



## **MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA: POSSIBILITIES and PROBLEMS OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICAL TREATMENT**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the problems and potential of medical tourism in India. India has become one of the destination countries for medical tourists from around the world. However, due to issues at both the policy and operational levels, India, like many other such countries, faces several problems in the development of its medical tourism industry. Indian medical tourism can be divided into four categories: surgical treatment, cosmetic surgery, alternative medical treatment, and wellness treatment. In this study, the authors focus on alternative medical treatment and wellness tourism and explore the possibilities and problems.

Results of the current study show that India's medical tourism industry has potential, as international tourists can visit India at a relatively low cost, there is an easy visa process. India offers world-class and standardized medical services, services for alternative medical treatment, and more. Nonetheless, to realize this potential, the medical tourism industry in India must address with a variety of problems, including the absence of standardized herbal drugs and medicines as well as authentic raw materials, lagging processing technologies, the need for improved infrastructure, and lack of sufficient training for non-medical staff in cross-cultural sensitivity and language skills.

**Keywords:** *alternative medicine, AYUSH, health tourism, India, medical tourism*

## Introduction

Medical tourism has become popular in recent years in countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, UK, USA, Japan, Korea, and India (Turner, 2007; Connell, 2006). Notably, the demand for Indian medical tourism is significantly higher than in many of these other countries (Mishra & Shailesh, 2012), and the number of people crossing national borders seeking medical care in India is increasing year by year (Ministry of AYUSH, 2019). High medical treatment costs in the home country, dissatisfaction with long waiting times, a low-cost carrier, development of almost all medical technologies and improvements in services are considered to be among the factors explaining this growth (Turner, 2007). In recent years India is a place for "First World Health Care at Third World prices" (Turner, 2007). However, despite recent trends and a government focus on medical tourism in India, there are still relatively few medical tourists coming from other parts of the world.

Competition in the healthcare industry is intense everywhere in the world. Historically, wealthy patients from developing countries have often visited developed countries for top quality medical care (Herrick, 2007). Today, many poor patients from developed countries travel for medical reasons to areas once characterized as "third world." These patients are looking for high-quality medical care at affordable prices (Herrick, 2007). For this reason, India is becoming a medical hub.

Medical tourism in India can be divided into four categories: surgical treatment tourism, cosmetic surgery tourism, alternative medical tourism, and wellness treatment tourism. In this study, we focus on alternative treatment and wellness tourism. These categories have received particular attention and support from the Indian government (Ministry of AYUSH, 2015; IANS, 2017). Alternative treatment is composed of Ayurveda, Unani, Yoga, Naturopathy, Siddha, and Homeopathy (collectively referred to as AYUSH), details of which are presented in the literature review section). In general, wellness tourism focuses on the activities of human life and serves those who seek to balance the mental, emotional, physical, professional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of their existence.

In recent years, global interest in traditional medicine has increased (Dawn & Pal, 2011; Kunwar, 2019) and Ayurveda is recognized as traditional Indian medicine (Patwardhan et.al., 2005). The modern epidemiological transition has allowed the growth of the conventional system of medicine

across the world (Gupta et.al., 2015) and traveling across borders to receive high-tech health care is increasing (Dawn & Pal, 2011). Wellness tourism and alternative medical treatment is a part of the traditional medicinal treatment was originated and famous in India. Today, Yoga and Ayurveda are synonymous with Indian medicine. In this stand, exploring potential and obstacles for alternative treatment and wellness tourism in India is necessary, which helps to increase the Indian alternative treatment market in the national and international society.

Mishra & Shailesh (2012) studied alternative medical treatment and explored that traveling abroad, patients not only save a considerable amount of money but also receive world-class service. Gupta et.al. (2015) presented that the Indian healthcare system is well-known for providing quality medical services at an affordable cost. Kunwar (2019) discussed the communication barriers in wellness tourism, and alternative treatments and Bookman (2007) discussed fundamental economic and legal issues in medical tourism. Some other scholars focused on specific topics of alternative treatments. For instance, Ayurveda (Patwardhan et.al., 2005), Yoga (Fontanarosa & Lundberg, 1998; Bhavanani, 2012; Kumar & Bharadwaj, 2016), Unani (Linde et.al., 1997), Siddha (Zysk, 2008) were studied individually.

However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous scholars focused on to explore the potential and obstacles of alternative treatment and wellness tourism in India. Therefore, this paper aims to examine India as a competitive destination for alternative tourism based on potential exploration. It also clarifies the problems and obstacles of alternative medical treatments in India. Based on the results, the authors present the policy implications for the Indian alternative treatment.

