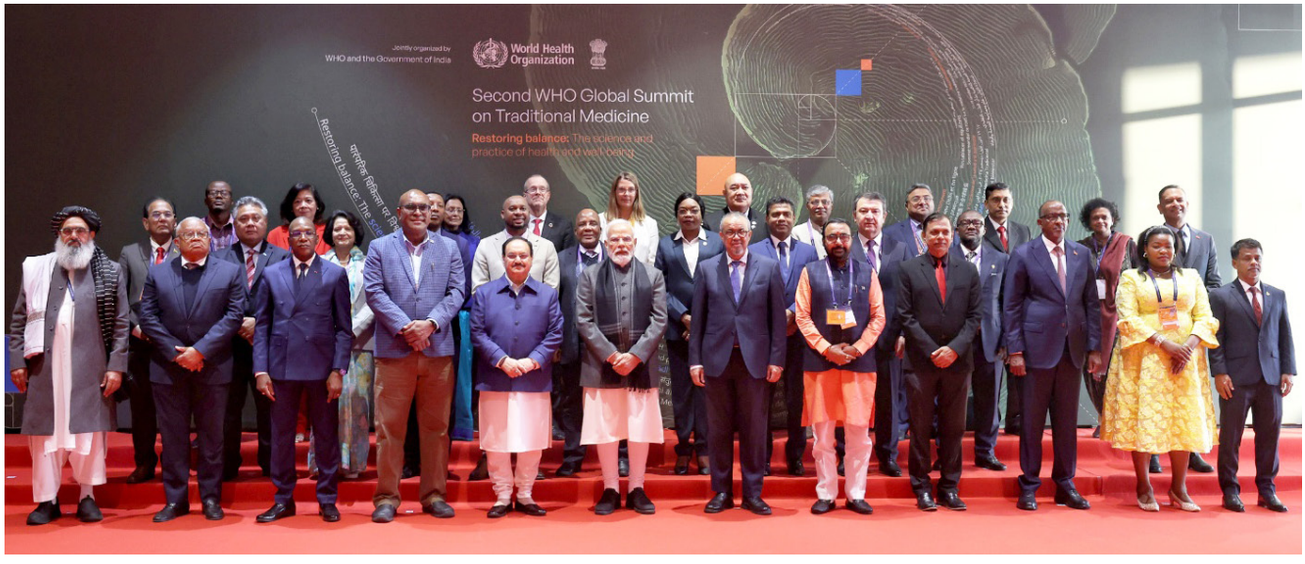
Traditional Medicine: A New Era of Health Diplomacy

Anil Pratap Singh[a,*], Avnish Jolly[b]
[a]General Secretary & Founder Director, Global Science Academy, Satywanpury, Block Road, Basti-272001, Uttar Pradesh, India
[b]Canadian Lawyer, 3 Drimes Place, Winnipeg, R2V 4M2, Manitoba, Canada
Corresponding author: globalaps@rediffmail.com

The Second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine, held in New Delhi in December 2025, marked a new frontier in global health governance. Jointly organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, the summit provided a timely diplomatic platform to advance a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable health. As the *Atharva Veda* mandates, *'Ayushyamanam shariram, shantim prapnuyat'*, that is, 'may the living body attain health and peace', highlighting the inseparable link between human well-being and societal harmony.

Diplomacy and Global Health Governance

The summit reaffirmed the understanding that diplomacy in traditional medicine serves as a vehicle for health equity and peaceful coexistence. By integrating diverse healing systems into global frameworks, nations can foster mutual trust and knowledge exchange, supporting the principles of inclusivity and



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus during the closing ceremony of the summit. Photo credit: PIB India 2025

shared responsibility that reinforce international law. Dr Shyama Kuruvilla, Director, WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre, emphasised that traditional medicine makes a meaningful contribution to universal health coverage when its integration is evidence-informed, ethical, and respects cultural and ecological foundations. The summit was a vital gathering where the diverse needs and goals of both developing nations, i.e., the Global South, and wealthier, industrialised nations (the Global North) were discussed and balanced. The dialogue centred on the principle of equity, and India acted as a bridge between these two hemispheres. In this context, the *WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034* underscores health equity as the guiding principle of this emerging global framework.

