

Mongrel Media

presents

Ayurveda

The Art of Being

A film by Pan Nalin

**OFFICIAL SELECTION
Montreal World Film Festival
Vancouver International Film Festival**

Germany/Switzerland, 2001, 102 minutes
Hindi & various other Indian languages with French and English subtitles

Distribution

**mongrel
MEDIA**

109 Melville Ave.
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6G 1Y3
P: 416.516.9775
F: 416.516.0651

Email: info@mongrelmedia.com
www.mongrelmedia.com

Publicity

Bonne Smith
Star PR
Tel: (416) 488-4436
Fax: (416) 488-8438
Email: starpr@sympatico.ca

Crew

Writer/Editor/Director Pan Nalin
Producer..... Christoph Friedel
Co-Producer..... Christa Saredi
Line producer..... Claudia Steffen
Composer..... Cyril Morin
Cinematographer Serge Guez
Editor Ben Von Grafestein
Production manager..... Dilip Shankar
Assistant director..... Natasha De Betak
Sound recordist..... Dominique Davy

Featuring:

DR. SCOTT GERSON
BRAHMANAND SWAMIGAL
VAIDYA NARAYAN MURTHY
DR. NICOLOS KOSTOPOULOS
DR. ASHWIN BAROT
VAIDYA PURANCHAND MALVIYA
DR. V. ARJUNAN
DR. G. GANGADHARAN
VAIDYA B. G. GOKULAN
DR. DHARMALINGAM
DAI MUTHUAMMA
DR. SATNARAYAN BHATT
VAIDYA BALARAMAN
DR. SHREERAJ

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Introduction

Originating in India and then spreading to Egypt, Greece, Italy, Tibet, China, Russia and Japan, Ayurveda is probably the world's oldest continually practiced holistic healthcare system.

Its eight main branches (pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics, ophthalmology, geriatrics, otolaryngology, toxicology and general medicine) are the forerunners of our medicine today and have directly influenced basic concepts of allopathic practices. In addition, massage, herbal remedies, plastic surgery, psychiatry, shiatsu, acupuncture and acupressure have their roots in Ayurvedic medicine.

Ayurvedic doctors (Vaidyas) pledge that all life in the world is part of one single unit, which manifests as macrocosms and microcosms. The Ayurvedic physician is the mediator, for the patients, between these two.

In Ayurveda, both prevention of disease and maintenance of good health are carried out by natural means and by achieving a state of balance among the bodies' three fundamental energies – Vata, Pitta and Kapha – which emerge from five elements – Space, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. All three doshas are present in each person but their proportional relationship varies from person to person.

Also according to Ayurveda, diseases must be treated by their root causes, not just by their symptoms. For example, a patient with diabetic retinitis would probably receive Laser Photo Coagulation, which treats the symptoms of the disease. In Ayurvedic medicine, the patient would receive a treatment called "Tarpana," which involves the use of medicinal fluids to remove the cause of the disease. To the Ayurvedic physician, diabetic retinitis is caused by an imbalance in pitta dosha, therefore, anti-pitta dosha drugs would be used.

Dr. Nicolos Kostopoulos observed in the film that the 1990s was called the "Decade of the Brain" in the United States, since a great deal of research effort was focused on the nervous system. He then points out that a thousand years ago, the focus of sophisticated ancient Ayurvedic medical texts was already neurological and that the crucial importance of the brain and the nervous system was already an integral part of its science.

Written, edited and directed by Pan Nalin (director of the Miramax release *Samsara*), **AYURVEDA: THE ART OF BEING** celebrates a practice that went almost unrecognized during two centuries of British colonial rule in India, and examines some of the reasons why Ayurveda has become incredibly popular all over the world.

Pan Nalin – Director

Pan Nalin, a self taught filmmaker, was born in a very poor family in a remote village of Adatala, in India, and spent most part of his childhood on railway tracks and platforms where his father sold tea & snacks.

Right from a very young age, he was fascinated with mirrors, lights and shadows.

Adatala village's remoteness and proximity to wildlife areas added to its natural beauty and tranquillity, where the imagination of a child had a vast scope for creation and innovation.

As a child, Nalin disliked schools. Instead he used to paint and draw and often used to stage plays with children or to participate in mythological dramas. But it was not until he was nine years old that Pan Nalin saw a film for the first time.

Later as a teenager, he left his family and village and ventured into a world completely unknown to him. When Nalin learnt that he would have to be a graduate to go to a film school, he started to learn filmmaking on his own. During the day he studied fine arts and during the night he worked to finance his studies and living.

Eventually Nalin was admitted to study at India's prestigious design school NID, The National Institute of Design. There, he studied visual communication but devoted most of his time to learn filmmaking. Besides, he managed a very successful film club where he screened and wrote about films. He often organised film festivals and retrospectives of the films of Tarkovsky, Godard, Bergman, Kurosawa, Eisenstein and Bunuel, among others.

After shooting some four animated short films and 20 small silent films with two 8mm and 16mm Bolex, Nalin began travelling across India and learning all he could learn about himself, his roots and the rest of the world.

