

Strictly speaking, the traditional Indian medicinal

system is synonymous with *ayurveda*. However, today when people in India refer to traditional cures they allude to diverse forms of healthcare that broadly include *ayurveda*, homeopathy, *unani*, naturopathy, chiropractic and Chinese and Tibetan medicine, among others. These traditional cures can be grouped under the umbrella term 'alternative medicine'.

The biggest difference between western medicine and alternative medicine is the manner in which they view the body. While doctors and surgeons in the west treat the body as a conglomeration of organs and systems, doctors from the alternative medicinal field look at the body, mind and spirit as a whole. Unlike most medical practices in the west, alternative medicine often seeks a deeper cause of illness, instead of simply addressing the symptoms.

"The basic foundation of alternative medicine is simple - it is about harmony of the body, mind and spirit in order to promote health. This idea of balance is as old as the healing arts themselves," says Dr



Radhika Goyal, a homeopath who owns a private clinic in South Delhi.

Alternative medicine practitioners usually do not prescribe drugs or perform surgery. "They believe in nature and the body's ability to heal itself. Consequently, the focus is on illness prevention and doctors in this field are as much engaged in the

prevention of illness as they are in its treatment. In addition, patients are counselled in terms of required lifestyle changes that can reduce or eliminate the risk of illness," explains Dr Goyal.

She is of the opinion that the theory of harmony and balance, which is the ethos of alternative medicine, is both its biggest strength as well as a formidable disadvantage. She explains, "This theory, at one very important level, means that diseases

cannot be examined and treated at a mere molecular level.

This relegates the scope of scientific research (at least in a straitjacketed sense) in this domain. On the other hand, western medicinal systems like allopathy that have originated at a much later period, have always been characterised by extensive and invasive research. It is human psychology to accept systems and processes that have a scientific explanation.



This probably is one of the reasons why while allopathy has propelled mass acceptance globally, till recently traditional medical systems were considered obscure, esoteric and shrouded in mysticism."

However, of late there has been a perceptible shift in this opinion across the world.

Contd on page 2 ➔

BACK TO BASICS

NOT CONSIDERED AS A SERIOUS BRANCH OF MEDICINE UNTIL RECENTLY, THE 5000-YEAR-OLD TRADITIONAL INDIAN MEDICINAL SYSTEM IS ATTRACTING A NUMBER OF YOUNG STUDENTS TODAY, INFORMS **PROYASHI BARUA**

