

My Health Journey - Saraswati Kavula

Recently when I was having some discussion on FB about the issues of Co-ro-na and the use of alternatives like Homeo or Nature cure, and I told people that I managed to stay off the Pharmaceutical drugs for at least last 10-15 years, people commented that “Oh you must be one of those with robust immunity”. And each time people attack you saying that there is no way without the so called “Modern Medicine”. True we have made great strides in improving diagnostic services and emergency care. Of that I agree. But to say we don’t have an alternative and all traditional cures are “unscientific and rubbish” is plain bullying, to say it mildly.

I will give an analogy sometime in 2005 I wrote an article about organic farming and there were many people who said, this is not possible. Even to this day we hear this argument “we cannot feed the whole population using Organic / Natural Farming”. But with consistent efforts organic/ natural farmers have proved the “industry led arguments wrong”. Funnily though, I find a lot of my friends who are into natural farming themselves, believing they cannot get well without using these same chemicals which are manufactured by these same corporations. The agro chemical Industry is intrinsically linked to the Pharmaceutical Industry. But that’s another topic. Here I am going to speak about my experiential learning.

As a child I was generally in ok health, but used to get some colds and fevers. Like most people we would use the paracetamol. But for my persistent colds I remember my mother would take me to a homeopath. That was when I was around 7. And we were in Hyderabad. But after that we moved to rural Telangana and our recourse was to use allopathy drugs mostly. Though I still remember in Nalgonda there used to be Cholera outbreaks and during that season we were given a preventive dose of homeopathic medicine. But for all other issues like fevers, colds, coughs, diarrhea etc we would go to our allopathic doctor who was a good doctor and medicine was not commercial in those days. People still felt that as doctors it’s their first job to do service to people. The fee was only for their livelihood and upkeep. So, I got this problem of amoebiasis and it was recurrent. So, each time I would have a bout of diarrhea I was given a set of antibiotics etc to stop the dysentery. I also had malaria and I could recover only after nearly a month of suffering. I noticed that after that bout of malaria, even when I was really sick, I wouldn’t get fevers that much. I was in Class 7 and in our science class we learnt about passive or acquired immunity. So I wondered if that was what stopped my fevers.

Then we moved back to Hyderabad. But my amoebic dysentery continued and so did my medications. Then I had the problem of acute sinusitis and again my recourse was to homeopathy. There was a doctor ZN Hashmi – quiet old by then in Isamia Bazaar of Hyderabad. He would not ask us to bring big reports or any such thing. He would ask me to place my palm on the table and then place his left palm over that at a height...meaning not touching my palm but just above it. And then he would use a kind of triangular magnet I think which was on a string and rotate that with his right hand...and this he would do for at least five to ten minutes. And then give me the medicine along with instructions of what to eat and not. I still remember he would tell me not to eat biscuits, bread, chocolates, all bakery products and items made of maida, soft drinks and ice creams etc. Now on hind sight after knowing what I know now, he was basically asking me not to eat all those foods which would cause constipation which leads to ill health. It was too much for a child of 12 to not eat all these. But I agreed. And initially my situation would aggravate. But, after a year of taking that homeopathic course, my sinusitis got cured.

Around the same time, when my periods started I had to take painkillers because I had acute pain during my period. It was so bad that I would be rolling on the floor. So I had to take injections of Baralgin. Then slowly it reduced to just the tablets. Later I started taking Brufen. But I read somewhere that Brufen impacted the bones! That was how I came across the issue of side effects of Pharma drugs for the first time. So I switched back to Baralgin and in later years switched to Meftal Spas since Baralgin too had some issues. It was only years later, while I was staying in a fisherman's house in Kerala on one of my documentary trips, his daughter showed me the easiest cure for menstrual cramps – she brought me a hot water bag and that eased the pain and that was followed by black coffee.

