

Healthy Lifespan through Ecological Wellbeing

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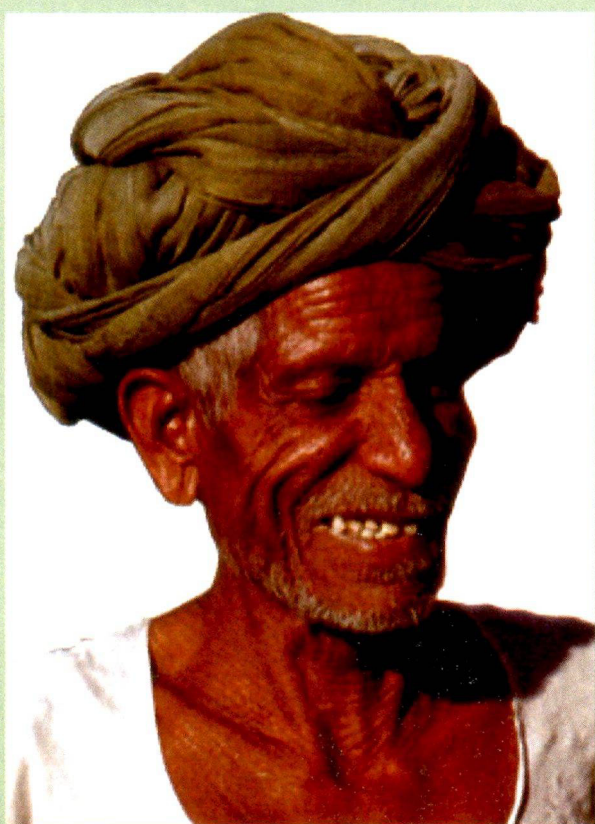
Nature is called macrocosm and man is called microcosm. The whole universe it is a one single gigantic living-system which cannot be just limited by local geographical boundaries. It begins from invisible and subtle level planes and creatures and ends in super-mega level galactic planes. Man is a part of it. Ecosystem diversity expands not only beyond biopsychosocial scopes but unto supra-mundane boundaries. Traditionally natural world is a multidimensional system which includes not only humans, animals, plants but also gods, demons. Therefore nature is described as an infinite, supreme and immeasurable entity. It is also a sacred and venerable. Nature's power is unexplainable.

Nature is respected as "mother nature". We are born in nature's womb, living in her embrace and dying in her lap. From womb to tomb all life process was designed by nature's law and order. They believed humanistic nature as well as supernatural nature at the same time. This is not a primitive cultural view of universe as anthropologists describe. But this is a knowledge system empirically developed through learning process of eco-human interaction. Ethnologically speaking our ancestors used natural resources with a "proper permission granted by the nature" according the norms set up by society. In this context healthy ecosystem was the foundation of healthy human beings.

Sri Lankan society is historically grown up with nature and nurtured through indigenous knowledge of wellness and wellbeing. It was more than a healthcare system but a way of living towards a total wellness. Healthy life was considered as "a gift with blessings of nature" and a result of individual living manner. In the past language, education, cultural norms, social network, livelihoods and religion were organized in nature-friendly manner in order to establish self-discipline to achieve healthy life. In this model every person was encouraged to protect natural habitats and their objects like forests, trees, mountains, rivers, springs, etc. There are various rituals and taboos prevailing for centuries with coded ethics to preserve ecological and biological diversity of local habitat. Cultural heritage and vernacular communication system strongly supported to dictate a self-disciplined community guide in sustainable use of natural resources. Therefore culture and nature were indispensable entities and leading to new model of bio-cultural diversity and every local community had a unique knowledge on resource use in eco-friendly process. Healthy living was a basic and mandatory right of the inhabitants as well as the community. Health was considered as the greatest gain which is gifted from nature as a return for good conduct extended to preserve nature.



Our ancestors were the key holders of this knowledgebase which had been transmitted from generation to generation before mainstream knowledge system is overrun by colonial imperialism. Traditional knowledge on healthy lifestyle was an encultured routine from childhood and empirically updated from time to time. Blessing of nature for healthy demonstrates the idea that "livingness of sacred spirits within the nature" which indicates that nature as a holistic system as well as a multifold organism. Everything in universe is linked together. They are inter-dependent. Theoretically it is evident that environmental pollution can have universally hazardous effect on all nations elsewhere. It is therefore well-known fact that human beings are experiencing malicious outcomes of their own activities caused injuriously ecosystem degradation. Ancient people believed that they can influence the nature only through deities who abode in natural habitat. Any human interference takes place in natural habitat should not violate ethics of conservation practices and obliged to divine nature. Specially forest deities were annually offered ritualistic oblations to protect natural sanctuaries of endangered flora and fauna which are flagship indicators of ecological disasters. When environment is affected by malevolent evil beings similarly it has counter effect on living beings also. Healthy environment and healthy human life are not two distinctive entities but are symbiotic and