## 1. Literature Review

Medical tourism is becoming an increasingly accessible health care opportunity for patients all over the world; it involves primarily and predominantly biomedical procedures, combined with travel and tourism (Dawn & Pal, 2011). The term "medical tourism" refers to traveling across borders to receive high-tech health care; it was created by travel agencies and mass media to designate the rapidly growing phenomenon of such travel (Dawn & Pal, 2011). It is also called medical travel, health tourism, or global healthcare is the practice of traveling abroad to receive healthcare services. Medical tourism consists of tourism for surgical treatment, cosmetic surgery, complementary alternative medicine (CAM), and wellness treatment (Dawn & Pal, 2011). In this

study, the focus is on alternative medical treatment, and wellness tourism, two areas emphasized by the Indian government. Further, the majority of wellness tourism originated in India. Today, Yoga and Ayurveda are synonymous with Indian medicine.

Seeking medical care in another country is motivated by a variety of factors, including long waiting lists for surgery and other specific treatments in the home country, the high cost of selective therapies at home, and significant reductions in travel barriers that allow more convenient and less costly international travel. Typically, by traveling abroad, patients not only save a considerable amount of money but also receive world-class service (Mishra & Shailesh, 2012). This has a great appeal to many people (Carrera & Bridges, 2006). The modern-day epidemiological transition has allowed the growth of the traditional system of medicine across the world (Gupta et.al., 2015; Meštrović, 2014). In this context, India has the potential to be one of the primary health tourism destinations not only for Asian visitors but also for tourists from elsewhere in the world.

The Indian healthcare system is well-known for providing quality medical services at an affordable cost. Health tourism packages provide a "basket of services" by merging traditional medicines with the existing allopathic system to attract patients across borders (Gupta et.al., 2015). Reflecting on the increased popularity of health tourism, generally, the health tourism industry in India has been growing by 25%-30% annually (Mishra & Shailesh, 2012). Private sector corporate houses dominate medical tourism in India; 80% of the hospitals are managed by private sector companies who are ultimately invigorating and transforming India into a global medical tourism destination (Mishra & Shailesh, 2012).

To better understand the concept of medical tourism, it is important to recognize the interrelationship between medical tourism and hospitality in hospitals. Stakeholders in the system need to be aware of the significance of cross-cultural behavior and intercultural communication between host and patient (Kunwar, 2019).

Bookman (2007) conducted research on medical tourism in developing countries and revealed the relationship between medical services and tourism. In this 2007 study, medical tourism is defined as a tour conducted for health purposes. The market is described in terms of its foundation, challenges, opportunities related to sector development, and the health care fairness problem (Bookman, 2007). In the course of the presentation, the author describes the fundamental economic and legal issues surrounding medical tourism (Bookman, 2007).

CAM encompasses modern or rejuvenated ancient practices that are claimed to have preventive or curative medical effects. These practices are not generally recognized in medical science and are typically not based on evidence or sound scientific hypotheses. CAM includes various therapies such as homeopathy, massage-based therapy, naturopathy, diet therapy, and other similar practices (Shakeel et.al., 2011). Generally speaking, medical therapies that are not included in modern scientific guidelines or not recommended by significant scientific associations are classified as CAM (Ray et.al., 2018).

In recent years, global interest in traditional medicine has increased. Patwardhan et.al. (2005) recognize Ayurveda as traditional Indian medicine (TIM) but claim that traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is still considered the world's oldest medical system. However, Renckens (2009) argues that Ayurveda, the science of life and recognizes differences and seeks balance to keep the body healthy. Efforts are currently underway to monitor and regulate herbal and traditional medicine. Although China has succeeded in promoting treatment with more research and science-based approaches, Ayurveda still lacks a broad scientific research and evidence base (Patwardhan et.al., 2005). In this context, the present study deals with the introduction of AYUSH and explores the importance of CAM, such as AYUSH. The elements of AYUSH are described below.

The Hindu holy book Veda (Ayurveda) provides detailed information regarding medicinal herbs used to treat various human diseases. The Vedas include four core books of spirituality, which consider the topics of health, astrology, spiritual business, government, military, poetry, spiritual life and behavior (Shakeel et.al., 2011). The books are known as the four Vedas, i.e. Rik, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva. A part of alternative treatment Yoga is included under Rik Veda (Fontanarosa & Lundberg, 1998) which means Yoga is not only one of the oldest treatments but also a part of religious performance in the Hindu religion.

Yoga is the art of excellent living. Yoga practices help to achieve an individual's higher aims in life. It involves a lifestyle that regulates one's thought, character, and behavior, and is reflected in one's attitude, personality and designs of life. Human consciousness and yogic science are an attempt to understand the mystery of consciousness in relation to Yoga (Kumar & Bharadwaj, 2016). New medical improvements and developments integrate several traditional healing techniques, including Yoga, to provide a basis for promoting healing, health, and longevity. This is a holistic approach to Yoga that faces current health care challenges (Bhavanani, 2012). For

instance, Yoga therapy has been used as a stress reliever in other kinds of health care and additionally helps to address infertility treatment (Jasani & Heller, 2016).

