

# SHIFTING PARADIGMS: THE CHANGING DISCOURSE OF MEDICAL PRACTICES IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

Medicine is not merely a science but an art as well. It consists not merely of compounding mixtures, preparing decoctions, pills, plasters and drugs of all kinds but it also deals with the different processes of life. The practice of such medicines in India dealt not merely with the external body of man but also with the inner man or the soul since times immemorial. The science of medicine is of fundamental importance to keep our total mind and soul in harmony and peace. The history of medical science dates back to the history and evolution of a human civilizations. It prospered in all ancient civilizations of the world. The two major systems of medicine, which are ancient to the Indian soil, are the Siddha and the Ayurveda. The Siddha System of Medicine is the oldest and flourished in the South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu; and the Ayurveda was prevalent in North India. Later, with the arrival of the Muslim rulers in India, the Unani system of medicine, which is the direct outcome of the Graeco-Arabian medicine, was also introduced in India. All these systems of medicine are based on humoral pathology or, in other words, on the same physiological doctrine that air, bile (fire) and phlegm (water) are the three humours which maintain the human body through the combined functioning. The following pages elaborated these indigenous systems of medicine which still continue to be popular in India.

**Keywords:** Traditional, Medicine, Unani, Ayurvedic



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first and the foremost is the pragmatic consideration as it through this academic exercise that the knowledge gained by our ancestors over centuries of experience, interactions and inheritance is preserved and made easily accessible to broader read. The collection and presentation of and easy access to traditional knowledge and practice of medicine provide a rich store of readymade hypothesis for further verification with the aid of modern insights and technologies. Indeed much of the traditional medical wisdom has not been rejected by the modern scientific research. This is the reason for its continuity not with standing the present scientific and technological revolutions. Medicine and health conditions of any given place are the product of varied climatic, technological, Scientific, Political and governance factors. And health being fundamental priority among the hierarchy of human priorities, and pre- requisite for smooth and prosperous life. Ayurvedic herbs are extracted from different parts of the plant, nuts, seeds, leaves, bark, roots and so on. There are thousands of herbs and their combination that are available as medicines. Combination of herbs which are described in Ayurvedic scriptures are called “classical medicines” while those which have been formulated by pharmaceutical companies are called “proprietary medicines”. It has been in existence for many thousands and the philosophy has remained unchanged, unlike modern medicine, where the basic premise changes every few years or other alternate systems of medicine, which have not been around for a long period of time. Ayurveda has numerous medicines, which are a complex combination of herbs and other naturally occurring elements; there are also numerous home

