

# AYURVASTRA: A WAY TO SUSTAINABLE LIVING IN THE TIME OF COVID

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## ABSTRACT

*Ayurveda in all spheres of life including clothing is becoming more and more appealing to a generation that is seeking holistic well-being in these times of turbulence. Herbal Textile or Ayurveda is a perfect amalgamation of cloth and wellness; this unique fabric incorporates in itself the rich Indian culture with health benefits. Ayurveda are enriched with nourishment that enhances the wearer's mind, body and soul. This paper is on Ayurveda which is the cloth made from organic cotton fabric and other natural fibers that has been specially treated with selected herbs to impart not only medicinal properties but also beautiful shades to the textiles. This paper also emphasizes on going back to our roots and adopts this sustainable lifestyle.*

**Keywords:** Ayurveda, Ayurveda, Herbal, Pandemic, Sustainable

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## Introduction

Textile industry has become somewhat conscious about its negative contribution to the environment pollution through the textile chemicals use in its various manufacturing processes. Environmental friendly fibers such as organic cotton and recycled polyester have become popular among the fabrics and apparel manufacturers. However, after these fabrics or the finished garments are manufactured, they have to be dyed in the same chemical dyes that are harmful to the environment. Dyeing is a major area of concern for environment as well as for the people who have chemical sensitivities as it may cause nausea, breathing difficulties, seizures etc. Herbal dyeing or Ayurveda is one step ahead of organic life style which supports the core concept of organic to eliminate the impact of harmful chemicals and pesticides.

Ayurveda is totally organic, sustainable and biodegradable made of 100 per cent pure organic cotton or silk, wool, jute and coir products. They are prepared on hand loom, processed and dyed by using various ayurvedic herbs to assimilate medicinal qualities into them. Thus, these are free from any chemicals that may release toxins and irritants harmful to users as well as environment (Yadav and Nath, 2010). Recent pandemic and other prevailing environment problems (acid rain, ozone layer depletion, air, land and water pollution, global warming) are very dangerous and making us ponders on the benefits of being sustainable. This paper delves in a thought of producing Ayurveda which requires not just patience but also a desire to redefine the industry in this world of fast fashion where garments are constructed in as less than a couple of hours.

## The Concept of Ayurvastra

When the textile is dyed with the extractions obtained from various herbs, they are referred to as **Herbal Textile or Ayurvastra**. When the dyeing is done with herbal extractions, no chemicals are used in its dyeing process. Whereas, some chemicals such as copper sulphate and ferrous sulphate are used as catalysts when dyeing is done with natural dyes. So, herbal dyes are different from vegetable dyes as it also carry some or the other medicinal value.

The concept of Ayurvastra is derived from Ayurveda, the ancient 5,000 year old Indian system of Vedic healthcare. Loosely translated, “ayur” is Sanskrit for health, “veda” means wisdom, and “vastra” is cloth or clothing. Ayurvastra is made from organic cotton fabric that has been permeated with special herbs and oils that promote health and cure special diseases depending upon the blends of embedded herbs and oils. Ayurvastra was used since long time in the treatment of a broad range of diseases such as diabetes, skin infections, eczema, psoriasis, hypertension and high blood pressure, asthma, arthritis, rheumatism, and even some forms of cancer. Ayurvastra is believed to help restore balance within the body’s systems and strengthen the immune system.

Textile industry being one of the major pollution creating industry needs immediate attention. A liberal use of harmful chemicals in the textile industry leads to severe health problems to both the workers and consumers. These harmful chemicals come into direct and prolonged contact with skin causing skin irritations, allergies and even cancer. Some of these chemicals may even diffuse through skin into the body, especially when the chemical particles are small enough, from the open sweat pores during sweating.

Ayurvastra use Natural Fibres like organic cotton, linen, wool, jute, flex, silk, coir, and their blends. Generally, 100% pure cotton and other fibers such as regenerated fabrics such as bamboo, banana, and corn fabrics are very popular. The process of producing herbal textiles begins with carefully planning every step in the preparation of herbal fabric so that it is precisely controlled and no chemical process is adopted while dyeing and processing the fabric. The bleaching of cloth is done naturally by exposing it to sunlight on a natural grass base and by use of animal manure.

The selected yarn or fabric is dyed in a carefully controlled mixture of herbal dyes depending upon the disease or ailment being treated. The dyes used for dyeing ayurvastra comes by blending and preparing different medicinal herbs from plants, flowers, roots and barks. The temperatures of the dyes, the duration and number of the dye soaks, the blend of herbs, and even the equipment used are carefully controlled. These herbs are applied directly to the fabric with the help of natural ingredients, so that the medicinal value of the herbs can be kept intact.

