Planet Health Museum

Capturing and Disseminating India's Cultural Health Heritage

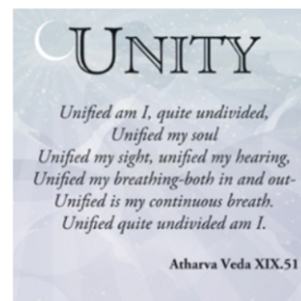Ranjit Makkuni
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Against the backdrop of the rapid rise of India as an economic power, (and a rise in which the infrastructure has not correspondingly been planned or kept up with rapid growth), and against a backdrop of a growing number of people who cannot afford sky-rocketing medical costs, and people who find themselves in stressful, poorly designed urban environments, Planet Health addresses the emerging challenge of providing immediate and direct access to cost effective medical alternatives so that Urban dwellers can 'retake' charge of their health.

'Planet Health', is an interactive multimedia museum that allows people to access traditional Green philosophy and the concept and experience of health from the perspectives of Ayurveda and Yoga.

Starting from the concept of health and alternative perspectives of the body, the project illustrates new visions and tools for a healthy society and planet. The project presents this vision across a spectrum of disciplines which include ancient sciences and modern computing media to communicate the vision.

UNITY

Unified am I, quite undivided,
Unified my soul
Unified my sight, unified my hearing,
Unified my breathing-both in and out-
Unified is my continuous breath.
Unified quite undivided am I.

Atharva Veda XIX.51

Planet Health museum explores cost effective culturally rooted health practices found in traditional writings on Green philosophy and presents traditional practices to examine a sustainable future and make these ubiquitously available to all.

Planet Health combines video documentation of the traditional knowledge of Ayurveda and Yoga traditions, animation, modern interaction design, tactile computers, craft, and product design forms into one interactive experience. The aim of the project is to explore continuity between the media of film, art, design, and modern interface technology into a seamless whole, inviting the museum visitor to experience green consciousness, as interpreted by Ayurveda and Yoga traditions.

A potential revolution in health care can emerge today based on ancient health traditions of India that flourished thousands of years ago.
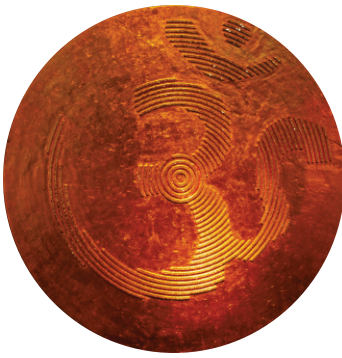
In this worldview healing is intimately linked to ecological awareness.

In the Ayurvedic and Yogic indigenous medical traditions, the body is a system of 'interconnected intelligences'. This model of health and well being does not isolate mind, body and spirit into three separate compartments, but views it as one holistic unit which weaves the physical, the psychological, the subconscious, and the super conscious states of being into one whole. In contrast, the modern materialistic view of medical science is based on a split between the mind and body.

The project presents a view of 'health' as a state of harmony between the Individual and the Whole and presents a view of healing as a process of restoring the balance. This perspective shows an alternative, non-Cartesian, non-Western notion of a body seen as a meeting place of energy, ecology, interconnection, perfection, and the body also as an expression of bio diversity.

A PRAYER TO HEALING HERBS

The tawny plants were born in the ancient times, three ages before the gods; now I will meditate upon their hundred and seven forms.

Mothers, you have a hundred forms and a thousand sprouts. You, who have a hundred ways of working, make this man healthy for me.

Be joyful, you plants that bear flowers and those that bear fruit. Like mares that win the race together, the glowing plants will carry us across.

You mothers who are called plants, I say to you who are goddesses: let me win a horse, a cow, a robe – and your very life, O man.

Rig Veda 10.97: 1-4

Planet Health shows a non-violent approach to Health, both in methodology and in the non- invasive practices found in Yoga and Ayurveda, and, in allowing Urban Man to re-recognize the intimate bond between Man and Plants.

The methodology of the project represents a deliberate and conscious 'stepping back' in order to reclaim the 'healthful bliss' that is due to every living being on the planet. Museum goers, by interacting with the exhibits, gain access to alternative therapies and knowledge of traditional healing and herbs that can be put to practice immediately, and therefore they can carry valuable 'learning' home from the museum visit.

Many of the hardware forms presented show new possibilities for culture based design, that is, through the use of wood and green materials. If implemented on a large scale this could provide and generate opportunities for traditional craftsmen, thereby creating sustainability of craftsmen, and ensuring commitments to complex traditional expertise, e.g., wood carving, lacquer work, crafts which are under threat of extinction.

This represents one of the first presentations honouring the value of traditional medicine, and will be valuable not just for Ayurveda and Yoga, but for all the indigenous systems of practice across the world.

ACKNOWLDGEMENTS

THE SACRED WORLD RESEARCH LABORATORY

The Sacred World Research Laboratory has been exploring technologies and designs for Personal Freedom; and the attainment of Physical Health is one of the major enablers of Freedom, personal and spiritual.

The Laboratory has been exploring innovation created by building bridges between Traditional and Modern Cultures: to ensure culture continuity through bridges between traditional green design and modern technology based designs.

It has been developing a voice for traditional cultures and expression in Modern Design and Technology. Especially as India advances to become a global super power, works such as Planet Health attempt to preserve traditional cultural expertise in the face of homogenization.

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RANJIT MAKKUNI

Ranjit Makkuni is a multimedia researcher, designer and musician. He is the President of the Sacred World Foundation, and Director of the Sacred World Research Laboratory, where he leads a design and research think-tank pioneering new applications in culturally rooted computing.

Prior to this, Makkuni spent nearly two decades at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), where he carved out new spaces of multimedia computing interfaces and learning applications, starting from the visionary explorations of the smalltalk object-oriented programming language in the 1980s to body-friendly, touch-friendly and culture-friendly multimedia computing in the 2000s.

Makkuni's projects go beyond just demonstrating futuristic technology. In his projects, Makkuni brings to life the authenticity of traditional ideals on primal ecology, learning, and healing that are simultaneously contemporary.

His projects allow for the participation of diverse viewpoints of people whose skills face the threat of extinction. Proficiency in multimedia technology as well as traditional art allows Makkuni to bridge multiple worlds: between technology and art, the techno-man and traditional man, and between the developed and developing worlds.