Unani medicine is another ancient method for the treatment of disease. The Unani system of medicine originated in Greece (Shakeel et.al., 2011) and is generally believed to be based on the ideas of Aesculapius. According to Linde et.al (1997), Hippocrates (460-377 BC), the Greek philosopher/ physician, formulated the theoretical framework of Unani medicine. Hippocrates is said to be a descendent of Aesculapius and regarded as the father of Unani medicine. Galen (131-210 AD) further developed the system of Unani medicine. Unani, which deals with the preventive and promotive aspects of human beings and treats health complications caused by ecological and environmental factors, teaches us to maintain health and treat disease by rebalancing unbalanced humor (Linde et.al., 1997).

The Siddha slogan is "Prevention is better than cure." The history of Siddha, along with its principles of diagnosis and treatment, can be compared to that of north India's Ayurvedic medical tradition (Zysk, 2008). A skilled Siddha doctor uses various methods, including an examination of the patient's pulse, urine, tongue, and eyes, to determine any imbalance and to diagnose its essential nature (Bhamra, 2016). Siddha treatment to remedy an imbalance involves the use of plant-based and metal - and mineral-based medicines. The Siddha system of medicine prescribes a healthy way of living.

Homeopathy was introduced to India in the early 19th century. In 1973, the Indian government accepted homeopathy as one of the country's major medical systems. The Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH) was established to regulate education and practice (Ghosh, 2010). There are several reasons that homeopathy is ignored in a number of other countries. According to the Japanese Physicians Society for Homeopathy, the current status of homeopathy in Japan is far from prominent; due to the legal framework, there are no regulations relevant to homeopathic treatment.

The increasing incidence of complex, multi-factorial chronic diseases and multi-morbidity indicates the need for better therapy and treatment (Song et.al., 2016). In medical practice, the use of traditional and complementary alternative medicine (TCAM) is an important part of medical care. An increasing number of patients worldwide rely on TCAM prevention or palliative care (Song et.al., 2016). Given these factors, it will be necessary to place significant emphasis on

medical research and development that will facilitate the promotion and certification of alternative medicine in India.

### **1.1. Alternative Medical Treatment And Medical Tourism In India**

Alternative medicine methods, mainly AYUSH (Ayurveda, Unani, Yoga, Naturopathic, Siddha, and Homeopathy), are rapidly gaining popularity in India. Reflecting this increased interest, the Indian government created the Ministry of AYUSH in 2014, in part to promote medical tourism in the country. To implement appropriate strategies, the government has continued to increase the budget of the AYUSH ministry every year; in 2018 the total budget increased by more than 13% as compared to the previous year [Press Trust of India-PTI, 2018]. The ministry has invested a significant proportion of its money in research and education in order to produce a qualified workforce to work in the medical industry (Ministry of AYUSH, 2019). A central committee has also been established to create the necessary infrastructure and implement a strong regulatory framework.

There is an increasing awareness of alternative medical systems around the world, and the demand for alternative medical treatments is growing rapidly. According to Research and Markets, AYUSH is a \$10 billion market that is expected to grow into a \$15 billion market by 2020 (Research & Markets, 2017). Various startups are working to expand this market, with projects dealing with the repackaging of drugs and formulas for Ayurveda and Homeopathy, and offering preventive and holistic treatments. Patients who have failed allopathy drugs or have suffered from their side effects are recommended for these alternative medical treatments.

Despite advances, however, Indian alternative treatment and wellness tourism is not free from challenges, including composite product development, standardization of products in the international market, product promotion, to name a few. It is in this context that the present study aims to explore the potential and problems of alternative treatment and wellness tourism in India.

The authors first review the literature and present an overview of AYUSH, then generalize this information based on an Indian perspective. Next, the potential and problems of the alternative medicine and wellness industry in India are assessed. Finally, based on study results, the implications of alternative medical treatment, and wellness treatment in India are discussed.

Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) is known by various names. Different types of practices in different ethnic communities are given different labels according to the community and country. For example, in China, the term traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is used (Song et.al., 2016); in India, it is traditional Indian medicine (TIM) (Patwardhan et.al., 2005). The composite term "traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine" (TCAM) is sometimes applied (Song et.al., 2016). In the US, the terms alternative and complementary medicine are frequently used; in Europe, it is most often complementary medicine (Fisher & Ward, 1994). In this study, our use of alternative medical treatment is based on the Indian AYUSH.