So, coming back to my teens, at the age of 16, when I joined the Hotel Management, I became sick with Hepatitis A and C and for many weeks we just thought it was normal jaundice and since there was not much fever and other than the yellow tint of my eyes...I was put on a diet of curd rice and bananas mostly. But after 3-4 weeks, I started to see that my stool was white. And then our family doctor advised that we visit a gastroenterologist. And two days after I started to bleed profusely from my nose – non-stop bleeding that wouldn't go away. So, I was rushed to Gagan Mahal Nursing home to Dr. Sethu Babu, the gastroenterologist. First they tried to stop the bleeding...I still remember when they stuffed the cotton in my nostrils, the blood was stuck in my throat and it was just unbearable. But the first thing they did after was to put me on a drip – four saline bottles – one each on both hands and legs...and I was getting into a comatose condition...I didn't realize it then. Dr. Sethu Babu told my parents don't let her sleep keep talking to her. If she pulls through these 24 hours, she will live. And so I did. And I must say this about Dr. Sethu Babu more than medication he cured his patients with his good humour. Though my situation was precarious, he never let me know or feel about it. He would be cracking jokes with me about my hotel management and cooking skills etc. He would come to my room and say, "this should not look like a hospital room, this should be like a resort, bring in flowers and fruit drinks etc"... So I learnt the first principle of healing...positive thoughts and laughter as best medicine. Truly even until many years later, I noticed that Dr. Sethu Babu would hardly give a tablet or two and never this huge list of medications as the present doctors do. And we always would say, he cured his patients with his good humour.

I wondered about why I became so ill. I felt that since all those years, I only ate at home, and never ate outside. All of a sudden after going to college I was eating outside and my system was not used to this outside food and was not able to handle that. I decided, I should strengthen my system and made it a point to eat outside food from time to time. My situation improved.

But then came second year of college when we had to go for our industrial training and I was in Bangalore and due to certain circumstances at that time, I would not eat well and my choice of night meals was restricted to chips and colas. And what happened after six months of such a lifestyle...was that I ended up with Ulcerative Colitis...and even that I realized only when I was getting a black stool like jet black. No pain in the stomach nothing. I wondered and again contacted Dr. Sethu Babu and he got some tests done and then a torture called Colonoscopy. And we discovered plenty of bleeding ulcers in my colon. So again one more round of medications etc. But at that time my brother's friend took me to an ayurvedic doctor in Padmarao nagar. He gave some ayurvedic medicine. Whether it was the ayurvedic medicine or the drugs by Sethu Babu I was clear from Ulcerative Colitis in a few weeks time. I would guess the ayurvedic medicine (which was only plant extracts), must have worked. Because at that time my mother used to have blood pressure and after taking ayurvedic medicine from that same place she was off her BP drugs.

Then I joined the hotel industry for my first job. And we worked in shifts: sometimes night shifts, sometimes day and sometimes afternoon. So all my meal timings went hay wire. Also the food in the canteen used to be bad. And since we were eating at odd hours, like eating breakfast at 9am and then having to eat lunch by 12 before a 1pm second shift, I would be hungry by 4pm or 5pm, so the only option we had was to order samosas and pastry from the cake shop. Or buy a pizza or a sandwich from the coffee shop, on which we could get staff discount. We couldn't afford anything else! So my system went for a toss, I once again suffered from Ulcers in the stomach. And again had to visit Sethu Babu...more endoscopy, more torture, but with his good humour and some medications Dr. Sethu Babu got me well.

But soon after, my respiratory issues surfaced: acute tonsillitis and sinusitis. The doctors in Gandhi Hospital said, "We must operate and remove the tonsils". Somewhere my inner intuition kicked in, and I said, I will never go under a knife. At that time I was taking homeo from a Dr. Narsimloo Silvery in RTC Cross roads and he told me, "please give yourself 3 months time, you will get well" and bless him I did get well and never really had that problem afterwards.

I realized after two years of working in the hotel industry, that if I must stay healthy I must get out of this job and I did soon after. Especially since the odd shifts and the lack of proper diet most of the time...was taking a toll. While working in the hotel, I used to also study French, so I got a scholarship to go to France. All was well, but one dip in the Mediterranean Sea and I became sick. And I broke the cardinal rule, never become sick in Europe for as my French teacher told me, French people are very hospitable to you, until you become sick. Then they will throw you out because they can't be bothered to pay the high costs of medical care. So, I broke that cardinal rule and I could see that those who hosted me were not too comfortable with my cough and cold. I tried to overcome that by gargling salt water (of which I learnt by then) and to use a cough syrup that was still available across the counter from the pharmacy. My trip included trekking in the central mountains and during that time, I was having respiratory issues while climbing up. On my return I did a lot of research and realized that the constant use of Antibiotics was draining my body and I was beginning to get weak. So, I decided I had to improve both my immunity and my lung capacity to get over all these health issues.

