

What Anandayya of Andhra Pradesh has done many can do in India

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Traditional methods are time-tested

They are not alternative to vaccine or modern medicine

Can be supplementary and parallel ways

Herbal (Ayurved) practitioner Anandayya, near Nellore, has shown what even one volunteer could do to relieve immediate pressures of Covid-19 and showcase an alternative time tested method to cope with the complex situation. He is so transparent giving out all the details of the inputs and their measures. There are many such persons in the country. This has been our traditional way of treatment for ages. But this example brings out how local options and conventional methods are scuttled by vested interests. For some days his initiative was praised by those in long queues waiting for his native medicine brewed there and then. All that has been done freely bearing all expenses himself. And it was prominently shown on news media, locally and nationally.

Tide turns against Anandayya

But then that was the beginning of his problem. The demand for his formula and the commercial opportunity it involves has turned the tide instead of support. Adding to it was the news that the state chief minister had discussed the matter internally and that ICMR and Ayush teams study his experiments with not one adverse reaction among over fifty thousand people treated so far and there are no cases of Covid locally. And yet the voluntary initiative was disrupted as if deliberately and Anandayya was subjected to police enquiry on grounds of disturbing local peace against Covid protocol. All this after he personally treated each without wearing even mask and many serious ones coming by lined up ambulances over a kilo meter stretch. His treatment includes preventive, and to those with signs of corona virus, those in serious condition and also with multiple complexities. Anandayya adopted these methods over the years taking clues from his mother's treatment earlier years for local virus.

What the global panel said?

An independent global panel for pandemic preparedness and response concluded in its just released report that Covid-19 should have been prevented. Constituted at the instance of WHO in May 2020 it submitted its report within one year although not with any altogether surprises but confirmed what is generally believed in many countries such as India. It concluded that a series of bad and delayed decisions had taken millions of lives and devastated the global economy. The panel of 13 leaders and experts reported that institutions had failed to protect people and public trust had dwindled in health interventions and infrastructure. It called the wealthiest nations to fund new organisations to prepare for the next pandemic by overhauling alarm system. The panel specifically referred to religious and political congregations and celebrations in India as responsible for the scale of the tragedy.

Report sans non-medical options

That report is aptly titled "Covid-19, Make it the last pandemic." Can we expect that without Anandayyas around? That report did not refer to any ongoing native preventive measures to avoid similar catastrophes. The panel has missed considering sustainable non-medical preventive options prominently available already in some countries like India. Total dependence on hospitals and health infrastructure and vaccination of every one can never be a practical solution even if reliable considering the size and scale. This include not only reliability but in a faster time frame (not two years as in the present case). Otherwise, the pandemic may change its scope manifesting into a new wave of virus and take a new avatar as we are witnessing now. A truly preventive as well as alternate option is possible only when every household adopts a lifestyle course so that the virus could be met parallel and in a level playing way. Whereas leaders now including chief ministers keep repeating that vaccination is the only way to get over the Covid. This aspect was not deliberated at any level. Yet no other route is even considered like Herbal or Ayurveda or what civil societies could do locally, quickly and inclusively as parallel and supplementary ways. For example, 25 resident associations in Gurgaon had set an example last week by setting up "community relief camps" and relieved hospitals from the rush, shortages and even tragedies.

Covid -19 reminds that achievements and accomplishments that we have been claiming are of no consequence or even good enough to face the crisis situations as this pandemic. The concern is limited to immediate availability or shortage of vaccines, ventilators, beds, oxygen, medicines and the number of deaths, and number of positive and negative cases on a daily basis adding or creating panic. This remains total

preoccupation of the government, political parties, media and everyone else who matter. There is hardly any discussion beyond an immediate supply of vaccination. Since pandemics per se see no end and are unlikely to have a lasting solution, it is preventive concerns and ways that should be considered as far more sustainable even as supplementary measures. What are these?

What preventing measures to be considered?

First, we should realise that our very outlook to life and living has outlived. In this outlook one tends to maximise advantage individually, unconcern or ignoring the equity basis. “We, together” view is long forgotten. Our grandmothers had many stories on how we were all connected including with the nature and every living being. And why it matters that we share or be concerned about the others around and that one remains happy only when the others too are. Today we are reminded of that fundamental.

Second, as preventive and curative measures there are several suggestions floating around for long and even social media is flooded by several well known gurus. These measures fall into three categories and relate to (pranayam techniques) breathing, food habits and specially prepared homemade drinks with spices and the like locally available items like turmeric, ginger, neem leaves, sesame seeds, pudina, black pepper, pumpkin seeds, etc. Many of these are time tested methods both for prevention and immunity building. They have potential to better immunity and build oxygen levels across age groups. This has been a time tested and acknowledged fact even if it has not been established by scientific establishments. But there would be many more ordinary people to endorse validity of these methods than the number of people covered in scientific experiments.

No alternative to vaccine

Going by the nature of calamity today, scale and shortages, this route may be even more durable and scalable among rich and poor and privileged and not so. Of course, I’m not saying anything as alternative to vaccines. I only wonder why the kind of seriousness being bestowed on this self preparedness by families as a unit is not being promoted. In fact, this could have been truly Indian formula to cope with such pandemics as Covid and its different versions. Why agencies like ICMR, CCMB and Ayush do not endorse these options pending time taking other options. Now Ayurveda practitioner Anandayya had showcased what even one individual could do. Third, Covid has reminded an eternal fact governments are reluctant to recognize. That is, more prolonged crisis and its scale and spread the more the

relevance and role of civil society and community groups. The limits of political leaders and parties and their parochial outlook become more evident. All this despite the track of voluntary organisations in relief and rehabilitation in calamities of all kind, of nature in particular, is impressive. Why this channel is left to politically determined local vagaries.

Why ignore conventional methods?

Truly preventive and a more reliable way to cope against such catastrophic viruses is our own individual level discipline, family level customs and many conventional methods as Anandayya has demonstrated. These include time tested food, eating, cooking, drinking, physical exercise and living discipline as a ritual or customs and culture. Why this traditional route is not being taken seriously and logically. These living customs are not suggested as alternative or in lieu of the present vaccination or medicines-centric approach. Irrespective of that and in addition to those, these conventional ways are prompt ways of up keep levels of oxygen, immunity and body temperature. Apart from this, these conventional practices one can indulge wide across irrespective of socio-economic and location limits and without waiting for external help.

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