## **2. Types of Medical Tourism in India**

Medical tourism can be broadly divided into health tourism and wellness tourism. We further divide these two broad categories into four subcategories: surgical treatment tourism, cosmetic surgery tourism, alternative medical tourism, and wellness treatment tourism. To provide a better understanding of the Indian situation, Figure 1 shows for each of the four medical tourism types the corresponding medical services available in India. Market segment sizes are based on company sales; the competition category refers to competitor countries that are doing the same type of business with other countries; the strength category refers to the relative strength of each medical service in India.



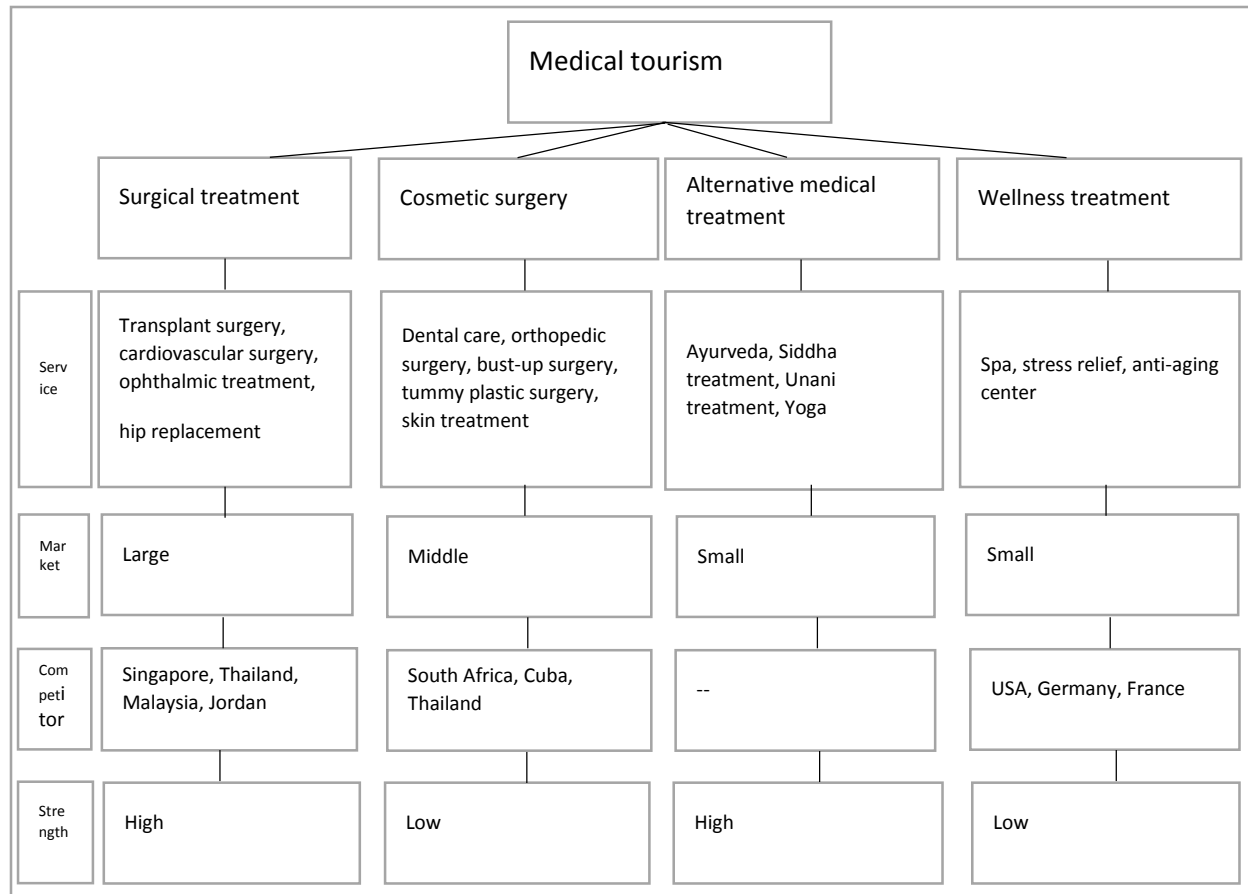


Figure 1. Structure an division of medical tourism in India

Source: (Dawn & Pal, 2011). Modified some by the authors

Surgical medical treatment includes life-threatening surgery, for which the market is vast; this is the strength of medical tourism in India. It is challenging to examine the medical tourism market sales by category. However, Indian hospitals have the largest share (71%) of India's healthcare industry (Biswas et.al., 2017). The leading companies are Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd., Aravind Eye Hospitals, CARE Hospitals, Fortis Healthcare Ltd, Max Hospitals, Manipal Group of Hospitals, and Narayana Health (Dawn & Pal, 2011). Competing countries for surgical medical services include Singapore, Jordan, Thailand, United States, Japan, Malaysia, Costa Rica, South Korea, Mexico, and Turkey. In these countries, treatment costs are relatively higher than in India, which is a strength of Indian medical tourism (Dawn & Pal, 2011).

