occurred through print-media. It disseminated new kinds of information about health, hygiene and medicine to an eagerly receptive public. She further pointed out advertisements were active agencies that created a consumer for medical products and services across a variety of medical systems. She also opined that like the European counterparts the Indians adopted communication and marketing strategies through advertisements to capture the clientele market.<sup>2</sup>

Maarten Bode, on the other hand, opined that a shift has occurred in the nature of the consumers of Ayurvedic medicines and products. In his words, the last decade of the twentieth century "focused on the educated, urban middle class to market over-the-counter brands" of Ayurvedic products as observed by the Ayurvedic firms like Dabur, Zandu and Himalaya. To him, newspaper articles, advertisements and industry statements available through company websites provided a new consumer market for indigenous medicine and other herbal products.<sup>3</sup>

Dominic Wujastyk emphasized on the recent popularizing mode of social dissemination of Ayurveda through the internet service and refers to international sites like National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA) in the United States and Ayurvedic Practitioners Association (APA) in the United States as well involved with Ayurveda. Wujastyk informs about the website of Alternative Medicine Foundation which provides information on alternative medicine to "public and health professionals". He uses the word 'New Age Ayurveda' to indicate that a shift has occurred in the presentation of Ayurveda in the modern world. He traces this shift of Ayurveda from "reactive medicine that cures ills to preventive medicines that offers positive lifestyle index".<sup>4</sup> Wujastyk further points out that this positive change in the life of mankind encompasses "wellness and beauty as fundamental components of good health".<sup>5</sup>

Madhulika Banerjee mainly dealing with standardization and 'pharmaceuticalisation' of Ayurvedic medicines referred to the case of two Ayurvedic manufacturing companies, Dabur and the Himalaya Drug Company. Her reference to advertisement is not the direct fashion of that of Sharma and Bode. Rather while discussing about Dabur's 'positioning' its product in the market she refers to advertisement. But here also she points out that merely advertising a given product does not bring it to a saleable quality. In fact she highlights that Dabur's story of success lies in the fact that the company has constructed the popular image of itself of that "of a modern company that sells tradition".<sup>6</sup> The 1990s was a period

of globalization and economic liberalism that witnessed a race for the entry of Ayurveda into the global market. Ayurveda was repackaged with new entity with modern names that sounded western, new packaging, new labeling, and offering 'natural' solutions for managing chronic diseases and other ailments like diabetes, arthritis, asthma, stomach and dermatological problems, loss of vitality and virility. Apart from this it also offered solutions for the ill-effects of environmental hazards, hectic life- style marked by fast food.

A significant trend observed in the late 1980s and 1990s was the rise in the beauty industry. The new addition in this segment was the women's magazine, Sananda. It was launched in 1986 and covered issues like self development and empowerment of women with traditional columns on fashion, beauty and cookery. The beauty columns offered easy homemade remedies for working women and also columns on women health.<sup>7</sup> Another magazine, The Sunday Telegraph Supplement Graphiti in its beauty columns by Bridgett Jones and Suparna Tirkha Dewan offered natural solutions and home remedies for beauty problems under the segment 'The Natural Way' and later on 'The Look'. As already clear that the shift from a rural base towards an urban clientele marked the characteristic feature of this period. In advertisements also the beauty industry was rising a high tide of visibility.

From the 1990's Baidyanath competed in the market with products like Lal Dantmanjan, Rumartho, Kabz-har, Liverol Momerex, and Dabur with Nature Care and Panchpushp and advertised them to be strictly Ayurvedic.<sup>8</sup> Another trend was observed where Ayurveda medicinally got associated with cure for sexual diseases and sexual rejuvenation acquiring a new look and new name like Vita X.<sup>9</sup> Also other magazines like Bartaman, Desh, Nabakollol and newspaper like Jugantar, Anandabazar, Dainik Basumati consisted of advertisements on Ayurvedic medicines, oils, soap of different pharmaceutical companies. They also featured the similar kinds of advertisements. There were coming of the companies like Ayur, Herby, Naturoma with new labels. The relabeling was seen when Parachute coconut oil was relabeled as Parachute Active Plants and Himani Boro Plus tagged it as Ayurvedic.<sup>10</sup> It is also observed that during this time DD Doordarshan and several private channels were telecasting talk shows on Ayurveda. These shows discussed on the relevance of Ayurveda in the present day and focused on particular disease treatments. The first TV live chat show telecast by DD Doordarshan was on 'Ulcerative Colitis' by Ayurvedic consultant Dr. Harish Verma in 1999.<sup>11</sup>

Dr Verma suggested home and herbal remedies for the treatment of colitis. In another talk show organized by Doordarshan was on 'Ayurveda- the way of Life' where Dr. Ramesh Varier discussed on relevance of Ayurveda in certain non-fatal chronic diseases like constipation, cold and discussed about the 'grandma's concept'/ age-old remedy for curing common ailments. He also discussed that Ayurveda way of life needs to be followed for the betterment of life.<sup>12</sup>

