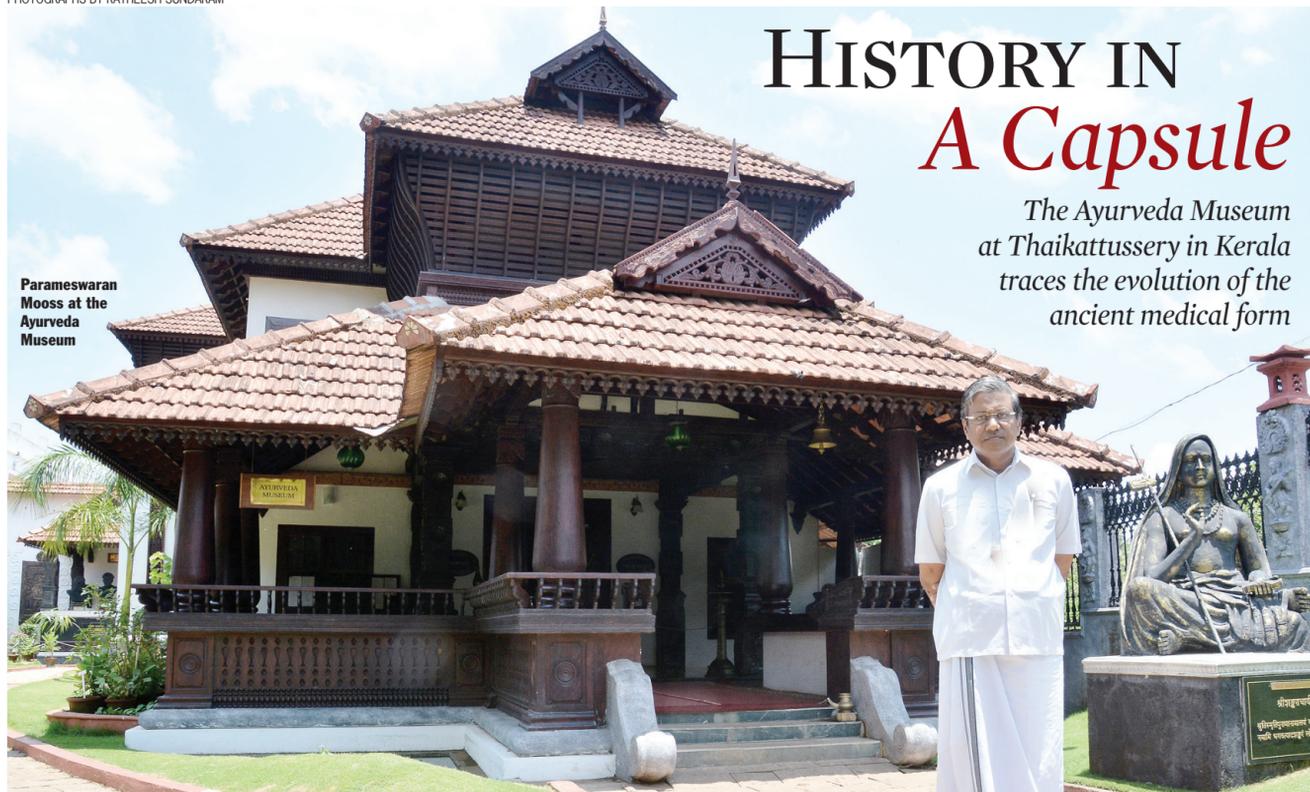


PHOTOGRAPHS BY RATHEESH SUNDARAM



Parameswaran Mooss at the Ayurveda Museum

# HISTORY IN A Capsule

The Ayurveda Museum at Thaikattussery in Kerala traces the evolution of the ancient medical form

By ELIZABETH NINAN

Ayurveda is believed to have divine origins, but its historical journey is wrapped in mystery. To throw light on the fascinating past of this alternative medicine, the Vaidyaratnam Ayurveda Museum at Thaikattussery in Kerala showcases a treasure trove of information on the origin, growth and evolution of Ayurveda in India.

The private museum—believed to be the first Ayurvedic museum in the world—was built and is maintained by the Elayidath Thaikattu Mooss family. Ashtavaidyam E T Parameswaran Mooss, the man behind the venture, says, “The museum was built as a *gurudakshina* to my grandfather, the late Ashtavaidyam Padma Shri E T Neelakandhan Mooss, the founder of the Vaidyaratnam Ayurvedic Group. The idea was proposed by my mother Sathi Antharjanam as a tribute to our forefather, who was a great exponent of Ayurveda. The museum depicts mythology, science, history and development of Ayurveda and the contribution of Ashtavaidyam tradition, which would be beneficial to future generations to have an awareness about Ayurveda as a science and way of life.”