Cosmetic surgery is medical care that is not directly related to the preservation of human life. The market is considered to be at the middle level. In this category, some surgeries are performed according to a person's preferences, while others are performed to correct the shape of the patient's teeth or face. Although the history of cosmetic surgery is not particularly old in India, it has become quite important and popular over the past 20 years (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). The first hospital to perform plastic surgery called the Department of Plastic Surgery in India was established at the government medical college in Nagpur in 1958. Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Pune, and Chandigarh are the primary sites for cosmetic surgery within India. Competing countries for these services include South Africa, Cuba, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, the United States, Brazil, and Mexico. Due to technological advancements in these countries, India is losing its market share in cosmetic surgery.

Indian alternative medical services consist of unique treatment methods available only in India. Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and Yoga are examples of these alternative methods. In addition to these, patients can also receive treatments in India that are not unique to India. Ayurveda offers not only preventive medicine but also an advanced life philosophy. It prescribes appropriate diets and identifies those that may not be suitable depending on the physical condition of the individual. In recent years, Ayurvedic drugs have attracted attention because the drugs contain herbs, minerals, and biologics (formed with proteins such as oil). In India, the market for herbs used in Ayurvedic treatment is expected to increase to \$ 6.1 billion in 2019 (Ali & Yadav, 2015). Major companies in the Indian herbal market include Himalaya Drug, Emami, Aswini, Ayur, Dabur, and Cholayil Pharma, which have patented herbs and Ayurvedic products in India and abroad.

Wellness tourism involves activities and treatments to improve and balance all the major areas of human life. Wellness addresses the physical, mental, emotional, professional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of one's way of living. The main motivation for wellness tourism is to engage in preventive and active lifestyle enhancement activities, which would include healthy eating, fitness, relaxation, luxury living and healing treatments (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Wellness tourism typically involves such elements as spa treatments, stress relief, anti-aging centers, meditation, acupressure treatments, and acupuncture treatments. According to a report issued by the Global Wellness Institute (2017), the most significant factors in wellness tourism are beauty and anti-aging, healthy living, nutrition, weight loss, wellness lifestyle, the real estate industry, mineral springs, and the hot springs industry. The leading countries in wellness tourism include the United States, Germany, France, China, and Japan. Between 2013 and 2015, the number of wellness tourism trips to India increased by 18% (Global Wellness Institute, 2016), and the revenue from wellness tourism has grown 7.8% over the past five years (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). However, India is still developing its medical tourism sector.

The AYUSH Ministry was established in November 2014 to ensure the optimal development and dissemination of alternative medicine (AYUSH) systems. Its predecessor, the Department of Indian System of Medicine and Homeopathy (ISM&H) had been created in 1995 and renamed AYUSH in 2003. The intention of creating the ministry was to focus on improving education and expanding research in Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (Ministry of AYUSH, 2019).

### **2.1. Introduction of Alternative Medical Treatments of AYUSH**

As noted, AYUSH is the acronym for Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy. Each is described below:

**Ayurveda** - Ayurveda offers a complete system for preventive medicine and healthcare. It has proven effective for many years in India. Ayurveda is based on natural herbs that give an individual advantage. The science of Ayurveda is based on knowledge of the human way of life. If every individual knows his or her way of life, they are able to understand what a good diet and lifestyle for them is. The five elements, such as ether, air, fire, water, and earth, constitute the most important basic concepts of Ayurveda. They are expressed in three Dashas (biological organizations) known as Vata, Pitta, and Kapha (Dawn & Pal, 2011). These biological organizations are used by individuals to fully understand all aspects of body function and establish the harmonious balance necessary for a healthy life.

**Yoga and Naturopathy** - The Sanskrit word "yoke" means Yoga. Yoga is a discipline to improve or develop inherent power in a balanced way. It provides a means to achieve complete self-fulfillment. Yoga can also be defined as the means of linking individual spirits with the universal spirit of God. Further, Yoga is the suppression of mental changes (AYUSH, 2018). It is a tool for self-evolution and enlightenment through physical and spiritual well-being. Several types of Yoga pose vital massage organs to keep them in perfect order. Yoga harmonizes the inside of the body, purifies and detoxifies it, and boosts the immune system.

