Introduction

India has a rich history of traditional medicines which are in existence for 5000 years. 6 main types of CAMs are primarily prevalent in India as shown in the adjoining figure.

CAMs are widely used by at least 65% of the population in India to cure acute (common cold, fever, gastrointestinal problems) and chronic diseases (cancer, insomnia, depression, back pain etc).

The prevalent CAMs in India among patients include Ayurveda (36%), Homeopathy (26%), Unani (18%), Yoga (9%), home remedies (9%) and others.

The reason for the popularity of CAMs include easy availability, low cost, effectiveness and safety.

On 9th November, 2014, the Ministry of Ayush (an acronym for Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) was formed for developing education, research and propagation of indigenous alternative medicine systems in India.

The Ayush Ministry looks after and has also set up several professional research institutes and academic faculties devoted to various forms of alternative medicine namely National Institute of Homeopathy, National Institute of Siddha, National Institute of Unani Medicine, National Institute of Ayurveda, North Eastern Institute of Ayurveda & Homeoeopathy, All India Institute of Ayurveda etc among others.

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, the use of CAMs has drastically spiked up in India for prophylaxis, management of Corona Virus. For boosting immunity with special reference to respiratory health, daily practice of Yogasana, Pranayama and consumption of spices like Turmeric (Curcuma longa), Cumin (Cuminum cyminum), Coriander (Coriandrum sativum) and Garlic (Allium sativum) has been promoted. Decoction (Kadha) made from Basil (Ocimum sanctum), Cinnamon (Cinnamomum verum), Black pepper (Piper nigrum), Dry Ginger (Zingiber officinale) and Munakka (Vitis Vinifera); Chyawanprash and Golden Milk are consumed.

CAMs, specially Yoga and Ayurveda are also included in the management protocol for COVID-19 in India.

The protocol also includes formulation like Ayush-64, Piper longum (Pippli) and Tinospora cordifolia (Guduchi), Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera) preparations.

At present about 68 clinical and observational studies are being undertaken at 112 sites across India for these preparations.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted on the available literature from the open source platforms like PUBMED, NCBI, ResearchGate. The official website of the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India was also referred.

Results

The data presented in the review suggested that the evidence-based studies, efforts are being made for the mainstreaming these Indian traditional medicines. The Ministry of Ayush under the Indian government is also opening up hundreds of new higher educational and research institutes for CAMs which are expected to produce trained professionals in this field who will carry forward the legacy of our ancient system of medicine. As of now, close to 50,000 students graduate in CAMs every year in India. The current status of CAMs look promising in India.

In order to promote Ayush systems, Government has taken a number of steps and implemented many initiatives such as mainstreaming of Ayush under National Health Mission and National Health Policy-2017, financial support for research activities, setting up of Central Regulatory & Research Bodies. This is going to have a great role in promoting the future of CAMs in India. With a large number of educated CAMs scholar and evidence based research, CAMs are expected to bloom further in India in the coming future.

Conclusion

Although CAMs have been practiced in India for thousands of years, there is limited literature available on the extent of use and a lot of research is still pending in this field. With the setting up of Ayush institutions in India and its popularisation, scientific and evidence based research should be done in this field for a prospective future. The need for sensitization of medical students to CAMs is necessary. Teaching of integrative medicine in the curriculum may be a way to bring about the changes. There are many strong players like Dabur, Himalaya Wellness, Patanjali, Baidyanath in the field of CAMs in India and many new start ups are also emerging which will further strengthen the complementary pharma industry in the country in future. The well-trained professionals in this field emerging from the various CAMs institute in India will carry forward the legacy of our ancient system of medicine.