Tired of his “nomadic and homeless” existence, he landed up in Bombay with 26 Rupees in his pocket and bagful of unfinished scripts. He joined a film production company, eventually as production runner and then as Production Manager. It took only a few months for the producers of the company to realise Nalin's talent and offered him to direct commercials and corporate films.

But even though the instant success in the commercial world brought him money, Bombay brought no creative satisfaction to Mr. Nalin – he refused offers to direct typical Bollywood masala films. One day, he sold all he owned and set out to travel in Europe.

On returning to India, he roamed the Himalayas and built a solid spiritual foundation besides developing ideas for several feature films. Along with the process of writing, he experimented with the short fiction film format, eventually landing up with many unfinished short films. Nalin has made several documentaries in collaboration with Canal Plus, BBC, Discovery, National

Geographic, France 3. All his films evoke a unique universe of spiritual quests in light of eroticism, sensuality, faith, religion and society. It was in 1993 that he felt it was right time to make his first feature film *Samsara* but since then it has taken seven long years before this reality would turn into a dream.

As told to Anne Magidson.

Director's Statement

As a child growing up in the Indian countryside, I had an opportunity to live Ayurveda. My family, even today, continues to believe in Ayurveda like they have done for several generations. I already know about some of the significant differences between Ayurveda and the Western approach to diagnosis and treatment. However, till today I remain totally impressed by the logic of Ayurveda and charmed by the power and completeness of its comprehensive understanding of life.

In the last 3 years alone nearly 500 books about Ayurveda are being published in 60 different languages, in 50 countries. In 2002 and 2003, about 500 more books will be added to the existing literature on Ayurveda.

The film travels nearly 10,000 miles through landscapes of exceptional beauty and geographical variety in India, Greece and USA. For several months, my research team and I have constantly searched out people and places to do total justice to this exceptional subject and to voice the story of Ayurveda through exceptional Vaidyas (Ayurvedic Doctors), patients and experts.

Some of the Vaidyas have revealed their secrets and opened their homes and clinics to us. Plant searching tribes took us into a dark corner of jungle where a rare endangered plant still grows wild. Ancient Palm-leaf manuscripts, locked away for three to five centuries, were in front of us. An ancient 'Mud-Scanning' method of diagnosis had been considered extinct and lost, but our months-long efforts managed to track down the last surviving place. A rarely seen lost science of Marma, vital points, and how it can kill or cure was demonstrated on a goat for the first time, revealing vital points which can paralyse.

During the three long years while preparing the film I have been surprised to discover how scientific Ayurveda is. I personally believe that our world of today, into a new millennium, is going to need natural arts of healing like it never did ever before. Spirituality and natural balances will play a vital role in governing our happiness in near future.

Pan Nalin, January 2001, Paris

BRAHMANAND SWAMIGAL



Brahmanand Swamigal has been practicing Ayurveda for 55 years – he was 67-years-old when the film was shot in 2000. After getting his Ph.D. from the Sri Lanka University, Swamigal has been dedicating his time to researching ancient Ayurvedic transcripts and poems.



“In those days, the Gurus taught us that if science is only followed for money, it is wasted. Wealth earned from medical science is always contaminated, as it comes from the suffering of others...”

– *Brahmanand Swamigal*

VAIDYA NARAYAN MURTHY

The special bark that Narayan Murthy uses to treat various Leukemic and cancerous cases was tested at a laboratory in the Indian Institute of Science. The bark was pulverized and put on Leukemic cell-lines K562. Within 24 hours, the cancerous cell-lines were dead.



“The deforestation is a serious problem for me, and that is why I am striving to save these plants. We have to preserve these herbs...for the next generations.”

–*Vaidya Narayan Murthy*

DIVYA



Divya suffers of irregular growth and her problem was considered incurable by “English medicine.” After being treated by Dr. V. Arjunan with special herb-oils, Divya was able to stand and walk by herself for the first time.

DR. NICOLOS KOSTOPOULOS

George, one of Kostopoulos' many patients, was having an average of four to five migraines in October of 1997. After using Kostopoulos' natural medication integrated with Yoga exercises and relaxation, George now has less than a maximum of two migraines every two weeks.



“In Ayurveda...they have said that the first factors that can create a disease are related with human intelligence. How did they know, two thousand years ago...that stress was going to be such a factor in our life?”

– *Dr. Nicolos Kostopoulos*

OTHER AYURVEDIC DOCTORS

Dr. Scott Gerson National Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine New York, NY (U.S.)

The National Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine (NIAM) is recognized as the largest and most authentic resource of information on Ayurveda in the United States. The institute was established in 1982 by Scott Gerson, M.D. Dr. Scott Gerson is the nation's only medical doctor to hold degrees in both Ayurveda and conventional allopathic medicine. He holds the academic position of Clinical Assistant Professor at New York Medical College in the Department of Community and Preventive Medicine. Dr. Gerson's medical practice has combined Ayurveda and conventional medicine for nearly twenty years and he is widely regarded as this country's most experienced Ayurvedic physician and researcher. His Ph.D. dissertation in Ayurveda at the prestigious Pune University is on Panchakarma and its Effects on Human Immunity. He recently published part of his work on the antifungal activities of certain Ayurvedic plants.