Naturopathy holds the belief that the human body has unique self-building and self-healing powers. It does not seek out the exact cause of a disease and its specific treatment, but rather it examines and addresses the totality of factors responsible for these conditions, such as unnatural habits of life, thinking, sleeping, working, and environmental factors that can interfere with the normal functioning of the body.

**Unani** - The Unani Medical System holds that the human body is made up of four essential elements, i.e. earth, air, water, and fire, and that these elements have different temperaments cold, hot, wet and dry. When these elements collaborate and interact, a new compound having a new character comes into existence, i.e., hot-wet, hot-dry, cold-wet, and cold-dry. The Unani treatment system depends on observation and physical tests. A person's illness should be regarded as the product of that person's creation and material. The Unani system believes in the promotion of health, prevention of diseases and cure.

Unani medicine includes a variety of practices. Unani therapy consists of venesection, cupping, the promotion of diaphoresis and diuresis, Turkish baths, massage, cauterization, purging, exercise, leeching, and more. Unani diet therapy prescribes specific diets or regulates the quality and quantity of food. Unani pharmacotherapy uses natural, mostly herbal medicines (having animal or mineral origins). A combination or single medications in their raw form is preferred for compound formulations. Unani physiotherapy uses particular techniques of exercise to help balance the homeostasis of the body (World Health Organization, 2010).

**Siddha** - The Siddha system defines disease as a condition in which the normal equilibrium of the five elements is lost, leading to different types of discomfort and pain. The Siddha treatment method is based on the clinical judgment of the doctor after observing the patient and checking pulse, diagnosis, and medical history. According to Siddha, particular foods can improve physical and mental performance or even decrease the risk of disease. The concept of this ancient Indian system is "Food is Medicine and Medicine is Food." Specific food recipes/grains are prescribed, along with medicines for every illness (Sivaraman & Rajalakshmi, 2005).

**Homeopathy** - Today, homeopathy is a rapidly growing system being practiced in many parts of the world. In India, it is widely recognized for the safety of its pills and the gentleness of its cure. According to one study, approximately 10% of the Indian population depends on homeopathy for their health care needs. It is considered the second most popular system of medicine in India (Ministry of AYUSH, 2019). Homeopathic treatments have numerous components and three main agents: (1) the patient with his/her condition and personal characteristics; (2) drugs and their composition and manufacturing processes; and (3) doctors and the various treatment methods and health concepts (Poitevin, 1999).

All of these alternative medical treatment systems attract national and international patients and generate medical tourism in India.

## 2.2. Wellness Tourism

Wellness tourism is another important component of medical tourism in India. It includes spas, stress relief, anti-aging centers, meditation treatments, acupressure treatments, acupuncture treatments, herbal therapy, aromatherapy, batch flower therapy, chromotherapy, hydrotherapy, oil massage therapy, magnetic therapy, mud therapy, and a focus on balanced nutrition. Especially in

recent years, many people have sought a healthier lifestyle and have integrated health into their travel and vacation patterns. The current wellness tourism market contains primary and secondary wellness tourists. For prime wellness of tourists, the only purpose of their trip and reason for their destination choice is wellness treatment. The secondary wellness travelers participate in a wellness experience to rejuvenate or de-stress during their trip or visit, but wellness treatment is not their primary motivation for travel [Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry -FICCI, 2018]. There are a number of destinations in India that are famous for wellness tourism for both domestic and international tourists. India had been featured as one of the top destinations for wellness tourists, with many of the best hotels for wellness treatments. Moreover, India offers access to international standard medical services and healthcare at a relatively low cost. Most of India's wellness service providers are from famous hotels and resorts; tourists check advertisements and search homepages to select their preferred providers.

The annual Indian wellness industry growth rate is 18.6 %, while the global wellness industry is expanding at a rate of 15%. Around the world, China, Brazil, the United States, India, and Indonesia represent the largest growth markets (Manideep et.al., 2018).

### **2.3. Reason for the Growth of Medical Tourism in India**

India is known as the fastest-growing medical destination in the world. In India, travelers have access to treatments and procedures that may not be available in their home country or are unaffordable there. In some cases, there are legal restrictions on certain types of treatments or medicines. There are essentially eight major reasons that make India an ideal medical tourism destination:

- I. The cost of treatment is relatively low compared to countries like the US and UK.
- II. Obtaining medical visas for medical purposes is much easier than in other countries.
- III. World-class medical services with the latest medical devices and technologies are available.
- IV. Reasonable airfares and hotels are offered through travel agencies.
- V. Surgery involves little (almost no) waiting time.

VI. After completing treatment, hospitals can provide services for alternative medical treatment on request (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy, and others).

VII. Qualified and skilled doctors and medical staff who communicate in English are commonly available, which makes it more comfortable for foreign tourists to communicate with their doctors and supporting staff.