synergetic factors in sustainable development in any country. It is evident that environment plays a key role in human health which is now in fact highly threatened due to environmental pollution and dehumanized cultural impact of globalization. Most of the countries are facing health problems caused by denaturalizing environment in current development context exclusively based on increasing population-demand. It is not justifiable to destroy natural habitats for development projects and expanding human settlement because ultimate ecological balance-sheet will not be beneficial to the human health. World Health Organization has alarmed this negative outcome and growing challenge in 1997 by indicating environmental imbalance as a main aggravating factor of reemerging infectious diseases and breeding new pathogenic organisms which have now become highly expensive to health sector. Epidemics and pandemics of infectious diseases throughout the world were potentially catastrophic and mostly caused by serious environmental

negligence. Over past few decades humans have rapidly and extensively changed ecosystems to meet the growing demands of economic development and resulted substantial loss of biological diversity on the earth. Global warming, irregular climates and extreme weather conditions may aggravate pandemic outbreaks and disease emergences that bring unmanageable health challenges.

Sometimes it is not the population size but their multi-ambition and greedy lifestyle driven by sophisticated consumerism is not tolerable on this one earth. Therefore today we need to redefine the health including ecological perspective in order to popularize the intangible and immeasurable values of well-preserved natural environment in healthy lifespan and wellbeing of mankind. Urbanization was the most serious environment issue in last century which created megacities all over the world and utilized most of natural habitats for manmade structures which increasingly restricted green spaces

and caused enormous biodiversity destruction anywhere. Ecological footprints of modern humans in new millennium made deliberately negative outcomes causing massive environmental calamities with irreparable affects to future generation too. All these irrational human mistakes still continue to maintain highly sophisticated lifestyle which are indeed disturbing natural cycles in ecosystem and not justifiable in any means. The rapidly growing livestock density and the overuse of inorganic fertilizer, became a major source of water pollution, and often provides favorable environments for novel pathogens to emerge.

Sri Lanka is a country with a high biodiversity and versatile cultural heritage originated from a traditional knowledgebase embedded in treasure trove of ancestral experiences of living with nature. In ancient country village culture was enriched with beliefs system, traditional ethics and lifestyle norms which led them to a maximum lifespan with high quality of life. Eco-friendly sustainable livelihoods and nature-oriented healthcare practices were a part of indigenous cultural repertory inherited from generation to generation. Health lore was an inbuilt time-tested knowledge which was mostly transmitted by verbal mode and less documented in formal manner. Native medical practitioners, local healers and spiritual therapists were holders of indigenous knowledge system related to prevention and curative interventions. But everybody had a basic knowledge on home-remedies and field health-aids which was considered as common knowledge passed through family inherent. Sri Lankan Indigenous medical knowledge system is therefore regarded as a highly skilled-based and widely practice-oriented ethno-science that promotes nature-friendly lifestyle to gain health. This knowledge was considered as sacred and to be learned only by selected persons who had inborn and inherited talent in accordance with ancient pedagogics. Learned traditional medical practitioners were not only really good therapists but also ecologists who took care of environment.



Our ancestral knowledge on healthcare was a set of norms and manner of self-discipline to achieve maximum lifespan with a minimum impact on ecosystem through sustainable livelihoods. Their lifestyle and life-vision were augmented with environment-friendly spiritual philosophy which can be more or less called a green religion. Knowledge, attitudes and practices belong to healthcare had been culturally contextualized into traditional learning process to achieve optimum health literacy. It is a kind of “wisdom package” gifted by elders to install the customized health profile and one’s own stewardship of health through individual responsibility. Family inherited life dynamics and health traits are transmitted in a well-established manner to preserve the belief system based on norms of eugenics. In such model health strengths and weakness are genealogically managed to minimize pathological factors and optimize the immune system. Therefore one’s health is a matter of life to be generated from pre-conception period which can be programmed before parental marriage. Matching family pedigree, caste system, horoscopes and updating couple’s health are a part of traditional eugenics to breed healthy offspring for next generation. In this process also our ancestors were aware of bad environmental outcomes could have negative impact which causes genetic or congenital disorders in humans.