Dr. Scott Gerson was born in New York City where he was raised and attended elementary and secondary school. At an early age he became interested simultaneously in the subjects pertaining to consciousness, science and Eastern philosophy. At age fourteen he began exploring hypnosis; at age fifteen he acquired a prototype of one of the first primitive biofeedback instruments and began to make observations on the connection between mind and body. Even today, he continues to employ these two modalities in his medical practice. At age seventeen he became acquainted with the work of the mystic/philosopher George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff and became aware of a strong yearning to find the connection between higher states of consciousness and the science of healing.

Dr. Gerson attended Brandeis University in Waltham, MA and received his B.A. in Philosophy. He then travelled to Europe and eventually to India where he met one of his early teachers, the highly renowned vaidya Dr. V.N. Pandey, the director of the Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha Medicine. Through this friendship, Dr. Gerson began to earnestly study Ayurveda and eventually continued his studies at the College of Ayurveda in Trivandrum, where he spent almost three years. As his knowledge and insight into Ayurvedic principles developed, Dr. Gerson's interest became focused in the area of Panchakarma Chikitsa – the science of detoxification and rejuvenation. He therefore took up residence for some time in Kottakkal, India the home of the famous Panchakarma facility, the Arya Vaidya Sala, directed by the late Dr. P.N. Varier, who became Dr. Gerson's second important mentor.

Based on his understanding of the importance of Panchakarma and the imminent danger of its attrition and disappearance, Dr. Gerson began to travel throughout India to various centers of Panchakarma, both large and small. He found many nuances and variations shaped by the intuitive wisdom of various vaidyas and their ancestors throughout the ages who lived in different regions of the subcontinent.

For two years he personally experienced Panchakarma treatments at these facilities and shared ideas with many doctors, ethnobotanists and patients. He gradually catalogued in great detail the many pieces of practical knowledge of these purification procedures, which had somehow survived thirty or more centuries to appear in our present era.

Dr. Gerson returned to the United States and attended medical school once again, this time at The Mount Sinai School of Medicine in his native New York. He continued his education for three additional years with residency positions at several teaching hospitals including New York University Hospital, Bellevue Hospital, and New York Downtown Hospital, completing the requirements for training in the specialty of Internal Medicine. Today, he holds an academic position as Clinical Assistant Professor at New York Medical College in the Department of Community and Preventive Medicine.

Dr. Gerson founded the National Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine in 1982 and since that time has integrated Ayurveda with conventional allopathic medicine. He does not travel extensively except for trips to India twice a year. He prefers to remain as quiet and still as possible and to assist his patients with their understanding of their health conditions. The primary activity in his life is to be available as an Ayurvedic consultant and physician for his patients. He supports the spread of Ayurveda through the research and educational activities of The National Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine, where he gives regular seminars and workshops on Ayurvedic Medicine and related complementary medicine topics.

Currently, Dr. Gerson is preparing his Ph.D. thesis in Panchakarma Chikitsa (Detoxification Therapy), which he will present jointly to the University of Poona and Benaras Hindu University in 2002. He is a member of the teaching and research faculties at the prestigious Institute of Indian Medicine in Poona as well as numerous other academic affiliations including the Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha Medicine, the Indian government's principal Ayurvedic organization. He also holds the academic position of Assistant Clinical Professor at New York Medical College in the Department of Community and Preventive Medicine.

PRESS CONTACT:
Dr Scott Gerson (M.D.)
13 W. 9th Street
NY, NY 10011
(212) 505-8971

Dr. Gokulan
Ayurvedicx Ophthalmologist – Netra Foundation
Kerala, India

Encouraged by his mother, who was a practitioner of traditional medicine, Dr. Gokulan became interested in this field at a very early age. After studying the field for seven years, he chose to specialize in the area of traditional ophthalmology.

Dr. Gokulan, whose title was earned through seven years of study of the ancient discipline of ayurvedic medicine, is demonstrating ways to avoid expensive diagnostic, treatment, and surgical procedures by using ayurvedic ophthalmologic preventative and curative practices. These practices can halt the progression of cataracts and other common eye ailments without resorting to surgery or expensive medical treatments.

Dr. Gokulan is also systematically documenting and reviving a broader range of ayurvedic methods than is currently used, while training motivated and interested students and graduates of both ayurvedic and modern medicine in these cost-effective methods. This training enables poor and disadvantaged communities to access primary eye care for conditions such as night blindness, conjunctivitis and myopia, as well as cataracts (www.ashoka.org).

Individuals and Institutions in the Film:

Brahmanand Swamigal
Ayurveda and Siddha Physician
Agasthian Clinic
Coimbatore, India

Dr. G. Gangad Haran
Medical Plant Conservation Center
Kerala, India

Dr. Nicolos Kostopoulos
Holistic Health Center
Athens, Greece

Dr. V. Arjunan
Telungupalayam Hospital
Tamilnadu, India

Rajah Healthy Acres
Kerala, India

Dr. Dharmalingam
Dharma Clinic
Chennai, India