VIII. In addition to receiving treatment, medical tourists also have the opportunity to visit some of the most attractive tourist destinations in the world, including the Taj Mahal, one of the world's Seven Wonders.

### **3. Possibilities and Problems of Alternative Medical Treatment**

#### **3.1. Possibilities of Alternative Medical Treatment**

In recent years, advanced computerization and the proliferation of the mass media have facilitated an increase in the number of patients seeking alternative medical treatments (Suzuki, 2004). Alternative medicine is becoming a medical trend worldwide. The range of alternative medicine is broad and includes new treatments not covered by health insurance as well as traditional medicine and folk remedies from various countries and regions across the world. In terms of population percentage, surprisingly few people are convinced of the benefits of modern Western medicine; indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) classifies 65-80% of its global health care operations as "traditional medicine" (Suzuki, 2004).

There are multiple explanations for the growing popularity of alternative medical treatment. Such treatments and therapies help the patient feel better, concentrate on relaxation, and reduce stress allowing patients with serious diseases such as cancer to better cope with their condition. There is substantial evidence that certain complementary therapies can help manage or eliminate some of the symptoms of cancer and reduce the serious side effects of strong medications. For example, acupuncture can help relieve the pain and sickness caused by some chemotherapy drugs. It also can help to reduce soreness in the mouth after treatment for head and neck cancer.

Furthermore, for some patients, the comfort and satisfaction that comes from the touch, talk and time that a complementary therapist commonly offers is a meaningful benefit. The best therapist can play a helpful role during cancer treatment and recovery. For example, skilled and thoughtful aromatherapy can make a patient feel compassionate, which may help the patient's recovery. Some

patients use complementary therapies as a way to feel positive and hopeful, a feeling that may be difficult for a doctor to provide but one that alternative medical treatments may be able to foster.

The rate of CAM use among the elderly is substantial, ranging from 35% to 60% of the elderly population according to various studies, and is higher than in other age groups (Astin, 1998). According to a 2013 European Environment Agency report, the world's elderly (60 years and older) population has increased to approximately 841 million, comprising more than 60% of the total population (European Environment Agency, 2013). By 2050, most of these elderly (nearly 8 in 10) are expected to be living in less developed countries (Crimmins, 2004).

Ayurveda, the most popular alternative system practiced by Indians, is currently the most commonly used treatment method for elderly patients; homeopathy is another popular Indian treatment system (Sharma et.al., 2017). According to the 2007 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), mind-body therapies, including Yoga, were the most favored (CAM) practices for children with behavioral, emotional or mental health problems. The 2012 NHIS reports that the use of Yoga and yoga therapy in children had increased from 2.5% to 3.2% since 2007 (Rosen et.al., 2015).

These facts reveal the potential of Indian alternative tourism and its market are expected to more than double by 2020. The revival of traditional and alternative medicine such as AYUSH has helped to boost India's medical tourism market in comparison to the markets in most Western nations (IANS, 2017).

### **3.2. Problems of Alternative Medical Treatment**

The Indian herbal drug and medicine industry needs to ensure the procurement of standardized, authentic raw material free from toxic contaminants. Improved processing technologies and conducting all operations under the government of India is also needed to assure compliance and the maintenance of in-process quality control in the manufacture of herbal products; evidence of the therapeutic efficacy, safety, and shelf life of these products is also critical. Such approaches remain essential in the global promotion of Ayurveda, which requires comprehensive scientific research and an evidence-based approach (Patwardhan et.al., 2005).

Some alternative medical systems and treatments are simple and healthy, and the therapist can apply the methods with the assurance of no harm and no serious side effects. However, this is not



always the case. Delaying surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, or other traditional treatment by using an alternative therapy can allow cancer to worsen and spread to other parts of the body. Some complementary and alternative therapies and medicine have been reported to cause serious problems, even death. Special vitamins and minerals can increase the risk of cancer or other illnesses when used excessively. Some companies don't follow the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules regarding claims and labeling supplements properly. In some cases, harmful contaminants can be included in dietary supplements because of the way they are manufactured or handled.

Indian doctors and the clinical infrastructure in India are considered excellent. However, the general infrastructure does not necessarily meet the needs of medical tourists. For medical tourism, there needs to be trained non-medical staff who are well-versed in cross-cultural sensitivity and have strong language skills. Moreover, while the cost of medical treatment is generally acceptable, other costs (especially boarding and lodging) can be excessive.

