

A tradition of beauty

Ayurveda, the "science of life", is a philosophy that covers every aspect of being: health, food, spirit, sex, occupation and relationships. It teaches how to live in harmony with your inner self and with the world around you. At one extreme of this far-reaching philosophy are the practices of religious ascetics, who subject themselves to fasts and other rigours to try to transcend the physical. At the other extreme are the sensual paintings, sculptures and writings that reveal a people at ease with their bodies and appreciative of the pleasures of life.

beauty of body and soul

For both men and women, beauty is seen as a blessing in India: gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines are depicted as handsome and graceful, with arched eyebrows and delicate features, and images of women's beauty and vigour appear in the earliest sacred texts. Traditionally, Indian women have adorned themselves with jewellery, make-up and body art. They have perfumed their hair and dressed it with flowers and gems. They have worn garments in dazzling colours, choosing fitted blouses that emphasize body shape, or swirling saris that draw attention to graceful movement.

Both sexes have traditionally groomed themselves to make the most of their looks. Since the earliest times, Ayurvedic remedies have included techniques to brighten eyes, clear skin and enhance the lustre of hair. Anti-aging treatments are among the most popular, aimed at restoring not only physical vigour but also a youthful appearance.

Because the philosophy of Ayurveda treats body, mind and soul as interrelated, beauty is not limited to the physical dimension, but reflects the vitality and health of the whole person, and adornment plays only a minor part. Jewels are valued not only for their beauty but also because they are considered to possess health-enhancing properties. Herbal remedies and treatments aim to cleanse the body from the



△ Harmony is the essence of Ayurveda. India's goddesses of wisdom, love, life and death teach their followers to blend action with reflection, courage with compassion, so beauty grows from inner radiance.

inside, while meditative practices prevent stress leaving its mark, and a fitness regime ensures agelessly youthful physical grace.

Ayurvedic medicine

Some of the basic principles of Ayurveda were set out more than 3,000 years ago in the Vedas, the sacred texts of Hinduism, and its teachings are believed to have been passed on by word of mouth for many centuries before that. The earliest medical textbooks, the *Susruta Samhita* and the *Charaka Samhita* (written before 500 BC and still consulted

today), list more than 700 herbal medicines, 125 surgical instruments and a range of procedures including cosmetic surgery and kidney-stone removal. Human bones excavated from the city of Harappa, dating from before 1500 BC, bear evidence of surgical repairs.

In the ancient world, Ayurveda's influence spread as far as Egypt, China and Greece. Since Western medicine developed from that of the ancient Greeks, a trace of Ayurveda survives in modern medical training, for example in kidney operations