On advice from my neighbour Dr. Patnaik, I started to learn swimming. But being inside water for long hours would aggravate my cough and colds. So, Patnaik uncle said, it's ok, just take the antibiotics till you learn to swim and soon after your health will improve. So, I did take some course of antibiotics and managed to learn swimming and soon my respiratory issues got resolved. In that span of one year I changed jobs, got into a bank job from the hotel one. But that was also a bad choice since we would be gulping cups and cups of machine coffee, but at least I was eating home cooked food from my lunch box. However, meal times were always delayed which too was affecting my system.

While in that bank job, I went for my first trek to the Himalayas. And at the base camp, they told us to drink the water from the river. It was freezing cold water. I asked my camp leader if I could get warm water as I had a tendency to fall sick with cold water he said, "You will never get sick here, you are breathing pure oxygen, and pure mountain water, so don't be afraid". And that trip made a major change in the way I thought about health. True to his words, I never got sick in all those 13 days of being in the mountains – drinking water straight from the rivers, no filters, eating out of lunch box after a long trek, by only washing hands with plain water, no soap, and no bathing for 10 days, as the only option for bath was the freezing river water, which I didn't dare to get into. So being with nature, eating with unwashed hands, living in just two pairs of clothes for two weeks and no bath – still No Sickness! I used to be a cleanliness freak until then, washing hands ten times a day and never ever sitting in places that

had dust etc. But then during the trek I let go off all that, we would sit just about anywhere in the forest, and it didn't matter. Sitting inside freezing water, didn't affect. What was the difference? Pure oxygen, natural spring water and more importantly plenty of exercise. That made all the difference.

So, I understood some basic principles about health, but then once I got back to my city lifestyle again issues persisted, the odd cold, fevers, diarrhea etc. Around that time, on a chance opportunity, I went to the Govt. Nature Cure Hospital in Ameerpet, Hyderabad. I still had the IBS (Irritable bowel syndrome – a resultant from my long bout of amoebiasis), still had colds etc. So, I was put on a detox plan – only fruits and fruit juices for nearly one week along with neem water anemas, massage and sauna. After two weeks of being there, I was totally cured of all my issues. I learnt the basics of healthy living and for most parts after that I didn't have many issues.

However, after that I went to England to study my Masters and there I observed how I was becoming tired always even though I was eating good food like fruits and vegetables. And I was shocked to see that people were dying from Flu. Whereas, in India people would say, "Oh he only has the flu". I then found out about the food and the chemicals used in them, the irradiation that was used to make them look fresh all the time and so though it was tough for me, I would try and buy organic food as much. I realized that even vegetables didn't taste as good as they did back home. So, yeah, I learnt the next lesson that what we put inside our bodies is what matters most. And it was the way the entire food system of that country which was nothing more than baked beans on toast or fish and chips...that made me decide to pack my bags soon after my PG and return to India. And my health got normalized after coming back.

I began to work on documentaries and started to travel in the interior pockets of the country and my understanding of health increased after my interactions with people of the soil – and learning from their traditional wisdom. My first stop at the Deccan Development Society in Zaheerabad introduced me to millets and their nutrition and the beauty of native crops. And this journey continued in other parts of India as well. I still remember in one adivasi village of East Godavari, the farmer just went to his hill field, harvested some ribbed gourd, boiled and added salt and chilli powder. That's it, no masala nothing! That was one of the most tasty dishes I ever had. That taught me about the value of naturally grown food, especially that which was nourished by nature. Thus my learning improved about the link between staying close to nature, eating native crops and working with the soil. Thus being out in the wilderness, being closer to nature, taught me peace and the most important lesson of how it helps in our health.

In 2007, I did a documentary on Musi River and a year later on the Coastal Industrial Corridor. After seeing the impacts of pharma industry on ecology and people's health – even leading to genetic mutations and death, I felt I didn't have to sustain myself by these products – these killer industry products which are taking away lives and livelihoods. Since then I stopped even my occasional medications. However, around that time, I was diagnosed with HypoThyroidism but I avoided medications. However, after a year or two due to constant pressure from doctors and family, I had to take Thyroxin. During all these years, I would go for a yearly detox at a nature cure hospital and on one such occasion, in April 2010, a yoga teacher told me that taking these hormonal medicines for long time is going to cause complications. So from that next day on I stopped taking Thyroid medication as well and instead started to do daily yoga which kept my thyroid under control. In all these years, I still had a normal metabolism, my periods were regular but the one problem I had was water retention issue. My TSH levels were around 17-21 and during times when I was getting stressed out, it would go up to 28. So I realized that the state of my mind determines the state of my health. And I started to pay attention to being cool.