### **3.3. Role of the Indian Government in Alternative Medical Treatment**

The government of India has expressed support and encouragement for alternative medical treatment. A separate department (ISM&H), now known as the Ministry as AYUSH, was established to promote indigenous systems. The Indian government has involved itself in setting specific education priorities, raw material availability development, drug standardization, research and development, information, communication, and healthcare in general. The Central Council of Indian Medicine oversees teaching and training institutes (Patwardhan, 2007). Some traditional medical products are being added to the government's family welfare programs under a World Bank project. These medicines are for common diseases such as anemia, uterine and abdominal complications, edema during pregnancy, postpartum problems such as pain and difficulties with lactation, nutritional deficiencies and childhood diarrhea (Kumar, 2000).

The government of India education policy and human resource development sets the standards for education in AYUSH systems. The ministry works in tandem with two statutory regulatory bodies the Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH) and the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) and permits the start-up of colleges recommended by these councils. At present, there are 401 Ayurveda, 11 Siddha and 53 Unani colleges affiliated with 59 universities throughout the country. Of these colleges, Post-Graduate Education in different specialties is offered in 140 Ayurveda

colleges, 12 Unani Colleges, and 3 Siddha colleges (Ministry of AYUSH, 2019).

The government of India has also established new drug testing laboratories for TIM and is upgrading existing laboratories to provide documented, high-quality evidence to licensing authorities for the safety and quality of herbal medicines. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has launched a research program under New Millennium India in 2002. Ayurveda identified three types of diseases under the scheme of the Technology Leadership Initiative program, including arthritis, diabetes, and hepatic disorders, which afflict large numbers of the Indian population (Patwardhan et.al., 2005).

The Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) is an independent body under the Ministry of AYUSH and is the apex body for coordinating, undertaking, formulating, developing and promoting research along scientific lines in Ayurveda. The core activities of the council consist of clinical research, drug research (medicinal plant research, drug standardization, and quality control, and pharmacology research) and literature research.

The annual budget of the AYUSH ministry is substantial, with an estimated total budget of Rs.1626.37 crores for the year 2018-19 and a revised estimate of Rs.1692.77 crores. Expenditures through March 2019 were Rs.1606.96 crores. The Government of India established the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) in 2001, which led to the Traditional Knowledge Resource Classification (TKRC) system (Ganguli, 2004). Such activities are very useful for the research and development of alternative medical treatment in India. Under Intra Mural Research (IMR), At present, there are 401 Ayurveda, 11 Siddha and 53 Unani colleges affiliated with 59 universities throughout the country. Of these colleges, Post-Graduate Education in different specialties is offered in 140 Ayurveda colleges, 12 Unani Colleges, and 3 Siddha colleges (Ministry of AYUSH, 2019). These projects are making a highly significant contribution to the AYUSH field.

## Conclusion

This study deals with the overview of Indian medical tourism, with a particular focus on alternative medical treatment, and wellness tourism. Specifically, this study explored the potentials and obstacles of alternative medical treatment and wellness tourism in India. The major findings are summarized below.

The Indian government's continuing emphasis on alternative medical treatment and wellness

tourism, the authors focused on these two types of medical tourism, i.e. alternative medical treatment and wellness tourism. The Indian government is investing a significant amount of budget in those industries. Thus, India is becoming one of the competent destinations for alternative treatments and wellness tourism. We believe this article will be useful for people seeking medical tourism (mainly alternative treatment) around the world, and for patients who are not cured by allopathic treatment. The patients/tourists not only from the South Asian countries but also from around the world can be benefitted in several ways such as reasonable treatment cost, easy visa process, English is used in the hospitals, no waiting time, and alternative treatment facilities.

As India is recognized as a medical tourism hub, those people who are not cured of allopathic treatment and faced side effects from allopathic medicines can be cured of alternative medicine. However, alternative medical treatment does not only have positive impacts, but also it has some negative aspects too. For example, delaying surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, or other traditional treatment by using an alternative therapy can allow cancer to worsen and spread to other parts of the body. Therefore, the proper decision should be made at the right time.

Based on the study, results, India appears to have the potential for its medical tourism industry. However, the Indian medical tourism industry also faces a number of problems. The herbal drug and medicine industry needs to ensure the use of standardized, authentic raw materials, improve processing technologies, upgrade infrastructure, increase training for non-medical staff regarding cross-cultural sensitivity and language skills, and address the issue of overpriced lodging and boarding. These problems need to be carefully reviewed and resolved as they can severely impede the growth of India's medical tourism industry. Alternative medical treatment and wellness treatments are gradually becoming more scientifically based, and the clinical efficacy of traditional medicines is being determined.

This study is based on secondary data, and it deals mostly with the historical description of the alternative treatment and wellness tourism in India. Thus, future research should be conducted by using primary data and explore the obstacles from the supply and demand side of alternative medical treatment and wellness tourism in India. Moreover, the research related to logistics should also be conducted.

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