remedies which has been prescribed in Ayurveda.<sup>1</sup> The use of spices like turmeric to treat cold and cough is so prevalent in India that it is often not even thought of as an Ayurveda remedy. Almost all the spices in Indian kitchens like black pepper, cinnamon, garlic, cardamom and many other home benefits associated with them for some or the other ailments. Aloe vera is ayurvedic treatment which is becoming very popular in several modern day skin care regimes. Ayurvedic medicines are a selection of plant extracts, herbs, oils, minerals and other metals from natural sources.<sup>2</sup> The main goal of ayurvedic medicine is to help people live healthy, long and balanced lives without the need for recommendation of drugs, difficult surgeries or suffering from aching conditions. Treatment in Ayurveda is also a healing process which aims at getting rid of the disorder, preventing its future and occurrence and ensures overall well-being. Vaidas prepared their medicines from herbs, minerals and animal products, which were also used in the preparation of drugs. Metals like diamond, gold, silver and some precious stones were used by vaidyas in the preparation of medicine. Medicine prescribed for the patients were provided on the basis of checking their pulse, tongue, phlegm, etc. The profession of vaidas was mostly hereditary in nature. Fathers used to teach knowledge about Ayurveda to their sons acquired by them from their forefathers. Advancement of plant based solutions for medicinal services and ayurveds through everyday experience is a part of the social legacy of India. The practitioners of herbs or physicians were vaidas, hakims, elderly persons and experienced ladies who used various medical extracts and preparations prepared from different herbs. Mineral water, spring water, oil, branding and prayers were suggested along with these herbs either to reinforce their effect or to correct any adverse effects.<sup>3</sup> The collectors of these flowers, herbs, and plants were mostly shepherds and Gujjars who led a travelling life and spent summers on hills, mountains and forests where most of these remedial plants were found. Then with the establishment of muslim state in India and the beginning of 13th century which mark the end of the ancient Indian culture and established a new medical tradition "UNANI". The unani medicine had so profoundly influenced the mentality of the people that the western medicine had to undergo a long persuasive exercise under the patronage of government to make a dent in the otherwise stable habit of mind. The Muslims and non Muslims who ruled Kashmir from fourteenth century onwards patronized unani and prophetic medicine as well as Ayurveda. As elsewhere in India, unani and prophetic entered Kashmir after the foundation of Muslim Sultanate in 1399 CE. All the Muslim rulers right from the sultans up to the Afghans were rooted in Medieval Persian and central Asia culture where unani and prophetic medicine ruled the healing culture. It is pertinent to mention that whether it was unani, prophetic medicine or Ayurveda— all of these healing systems belonged to elite culture in that common man generally took recourse to folk medicine, and was only when this first aid treatment failed to cure the problem. In the respect all the people were primary physicians in themselves and above them at the local level, there used to be some pir or some experienced elderly fellow who prescribed some sharbat or some folk device to overcome the problem. The hakim was the ultimate physician. On the other hand, Deepak Kumar pointed out that native medicines were so marginalized that they tried with resistance rather than collaboration. "In the words of Poonam Bala and Amy Kaler, the colonial govt. used to network of professionals and colonial medical institutions in the form of clinics, hospitals, education and institutions bureaucrats to setup in hegemonic authority.<sup>4</sup> The original basis of herbal medicine or unani medicine can be traced back to ancient Egypt, which gave key importance to plants in the handling of disease. Unani system of medicine made foremost achievement at global level, and successfully applies its principles to the India geo-human environment to appear as one of the common and effectively used local systems of medicine. The famous vaidas from Hindustan and their key contribution to unani system of medicine are Hakim Ali Khan (1669-1747 CE), Ali Ghilani (D. 1670) Akhbar Arzani (D.1721 CE), Hakim Azam Khan (1818-1902 CE) who is also known for his outstanding works in the field of pharmacology and medicine viz. Hakim Kabir al-Din (1894-1976 CE) was a renowned educationist of his time. He translated various classical unani works into Urdu medium to keep up with the shifting of medium of learning from Persia to Urdu and correlated the philosophy of unani medicine with modern medicines. The Azizi family of Lucknow, the Sharifi family of Delhi and Nizam of Hyderabad played a considerable role in the development of unani system of medicine.<sup>5</sup> Hakim Ajmal Khan (1868- 1927 CE) was a distinguished physician, an eminent educationist and big contributor for the development and progress of unani system of medicine.<sup>6</sup> He launched a program to modernize unani system of medicine with through changes in the field of medical practice, research and education. Hakim Abd al Hamid (1908 1999 CE) was an eminent practitioner who initiated modernized mass production of unani drugs. He set up Hamdard Dawakhana for quality production of unani medicine for global and domestic markets. The service of Hakim M.A. Razzaq, Hakim Ishsan Ullah Khan, Hakim Sukhanand, Shifa ul Mulk, Hakim Gurudutt Singh Alagh, Hakim B.N. Sharma and members of De Sinha family are worth mentioning in the field of practicing unani medicine. Unani medicine earned popularity alongside the traditional system of medicine – Ayurveda. It is also important to mention that the establishment of Shafa Khana (hospitals) was considered one of the great works of piety both the Hindu and Muslim