Finally, in 2016, I came across a book on mudras and that was like a gold mine. The simplest way to cure – I practiced the mudras and my thyroid issue got normal in few months time. Now the TSH levels are around 5-6 and at times it does go up to 8 but I don't bother. My body felt fine. Then around 2018 I began to eat only light supper before 7pm and that made a lot of difference. I began to lose excess weight. And in 2020 with advice from Doctor Jacob Vadakanchery – a nature cure doctor in Kerala, who makes a cardinal rule, don't eat cooked food after lunch...I shifted to eating fruits only in the evening and that truly brought in fitness – as the intermittent fasting brings a total change in your body metabolism and activity. In times of emergency I use natural herbs or at best homeo medicine. Even during Covid, I never wore a mask and didn't get sick. But only in Jan 2022 all three of us at home got the flu one after the other and they were acute symptoms – so, we just took Bryonia 200 (Homeo medicine) which I gave earlier also to all those who complained of Covid symptoms or Camphora (on advice from my homeo doctor), combined with fruit fasting and all got well within a few days.

What did I learn in this long journey? That Fasting is the best medicine. I remember once I was travelling in the forest areas of East Godavari. I got drenched while travelling on a motor cycle for about 200 kilometers. So I came back to the village with fever of 103 or so. I couldn't move a limb. The guys would say we'll take you to a doctor. I refused and asked for some fruits, and next day somehow they managed to put me on a train and the train was air conditioned. With difficulty I managed to reach home the next day morning. My parents were worried and they took me to a doctor who prescribed the usual antibiotics for 5 days. I just took for one or two days and realized I was becoming too weak. So I just stopped the medication, and simply fasted with lemon and hot water and I got well in two days time. So, each time I fall sick that's what I do, just fast on lemon juice and water and I get well.

I would give you another incident – I ate some food in a roadside place on my trip in Punjab and then followed that with another bad lunch. And by evening I was so sick I had both vomiting and loose motions and it was like at least 25-30 times in a few hours. I could not even drink water. All I did was to use a wet towel as a wet pack on my abdomen, every half hour to one hour, did apan mudra and fasted of course. The next day I was better and managed to eat some local fresh melons and drank readymade pomegranate juice and continued with the wet pack and apan mudra. Pomegranate juice helps in cases of diarrhea. The third day I had to travel to Delhi by bus, I continued my fasting taking only Mosambi juice on the way and then took my train from Delhi to Hyderabad that evening. And only on the fourth day on the train I ate some curd rice and fruits. I was okay after that.

Fever, vomiting, diarrhea and skin eruptions etc are body's ways of taking out the toxins. So in these times, just give rest to the body by fasting and just hydrate it by taking liquids like water and then may be some juices without sugar if you can't do only water fasting. You will be surprised how your body gets well in no time.

Even for things like cuts and wounds – there are some weeds that work wonders and heal your skin in no time. Nature is abundant in giving us all that we need. In 2018 when I had a fall in US and had some sort of serious sprain in my hip, all I did was use alternate cold and hot packs, Mag Phos 6x (a homeo medicine)...and then Tadasana. That is what finally got me going. Then in 2019 again I had another fall and sprained and later also had a hair line fracture in a motorcycle accident in a span of two months. So, I went to the Bone setters in Ghatkesar recommended by my friend who recovered from major fractures after their treatment. There they gave some herbs to eat and also applied some herbs to my leg and gave some supporting bandage. In six sittings over six weeks my ankle was healed. I could go on and give you so many stories of natural healing. I had seen people getting cured of Cancers and Paralysis from the

right diet which is mostly vegan / vegetarian with more fruits and raw vegetables and yoga, sun bath, massage and sauna and such other good things of life.

Finally, I remember what one midwife in an interior village of Nizamabad district of Telangana once said, "If you keep thinking something will happen to you, certainly something will happen". That old woman shared so much wisdom in that one sentence – that most disease is psychosomatic. Which we can see in the case of Co...ron..

Having learnt reiki and energy medicine and EFT (emotional freedom technique) over the last ten years along with Mudras – I understand that the key to your health lies in your mind. When the mind and body are in synchrony you are in the best state of health. And for that to happen, eat right, think right and keep your body active and mind calm and all will be well. And when your body is burdened with environmental toxins, allow it to heal by its mechanisms as the animals do – fast and rest and let your body take care of itself. Your body is the best Doctor.

- Saraswati Kavula