The roots, flowers, leaves, seeds and barks of around 200 herbs are used to make the dyes. The herbs used are different from vegetable dyes as they are not only natural but also have medicinal value. The natural herbs are generally found in very beautiful and distinct shades. Ayurvastra is also becoming very popular for its colour. All kinds of shades of red, yellow, brown, orange and green etc. can be prepared with the help of these herbs. To make the colors bright and fast natural mordents such as, Myroballams, rubhabs leaves, oils, minerals, alum, iron vat etc are used instead of heavy metal mordants like copper, chrome, zinc, tin etc. Every step in the preparation of clothing is carefully and precisely controlled to avoid contamination by harmful components present in environment. Most of the herbs used in ayurvastra are procured locally or regionally where they are grown organically and are extracted and applied by age old safe ancient methodology. This has further served the tradition of natural dyeing in India. (Saharan, 2015) The finishing process used after Herbal Dyeing is also organic and is given by sprinkling pure water on the cloth and then stretching under pressure, using hand rolls, aloe Vera and castor oil. (Rangari NT, 2012)

## The Healing touch of Ayurvastra

Ayurvastra is believed to help restore balance within the body’s systems and strengthen the immune system. The healing value of ayurvastra and its usage is based on the principle of touch. By coming in contact with herbal cloth, the body loses toxins and its metabolism is enhanced. Ayurvastra helps in fighting many common and prevalent diseases such as hypertension, heart ailments, asthma and diabetes. For diabetes, mimosa pudica (touch-me-not), cumon / cumin seeds, champa flower and shoe flower (hudahal) are combined in the herbal dye. The main herbs

used in the herbal dye for arthritis are curry leaves and apocynaceae. Whereas, for skin diseases, the herbs used are turmeric, neem, indigo and sandalwood. Cuscus grass is good for asthma patients, Sandalwood; with its mild fragrance has a soothing effect that helps in fighting stress. Rubia Cordifolia, Majith are known to be effective against diseases like Leprosy. Katha, Catechu is used for treatment of parasitic Infestation and itching. Some of the other herbal dyes that are used are catechu, pomegranate rind, madder, castor oil, sweet basil, lime, wild turmeric, henna leaves, curry leaf tree, aloe vera, certain herbal fruits, etc. each having their own healing effects. Jain M. (2010)

The most effective time to wear Ayurvastra is when the body is most at rest such as during sleep or meditation because this is when the body is naturally healing and reestablishing balance. Skin is recognized as being the body's largest organ. The skin can act as a barrier but also as a conduit for outside substances to enter the body. Many environmental toxins and chemicals in conventional clothing are assimilated into the body through the skin. Anything which can improve the skin's natural ability to block and resist harmful chemicals and toxins from entering the body will be beneficial to health. Keeping this in mind, herbs infused textiles are often used in making bed coverings, undergarments, towels, meditation clothes, sleepwear, and other such garments that stay close to human skin so that all its benefits could be absorbed through the skin. . Ayurvastra are of two kinds: One category is for curing diseases and the other is for wellbeing. First category of cloths which are used for curing diseases are sleep wear, bed sheets towels, meditation clothes and coir mats. Whereas, wellbeing clothes include saris, T-shirts, shirts, trousers, kurtas, nightwear, fashion wear, sportswear and inner wears, caps for healing headaches, caps for head balance, cooling caps, hair shining caps, hair strengthening caps, bandages and masks. (Baid, 2014). The technique for producing herbal textiles is also used for floor coverings and coir mats. For coir mats, the fibers are first soaked in herbal dyes and then woven into coir mats.

### **Scenario at present**

Pandemic is the time which made all of us realize the importance of balance in life and importance of going back to basics. Indian culture has always been about sustainability and looking back to our roots for solutions. There is increasing demand for herbal infused textiles around the world and within our country also. But this industry needs strong motivation from Government end to survive the competitions from regular cloth. The Handloom Weavers' Development Society in India is producing a wide range of herbal fabrics including saris, bed sheets and dress materials using medicinal dyes, and exporting them to the US, Italy, Germany, UK, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. National government ministries and state governments within India see ayurvastra as a way to revitalize and increase the market for their handloom industries and to create a niche for their eco-friendly handloom fabrics.

Another added advantage of ayurvastra is that the herbs used do not pollute the environment through contamination of water resources in areas close to processing units. Moreover, the solid residue left after dyeing can also be used for the purpose of recycling, where, solid and liquid waste is separated through the process of filtration can be used for farming purposes as manure & watering the fields.

Ayurvastra is the need of the hour and the Indian textile industry is well placed to accelerate this moment. This age old practice emphasizes the importance of an environmentally friendly way of living, and sustaining the world in a virtuous way for the forthcoming generations. Due to the ancient knowledge of Ayurvastra and the availability of skilled craftsmen possessing the knowledge of the complex technique, India is in a better position to leverage this sustainable product. This organic product also resonates with a new generation of conscious consumers. Brands are trying to bridge the gap between past and present and trying to make Ayurvastra relevant to today's generation through design intervention, good visual communication, creating short films, collaborating with artisans, participating in fashion weeks, making this concept as a part of fashion so that the message spread to the masses. This is the ideal time to create a shift from the fast fashion industry to locally produced slow fashion product. Ayurvastra not only reinforces the importance of sustaining the planet for future generations but also considers the well being of current generations using age old practices. Ayurvastra can play effective role in revival and elevation of the market for eco-friendly fabrics. Thus, it may be taken as emerging or new area of entrepreneurship and job opportunity for young people at one hand and on the other contribute towards offering economic stability to nation.

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