Whole lifespan of ancient people from womb to tomb is connected to nature which is reputed as a supreme macrocosm or almighty omnipresence living being. They respected the natural law and order as a fundamental philosophy of prudent lifestyle. In such livelihood natural resources were utilized in a wisely manner and sustainable mode to maintain the balanced relationship with environment. First of all they accepted the universal consciousness or spirit of nature which gives the life force to all living being and keeps life's vital energy moving. Healing properties of medicinal plants and other natural sources are believed to be inherited by supra-humane powers of nature. Therefore they respected all natural resources and followed special ritualistic practices before harvest any part from nature. Specially in every village there was a local deity abode and worshipped for preventing communicable seasonal diseases. This was a collective ceremonial cleaning mission taken place as divine duty to demarcate the boundaries to gain blessings from that deity. It was a continuous mandatory annual exercise performed by villages which eventually enabled clean and healthy environment free from pathogenic organisms and other malicious factors. These kinds of cultural festivals in ancient belief system had very positive impact on collective social responsibility in primary health care activities.

Optimistic lifestyle and religious practices bound with livelihood promoted non-invasive development model in which human manipulation took place in a very environment-friendly manner. They always appreciated the natural resources and their intangible value as they have learned from ancestors. For some simple ailments no medicine is needed and simple but costless remedial solutions are available. These therapies are economically sound and medically effective but not yet evaluated by any health microeconomic researcher. Dematerialized therapy or treatments without medicinal materials is a primary remedial practice recommended in ancient societies. In a way market value of these therapies are very high when it comes to cost benefit analysis and saves foreign exchange spent for health expenditure. Village level traditional health practices are not formally validated in a constructive and affirmative manner to convert them into best practices in health sector. Unfortunately Western dominated hegemonic health system looks down upon and discourages all traditional knowledge oriented practices as outdated and unscientific myths. For our primitive societies environment was the life and they were constantly receptive to nature and its changes. Adjusting their lifestyle according to the natural fluctuations was accepted as a norm and beneficial to update the immune profile.

Since humans are not satisfied with proper quantity and correct necessity over-consumption and over-production of food are now becoming an unpredictably hazardous to environment. Popularizing health benefits of eating fresh natural green foods is the only way out from present health crisis caused by unhealthy lifestyle. Food based nutritional guidelines should be established on all traditional and natural foods with their health effects. Scientific evidences for ecological outcomes of consuming diets with food diversity and nutritional security have been realized and it is becoming the right key to longevity and health related quality of life. Traditional diet is proven to be more health-oriented and cost-effective in two ways while spending less money and gaining more health benefits for preventing future ailments. Subjective wellbeing is an innovative idea by which positive outcomes of traditional healthy lifestyle could be explained and make the health related quality of life understandable. Spiritual health and happiness are very important elements in subjective wellbeing and not measurable in conventional health criteria. Realistic view of life and religious approaches would help them to actualize and rationalize the unavoidable life mandates which should be compromised with. Spiritual tranquility produced by harmonization with nature will be a key factor of optimum life satisfaction and maximum lifespan due to that.

Impacts of ecological footprints of ancestral societies were easily renewable and reversible in a sustainable manner. Their consuming pattern was environmental-friendly and economically viable to their livelihood. Therefore they were affected by less or no mental stress and psychologically

frustrated because of their simple and middle-path oriented lifestyle. Family relationships, culture, communication and community were highly conducive for enabling a supportive atmosphere to cope up with any stressful condition. Beyond all those individually each person had a strong belief in supra-humane blessings coming from their faithful deeds extended with good conducts in the past. If the result is good they are happy. If not it is something to go through and compensate. This philosophy helped them to make their minds and keep negotiating with outer world. Ecological wellbeing was a very vital and obligatory factor which could heal their whole life. Sometimes they had a ritualistic practice to tell their illness to a selected tree in a respectful way and keep hopes only on that natural object. Positive thinking was practiced in deep sense as a life custom which expels all negative effects through reciting blissful invocations.



Indigenous medical knowledge is always utilizing natural resources enriched with healing properties but in a sustainable manner. One formula contains multi-ingredients and has pluralistic applications which support customized therapeutic interventions and situational adaptations. Personalized therapy is also one of the effective ways of promoting eco-friendly resource use patterns that had been practiced widely in traditional medicine as a theory. In Other way indigenous medicine is a localized system which utilizes only limited number of species found in particular natural habitat. This does not encourage over-exploitation or outside persons to harvest resources by any means. Also another very important practice in indigenous medicine to avoid unnecessary exposure of natural medicinal resources is to decoding the names. In addition to that there are many norms and ethics to follow before collect medicinal plant or part of a plant. All these restrictions, taboos and proscriptions were well-established cultural practices to protect environment and it's natural treasure trove. Ultimately the philosophy behind our ancestral culture was that "every action has a similar feedback to the actor" which well-preserved ecosystem from unethical exploitations, inhumane destructions and irrational pollutions.