It is also observed that articles on Ayurveda are also seen on websites that focus on purity and safety of herbal products on one hand and also about the existence of lead toxicity on the other. However despite such claims there are a numerous sites offering advertisements

on Ayurveda of different Ayurvedic companies and also their products. Web advertising started in 1994 and eventually started online advertising on Ayurvedic products of different pharmaceutical companies as a marketing strategy to let their products be known to the people all across the world. The era of globalization had a tremendous impact on the different pharmaceuticals companies as it is not only bringing the new concept of 'New Age Ayurveda' encompassing wellness centers, yoga, meditation and spa-culture but also finding a niche in these alterations. The Ayurvedic pharmaceutical companies launched websites for their products like Dabur, Zandu, Baidyanath and Himalaya reoriented themselves, improved and advanced their marketing strategy, incorporated modern machineries and laboratory tests for standardization of their products and in due course became brand names. Himalaya Herbal Health Care produced medicines for Gastric Care, Joint Care, Nervine Care, Skin Care, Respiratory Care, Cardiac Care, Diabetes Care, Immuno Care, Women's Health.<sup>13</sup> Dabur also produces medicines for prevention of stress, herbal cough syrup, joint pain.<sup>14</sup> Baidyanath too plans to introduce herbal medicines in newly emerging therapeutic segments including diabetology, cardiovascular diseases, hepatology as there are no herbal remedies available for such diseases.<sup>15</sup> It leads to the development of a standardized formulation for HP-200, known as Zandopa for treatment of Parkinson. Jupiter Pharmaceutical Limited, a West Bengal pharmaceutical Company prepares medicines for digestion, diarrhoea, dysentery for children, oil for arthritic pain joint and muscle pain.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from these websites articles are also found which provides information on Ayurveda. The Times of India published an article on five ayurvedic herbs as healers under the title 'Apni Haldi' in the segment Herbal Healers, where it mentioned that turmeric is believed to be the destroyer of tridosha in the human body. However, advertisements are not limited to print media or other media agencies now -a- days. In fact, the present day advertisements are also featured on website advertisements, online videos, social networking sites, mobile devices etc. Wujastyk comments that these online advertisements are increasing so fast that to keep a track record of them is quite difficult. It is simply because of the maximum coverage area and the fast speed of delivering information that millions can view the product advertisement.<sup>17</sup> This not only attracts and engages the viewers to purchase their own required products but also benefits the companies to showcase their vast range of varied products. In the case of Ayurvedic medicines, a large number of pharmaceutical companies advertise their products online to be directly provided to the consumers. The availability of the DTC (Direct to Consumer) products is made easy either through internet banking or a simple phone call as pointed out by D.L. Frosch and D. Grande.<sup>18</sup> Advertisement standard council of India (ASCI) a self regulatory organization tries to maintain and enhance the public confidence in advertising. But there is no legal standing but only self-regulation in ASCI. It also upheld complaints against Dabur, Himalaya, Emami and Slim Fast Herbal Capsules for some of their claims in advertising their products which the ASCI did not regard as truthful.<sup>19</sup>

Ayurveda has entered a phase of new orientation and its global encounter has provided a new identity where it is not confined to just treatment but a holistic approach towards life. But in this shifting paradigm it becomes prominent that the New Age Ayurveda is creating an urban clientele group who are more concerned with beauty salons, beauty treatment, spa-culture and cosmeceuticals. On the other hand, those who visit the hospital for treatments belong to a completely different world distanced from the abovementioned practices. There is a third venue of Ayurvedic practices which thrive on roadside purchases of medicinal ingredients and there are also evidences of leaflets in trains and buses where cure for sexual and other chronic diseases are advertised. This section of clientele should not be identified solely with the lower income group consumers. The 'New Age Ayurveda' with an associated outlet/rider providing the scope for self-medication has become a prevalent factor as also found from the survey reports on Ayurvedic pharmacies. A class of consumers has appeared on the scene who do not visit the Ayurvedic practitioners but consume medicines on the basis of the advertisements of the pharmaceutical companies.

Social acceptance of Ayurveda is expanding through various outlets in the present scenario. Apart from hospital treatment, the new social trend shows more concern for the notions like 'safe', 'natural', 'herbal', 'healthy living' which attracts the new generation so much that they willingly purchase Ayurvedic medicines without consultation and prescription. It enables us to understand this phenomenon from the point of the processes of commercialization as reflected in advertisements.

It is however observed that with the progress of time only a few pharmaceutical companies who could keep up with the changing demands of time could survive. This has been so justly pointed out also by Madhulika Banerjee and Maarten Bode who point to the direction of newer concepts in packaging and remodeling of the products as a new aspect of marketing in the new age along with advertising. Ayurveda is not limited to purchase of ayurvedic health tonics. In fact, over-the-counter ayurvedic medicines are in demand particularly, the products of branded pharmaceutical companies. The branding of Ayurveda as a marketing strategy has become an important factor of commercialization. New Age Ayurveda has spread and become a wellness therapy where affluent people can buy package of healthy and holistic life. In a way the scene spells of a certain kind of homogenization and standardization of Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals leading to the choking of traditional treatment service. Seen from this perspective it may appear to be that the newly relocated Ayurveda is built up on the languishing strata of traditional 'system' itself.

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