The entrance of the museum has a figure of Lord Dhanvantari, the ‘god of Ayurveda’, rising from the ocean with amrit (nectar) in hand.



Exhibits in the museum

### THE HEALING HOUSE

- The museum is believed to be the first Ayurvedic one in the world
- It was built as a tribute to the late Neelakandhan Mooss, founder of Vaidyaratnam Ayurvedic Group
- The museum depicts mythology, science, history and development of Ayurveda and the diorama of Sushruta, the father of surgery
- Archaeological findings from the Indus Valley civilisation show that Ayurveda was practiced in India more than 5,000 years ago

Archaeological findings from the Indus Valley civilisation have proved that Ayurveda was practiced in India more than 5,000 years ago. Murals, sculptures and dioramas trace the journey of this mystical science and portray the mythical story of how Ayurveda originated from the gods and how

it came to earth. As Ayurveda is considered an ‘upaveda’ of Atharvaveda, palm leaves with Sanskrit writings are displayed to represent the Vedas. There are also dioramas of Aryans riding horses through the Himalayan passes to India and ancient Indians practicing black magic to cure diseases,



A mural on the museum wall

people performing yagnas and people in ashrams, apart from many others.

One of the main displays is the diorama of Sushruta, the father of surgery, performing an operation under rustic circumstances. Reena Abraham, a visitor, says, “I had learned about Sushruta in school. We came to the Vaidyaratnam Ayurvedic Hospital for my mother’s treatment, which is when I heard about this museum. It gives Ayurvedic history in a nutshell.” Parameswaran Mooss says, “We want to make this a destination for all who want to know about Ayurveda in an authentic way.”

Apart from slices of history, the museum also has displays related to Ayurvedic medicines, surgical instruments, storage places, tools and Ayurvedic books and the sages who wrote them. Another section exhibits advanced ayurvedic practices like ‘rasayana’ and ‘Vajeekarana’ treatments, which are believed to recapture the ‘youth’ of a person. There is also a section about how Ayurveda came into prominence in Kerala. The museum houses a 3D gallery as well.

A large part of the museum is dedicated to stalwarts from the Thaikattu Mooss family who won accolades as dedicated Ayurvedic practitioners.

Huge murals on walls portray ancient stories about famed ayurveda practitioner Vaidyaratnam Parameswaran Mooss, who was believed to have psychic power.

## Of Women’s Causes, Concerns and Celebrations

OPINION | SANCHAITA GAJAPATI RAJU



The writer is the founder of SANA that works for the empowerment of marginalised sections of society

Imagine a summit of women achievers. Of women icons. Role models. Activists. Change-makers. Survivors. An audience of over 2,000 women, and some men, at the Lincoln Center in New York, and you have just described the Women in the World (WITW) Summit hosted by the legendary Tina Brown (of *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and *Daily Beast* fame) in association with *The New York Times*.

The sixth edition of WITW this year was once again a three-day celebration of incredible women power from around the globe.

The subjects discussed and showcased included heart-wrenching narratives. There was a passionate plea of a Muslim mother living in Sweden whose daughter had gone off to Syria and was taken in by the ISIS. Despite desperate attempts to search for her, she remains unsure about her fate. The last communication from her was a brief Viber text message. There was the Nigerian former Education Minister, trying to keep alive the attention of the world to the kidnapping of the Boko Haram of 219 school girls whose fate still remains uncertain.

There was a fervent appeal by a female Yazidi Parliamentary Member from Iraq pleading for the lives of 5,000 of her Yazidi men and women captured by the ISIS and facing certain death. And the dramatic escape of a young girl and her mother from North Korea who were smuggled into China and then trekked in the cold winter nights through the Gobi desert to freedom from the clutches of the North Korean dictator. There was a heated debate on the documentary film, *India’s Daughter*.

The summit had its share of stars like Meryl Streep, who was interviewed about women and the politics of cinema, and Ashley Judd, who was in a panel discussing online trolls and cyber exploitation. And there was Helen Mirren who spoke about her remarkable career, topped by her performance as Queen Elizabeth in the Oscar winning role in *The Queen*. Barbara Streisand underlined the danger of heart attacks among women, being a lethal silent killer. Bollywood’s Aamir Khan was also present, as was Freida Pinto.

