

# Care Keralam Team Finds Traditional Ayurvedic Medicines are Free from Heavy Metals

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**Editorial**

Volume 1 Issue 4

**Received Date:** October 24, 2017

**Published Date:** November 10, 2017

## Editorial

Ayurveda medical system makes use of herbs to prepare several classes of medicines like *kvātha*, *cūrṇa*, *āsava*, *ariṣṭa*, *lēhya*, *taila*, *ghṛta* and *gulika* for treating diseases. As medicinal herbs are the raw materials, these medicines do not have any kind of toxicity. Another kind of medicinal preparations is also described in some texts. These are called *rasauśadhi* and are prepared from inorganic materials like mercury, arsenic, sulphur etc. Mainstream Sanskrit texts like *Caraka Samhita*, *Suśruta Samhita*, *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* and *Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya* do not describe *rasauśadhi*. Some historians of medicine opine that *rasauśadhi* made their appearance in Ayurveda on account of its contact with Islamic medicine. Whatever it may be, considering the poisonous nature of the ingredients, *rasaśastra* was treated as an occult science in olden days. However, in modern times *rasaśastra* has become popular, especially in northern India.

The adoption of the Alma Ata Declaration by World Health Organization in 1978, efforts of spiritual organizations like International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), Osho Foundation, Maharishi Foundation, International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, The Art of Living International Center etc, and growing awareness about the harmful side-effects of modern medicine, have popularized the use of Ayurvedic medicinal products in Europe and North America. The popularity of Ayurveda has grown to such an extent that western pharmaceutical giants have started viewing Ayurveda with fear.

One weapon the vested interests have started using against Ayurveda is the so-called heavy metal toxicity of its products. The whole defamation campaign began with the damaging publication of Saper and colleagues in Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) Volume 292: pages 2868-2873 in 2004. The authors collected some mineralo-metallic preparations from supermarkets in Boston area and analyzed their heavy

metal content. As mentioned above these medicines are prepared invariably with minerals and metals. Therefore, their presence in these products is not at all surprising. However, Saper, et al. used the experimental findings to malign Ayurveda saying that *Ayurvedic medicines are poisonous*. Usually the PDF of a research article published in JAMA is available only on payment of about \$50. However, PDF of this paper published with an evil motive is still available free of cost, encouraging its wide dissemination.

Saper's paper was given global publicity through Western print media, TV channels, radio stations and the internet. This paper was followed by many others reporting that Ayurvedic medicines are loaded with heavy metals. Almost all these studies were based on information obtained from ayurvedic medicines prepared from calcined metals and inorganic substances. No information is available on the content of heavy metals in traditional ayurvedic medicines prepared exclusively from herbs. Twelve years have elapsed and the muck thrown on Ayurveda has not been washed off. There are many national laboratories in India equipped with state-of-the art analytical instruments. However, no one cared to carry out a dispassionate enquiry into the so-called presence of lead, arsenic, cadmium and mercury in traditional ayurvedic formulations prepared exclusively using herbs. Indian science intelligentsia did not try at all to counter Saper's allegations and the cock-and-bull story of heavy metal toxicity of ayurvedic medicines circulates all over the world unchallenged.

A small band of researchers of CARE Keralam Ltd, an Ayurveda consortium in Chalakudi, Kerala has finally disseminated their findings through a research paper in *Aryavaidyan* published by the century-old Ayurveda house, *Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal*. This study demonstrates that 126 traditional ayurvedic formulations produced by 32 companies and 34 common

ayurvedic herbs collected from all geographical regions of India contained these heavy metals in quantities well below the limits set by Government of India. It is hoped that this publication will help to dispel the myth of heavy

metal toxicity of ayurvedic medicines and also stimulate further studies on the quality control of ayurvedic products.