Environment, Biodiversity, and Legal Frameworks

Deliberations during the three-day global summit established that traditional medicine systems depend on biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. Consequently, diplomatic and policy frameworks should incorporate environmental law principles such as sustainable resource use, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. Protecting medicinal plants and ecosystems is both an environmental obligation and a public health priority. Hence, legal instruments can promote equitable benefit-sharing and support the rights of Indigenous and local communities, in line with international human rights norms. The summit's focus on inclusivity echoes the work of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (*The Idea of Justice*, 2009), who argues that justice in health depends on respecting a plurality of perspectives and local knowledge, rather than relying exclusively on uniform technical frameworks. This can also support intergenerational equity and long-term peace.

A key highlight of the summit was the recognition that traditional medicine is inextricably linked to environmental integrity. The New Delhi summit stressed that human health cannot be protected without safeguarding the ecosystems that provide medicinal flora. To this end, the summit attained several key objectives, including:

- **Regulatory Landmarks:** The advancement of digital tools, such as the Traditional Medicine Global Library (TMGL), to provide a digital public infrastructure for tracking and verifying ancient knowledge. This ensures transparency and provides a robust defence against misappropriation.
- **Indigenous Rights:** Deliberations focused on ensuring that the Global North adheres to international norms regarding equitable benefit-sharing. This is crucial for the communities of the Global South who have preserved these traditions for millennia.
- **Policy Integration:** The summit established that effective governance now demands cross-sectoral integration across health, environment, trade, and intellectual property rights (IPR).

Peace, Equity, and Cultural Respect

During the sessions, delegates also highlighted that formal recognition of traditional medicine within health governance frameworks is vital for supporting social inclusion and cultural dignity. From a diplomatic perspective, the discussions stressed how such recognition can act as a catalyst to reduce health disparities, strengthen community resilience, and contribute to lasting social peace. A significant point of consensus was that traditional healing systems, ranging from Ayurveda in the East to Indigenous North American medicine in the West, share a foundational emphasis on harmony among individuals, communities, and nature. It was concluded that these holistic values align perfectly with the goals of preventive diplomacy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By validating these diverse systems, the summit affirmed that global health policy can foster a more respectful and resilient world order.

The summit's technical dialogues revealed a thoughtful synergy between global traditions. Experts mentioned that legal frameworks are not just administrative tools, but also a means to ensure cultural dignity. For instance, the Indigenous North American philosophy, *'Health is harmony with all our relations,'* was discussed alongside the Ayurvedic sciences of Dinacharya and Ritucharya. Together, these systems illustrated that health is inseparable from ecological balance as well.

During a technical session, the legacy of the late Gandhian and legal activist Ela Bhatt was also recalled; she once said that *'When people's knowledge is respected, and their rights protected, peace and progress follow.'* The delegates acknowledged that the formal recognition and protection of traditional medicine does more than provide healthcare and help heal historical injustices.

Strategic Recommendations

The summit's deliberations culminated in a set of strategic imperatives aimed at ensuring traditional medicine makes a meaningful contribution to global health. The following priorities were raised and adopted as essential pillars for the time to come:

- **Multilateral Dialogue:** Delegates emphasised the need to strengthen cooperation through WHO-led platforms to foster mutual trust and bridge the gap between diverse health systems.
- **Regulatory Harmony:** The discussions advocated for national legal frameworks that strike a balance between safety and quality, while promoting innovation. The *Ayush Mark* was highlighted as a successful model for ensuring standardisation while supporting the growth of traditional medicine sectors.
- **Environmental Integrity:** A key consensus was reached to embed conservation and climate resilience directly into health governance, thereby protecting the ecological foundations upon which these medicinal systems depend.

A New Paradigm for Governance

The sessions of the 2nd Global Summit on Traditional Medicine further established that environmental and biodiversity protections are no longer peripheral, but must be included as a core component of traditional medicine governance. Moreover, there was a strong call to safeguard indigenous and traditional knowledge through ethical, rights-based legal instruments that prevent exploitation.

The summit concluded that traditional medicine cooperation should be utilised as a strategic tool for *'health diplomacy'*, peacebuilding, and sustainable development, fostering a more resilient and equitable global order.

Toward a '*Sanatan*' Future

In his concluding address at the closing ceremony, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to a science-based, people-centred approach to traditional medicine.

While much work remains to bridge the gaps in research and funding, this summit provided a solid foundation on which to build by uniting ancient wisdom with modern law, paving the way toward a *'Sanatan'* (perennial) future that ensures collective well-being for both people and the planet.