culture. Blochman and Jarrett in the translation of Ain-e-Akbari mention that “many renowned vaidyas and hakims who looked after health the common public flourished under the governance of Sultan Zain-ul Abidin. 7 According to Abul Fazl, Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin had such a skill in medical art that sometimes personally administered and prescribed medicines to the patients. It has been recorded that once Zain-ul- Abidin was suffering from a malignant boil which confused all Muslims hakims and Hindu vaidas, but fortunately, was relieved from the ailment by application of lame ointment prescribed by Shri Balla. Ayurveda is based on the principle that wellness and wealth depend on a delicate balance between the body, mind and spirit. Its main intention is to promote good health, not fight disease. The unani medicine had so profoundly influenced the mentality of the people that the western medicine had to undergo a long persuasive exercise under the patronage of government to make a dent in the otherwise stable habit of mind. Still it was only in those areas where the traditional medicine had failed to arrest the occurrence of disease or to treat them effectively that the people gave concessions to the circumstances. According to a survey, until the 70s of the last century the masses preferred hakims and vaidas to a modern doctor to strong was the hold of traditional medicine on the society. In different parts of India, epidemic broke down, so different groups adopted different medicines, namely folks, unani and ayurvedic. Unani, Ayurveda systems of treatment had gained profound confidence among the people. This is why even after the introduction of modern medicine the people refused to part ways with the traditional healing culture except for those disease which the later had failed to control or heal. And this is also the reason that the hakims, vaidas and native orthopedician are still thronged by the patients. And their services were also sought by the colonial power during the epidemic. The healing culture, it may be mentioned, belongs to the field of the habit of mind, there are also layers which do not move in the same speed. Those habits which have pragmatic and utilitarian value are more stable than those which are non-realistic and regressive. The unani medicine was the elite medicine, and the unani hakim was the privilege of the economically affluent sections. The ayurvedic medicine was preserved by the hereditary vaidas, who were especially known as good ophthalmologists. The ‘oral sources’ which provide a lived experience on variety of diseases and medicines have not been documented so far. Nor is the information contained in colonial literature. The introduction of colonial or western medicine in what was structure and obliged to whatever factors came as a blessing in appearance. While it did left a legacy behind, historically evolved. In different parts of colony like Indian subcontinent it was started at different intervals of time and on account of several reasons were regional, local and sometimes it seems that voluntarily on the part of Christian missionaries. Western medicine was introduced to combat epidemics and other dreadful disease. It moved from admiration and acceptance of indigenous medicines by practitioners of western and indigenous medicines mutually helped to develop their respective systems. It moved from admiration and acceptance of indigenous medicines by practitioners of western medicine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to scientific disbelief in seventeenth century. The final onslaught on indigenous medicines happened after the discovery of the ‘Germ theory’ which pushed local medicines to the margins as outdated and primitive.<sup>8</sup> Practitioners of western medicine and western-educated intellectuals, with the hold of the colonial state, instituted western medical practice as the hegemonic one and marginalized native medicine in this process.<sup>9</sup> Colonial medicine acted as an ‘ideological tool of empire’ along with representing the blending nature of ‘humanitarian concern and social control’.<sup>10</sup> The appearance of hospital medicine (western medicine) having a new form of knowledge based on anatomy and physiology and newer practices of medical involvement marginalized indigenous medicine as archaic and outdated systems. <sup>11</sup> Indigenous medical knowledge was evaluated by western medical (techne) and (episteme). Which in the end devalued and delegitimized it.<sup>12</sup> Indians accepted British law without much upheaval, but not their medicine.<sup>13</sup> The colonial government and practitioners of western medicine propagated the supremacy of western medicine. According to Mark Harrison and Radhika Ramasubramaniam, the contact of western medicine was very limited in local society except during the period of epidemic disease.<sup>14</sup> Western medicine with a new form of techne and episteme emerged as a hegemonic medicine and attempted to marginalize aboriginal medicine in the political and social life. The above paragraph has focused on the travelogue of the Unani medicine in India through Kashmir and other parts. This also shows that how Ayurveda with the colonial presence boomed in the society and served the purpose. Unani and Ayurveda has been great help before the colonial medicinal establishment. Hakim and Vaidas has been the great help with the ancestral knowledge. This shows that Ayurveda and Unani had held a great importance in the history but also been overshadowed by the colonial intervention of medical practices. But on the other hand, India was in the need of the medical development, the over growing population of India, and migration across the globe during the colonial time led to many epidemics and several parts of India does also not have the access of clean water and food, which rose the diseases at that time.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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