

# It's a Gigantic Opportunity in India:

## Dr. Muhammed Majeed

Dr. Muhammed Majeed, Chairman and Founder of Sami Labs Ltd. Bengaluru, is a scientist turned businessman. Research is his passion. And business, his core competence. The man who made Ayurveda acceptable to the Americans is now riding the big nutraceutical wave in developed countries like the United States, Britain, Germany and Japan backed by the rich herbal heritage of India.

**Sitting** in the sprawling office of Sami Labs Limited in the Peenya Industrial area in Bangalore, Asia's largest industrial estate, Dr. Majeed spoke to our Editor – in – Chief Jacob George about the emergence and evolution of nutraceuticals, the great Ayurveda connection, his role in this growing global

business segment and the future of the nutraceutical business in India. Excerpts:

***What are Nutraceuticals and what are the changes that Ayurveda has brought to it?***

Dr. Stephen DeFelice, chairman

and founder of the Foundation for Innovation in Medicine in New Jersey, coined the term 'nutraceutical' in 1989, anticipating that food and food related substances in totality, would be used to improve health. Prior to that, Nutraceuticals were known as dietary supplements or food





supplements in the form of herbal extracts formulated into tablets, capsules and liquids. There was no organized industry or government regulation on nutraceuticals in the US until October 1994. Because of the overwhelming preference of Americans towards alternative medicine, (more

Americans were going to see their alternative physician such as Chiropractors and Naturopaths), there was a great need for natural products. In 1994 the US Congress enacted DSHEA Regulation (Dietary Supplements Health and Education Act). This regulation streamlined

the category of products comprising herbal extracts and natural products under the category of Nutraceuticals for use in making dietary supplements to support preventive health maintenance. Ayurveda has a vast collection of natural ingredients used in traditional medicine for millennia,

and therefore found a natural place in the growing market for nutraceuticals. However, as the concept of nutraceuticals is aligned to “food as medicine”, these ingredients had to be presented as phytonutrients to support health and wellness, rather than to treat or cure diseases. Ayurvedic herbs have been researched in this context, and their active constituents have been isolated, characterized and studied. Clinical research with respect to preventive health maintenance has validated the use of these herbs in dietary supplement formulations to support cardiovascular health, brain health, weight management, and healthy blood sugar and blood pressure levels; as well as in sports nutrition and healthy aging.

***What is the role of nutraceuticals in modern health care in the US and other developed countries?***

Since the introduction of DSHEA Regulation, Nutraceuticals have gained a substantial place in the USA health care system. It is estimated that more than 70% of Americans look into preventive care using Nutraceuticals.

Most of this interest is attributed to the growing population of aging baby boomers, a group that looks to personalized healthcare to counter the effects of aging. As researchers rightly concluded at the turn of the last century, the popularity of alternative therapies is not because of dissatisfaction with conventional therapies but because patients view physicians and alternative practitioners as a larger group of their healthcare team. Simultaneously, greater access to knowledge databases on

preventive approaches to health and wellness, the desire to “look and feel good”, higher disposable incomes and a media focus on fitness, have all played significant roles in the increased popularity of complementary therapies with the younger generation.

***How did you get into this field? How did you convince the Americans that there are potential solutions to their problems in the Ayurveda?***

My entry into this field was quite accidental. I am basically trained in Industrial Pharmacy and modern drug development and was in the generic drugs business in the early 1990s. With the enactment of DSHEA, I saw a better opportunity for natural products in healthcare, and began to focus on introducing herbal ingredients of Ayurvedic origin to international markets. In doing so, I began efforts to standardize herbal ingredients of Ayurvedic origin for specific marker compounds and to develop quality standards for herbal extracts. Some of the products we developed are used as the industry standard in the US. These are proprietary extracts which were subjected to clinical studies and stringent quality assurance. Research institutions across the world use some of these extracts in their clinical studies. These instances, along with educating western audiences through publications, and presentations helped to garner credibility for, and popularize some standardized herbal extracts of Ayurvedic origin as nutraceuticals and natural drugs.

***Ayurvedic drugs are usually a mix of roots, stems and leaves. And most of them are***

***proprietary products. How can these products be converted into nutraceuticals?***

It is true that in Ayurveda the products of polypharmacy is an acceptable practice. There are quite a number of reasons for doing so also. However, these times demand scientific documentation and validation of the composition on the clinical use. Additionally, formulations need to be standardized for specific active compounds that are characteristic of the herbs in the composition. Standardized products based on polypharmacy formulations are difficult. So today the focus is on single entity useful products and the future will see polypharmacy products also get standardized.

***Why is it that Ayurveda's nutraceutical angle is not so popular in India?***

Ayurveda's Nutraceutical angle is getting more prominent day by day. A number of companies are pushing the products in the OTC / nutraceutical range.

***What is your plan for India? What could be the business volume of nutraceuticals in India, in about 5 years?***

I see a gigantic opportunity in India. I can comfortably state that in the next five years nutraceuticals in India could be half as big as the pharmaceutical business. Awareness on prevention and clinical documentation on nutraceuticals will drive the business forward. Through Sami Direct, we plan to stay in this business in an aggressive fashion. Sami Direct itself could become a Rs.1000 crore company in the next five years.



***What is the business volume of this sector globally?***

In 2010 this was around USD 60 Billion and it is growing at double digits, growth rate.

***What are the ailments which nutraceuticals can address?***

Common health conditions addressed by nutraceuticals with a view to prevention and healthy aging include joint health, digestive problems, cholesterol levels, skeletal strength, hormonal imbalance, body fat, vision, cardiovascular problems, memory and cognition, gender specific problems.

***Do you need special approvals from regulatory authorities like the Drugs Controller to sell nutraceuticals in India?***

No special approvals from the Drugs Controller are required, since they are classified as food supplements in India. However, food supplement regulatory approval is required.

***Ayurveda is a big treasure-trove of great knowledge which can be a solid base for healthy living. What steps should be taken to make it acceptable to the modern world?***

In my mind, what is needed is modern scientific documentation of what is available in Ayurveda.

***How can India, with its Ayurveda and all sorts of herbs in hand, be a global leader in the nutraceutical industry?***

To be a global leader in the nutraceutical industry, India must place a lot more emphasis on the cultivation of medicinal plants, which is the very fundamental of Ayurveda. This is one area where we are lagging behind which must be addressed immediately.

***What is your future plan in this area? New discoveries? New breakthroughs? Patents?***

Continued research is the focus of Sami group. Even with the 69 patents, we have not discovered much. We have a long way to go to rediscover some of the treasures in Ayurveda and bring them to good use for the public. We will continue to work at it with a passion and dedication and most certainly we will go for patents in the interest of India.