Then there was Hillary Rodham Clinton, former First Lady, Secretary of State of the USA and now running for the President of the United States.

There were inspirational stories as well, including my session with Bunker Roy, in conversation with Alyse Nelson, president of Vital Voices. I spoke about using technology to transform lives. About my work in providing clean drinking water and sanitation to the rural poor. The model I showcased was the one for which I had won the Google Impact Challenge in 2013 and which my NGO, SANA, is implementing in 20 sites in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. The summit had its share of uplifting narratives and for me an opportunity to meet and exchange notes with women from around the world.

The evenings were glamorous networking dinners with the who’s who from Hollywood and our very own Aamir Khan. The second night was an elegant sitdown dinner by Dove, for the change-makers.

The final was a call to arms as women from around the world reaffirmed their commitment to bring dignity to those oppressed, to name and shame the rapists, to pledge for the battle against climate change. It was preceded by an emotional pitch from Angelina Jolie on the humanitarian crisis of women refugees created in Syria and the Middle East by the recent turmoil in the region.

The WITW Summit remains a unique platform which brings together a diverse set of ideas, stories and causes from across the globe, within the framework of engaging conversations and audio visual experiences. Unlike other conferences, WITW has a follow-up mechanism, which ensures that those who participate take forward the dialogue. It can be in the form of help by the WITW, to amplify the voices or simply to help raise funds for their causes. The network is formidable and the efforts sincere.

The summit is now going global with an edition to be held in London in October and in New Delhi on November 20. It is undoubtedly Tina Brown’s latest triumph in a remarkable career as a media personality and a champion of women’s causes.



Delegates at the WITW Summit in New York

## The World Wide Web of Tree Stories

A self-styled naturalist in Kolkata turns his passion for flora into a wealth of online information By SUNITA RAGHU

JM Garg is no student of Botany, and yet there is nothing surprising about him rattling off the names of trees you might not know about or have ever seen. Trees are Garg’s passion, and this led him to start Efloraofindia (eFl) in 2007, an e-group on Google, that has the largest database of Indian flora with 10,000 plant species and two lakh pictures.

Garg’s interest in flora was sparked by his passion for nature, trekking and birding. “A couple of years ago I noticed that there was a lot of activity on the Internet on birding, but hardly anything about trees and plants. I started documenting trees and plants, and thus was born Indiantreepix, which was later renamed Efloraofindia,” says the 49-year-old who lives in Kolkata.

Initially, only trees were the subject of discussion in the group. Later, talks began on herbs, fungi, shrubs, etc with other groups joining in. That’s how Indiantreepix became Efloraofindia. “I started this in June 2007 with a membership of 50 people, going up to 150 people in the first month. Now, we have 2,500 members,” says Garg. “I never imagined that the idea would succeed so well.”

Garg adds that eFl is one of its kind. “None of the members have met one another, and yet there is so much interaction, so much documentation. Pictures of trees and shrubs in urban areas are identified within a day, those in remote locations might take up to a month. Almost all pictures posted get identified,” he says. The group has attracted people such as Gurcharan



RAMKRISHNA SAMANTA

Singh, an expert on western flora, and Vijayasankar Raman, an authority on south Indian flora and Pankaj Sahani on orchids. “Pictures that have not been identified are sent to experts who identify them, and that is documented forever,” he says. “Biologists may know the names but they do not have pictures. At best, the plants can be viewed in herbariums, but even that is restricted by the government. Our site is definitely the best resource on India’s flora.”

Garg’s venture has turned many into experts. “These lovers of flora are contributing so much, not financially, just their knowledge, their photographs. eFl is a zero cost system, we don’t charge anything,” says Garg. The site has stu-

**Efloraofindia, an e-group on Google, has the largest database of Indian flora with 10,000 plant species and two lakh pictures**

dents who are “learning taxonomy and botany outside of the classroom”.

He explains that discussions on e-groups are not always documented. “On eFl, all that is discussed is put on the website; every species has a page,” he says. There is also an eflora group in Pakistan, China and North America which have been started by the respective governments. However, the sites do not have any pictures, just illustrations. He rues that the Indian government has done nothing in this regard.

Garg was conferred with the Sparrow Award in 2014 for his efforts to promote Indian flora. What’s next? He plans to “identify another 10,000 plant species”.