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## HISTORY OF INDIAN MEDICINE IN INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Indian Traditional Medicine, with its roots deeply embedded in the ancient practice of medicine worldwide, has been a crucial contributor to human healthcare and well-being since its inception. Similar traditional medicinal practices have flourished in various regions, such as West Asian nations (India, Pakistan, Tibet), East Asian nations (China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam), Africa, South and Central America, and others.*

*This article endeavors to shed light on the significance of Indian traditional medical services based on recent methodical reviews. A persistent debate exists between those who rely on Indian Traditional Medicines for treating various ailments and disorders and those who prefer contemporary medicine for a cure. Ultimately, the argument boils down to a fundamental truth: every individual, irrespective of their education or ailment, should be informed about the facts surrounding their illness and the potential side effects of medications.*

*The therapeutic knowledge embedded in Indian traditional medicine has given rise to various traditional approaches, each with its unique theories and methodologies, holding regional significance. To further research endeavors in Indian Traditional Medicine and explore phytochemicals, this current review aims to assist investigators engaged in traditional medicinal pursuits in the near future.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The realm of natural products encompasses a vast array of diverse secondary metabolites, exhibiting a broad spectrum of biological activities that have been harnessed across various fields, including human and veterinary medicine, as well as agriculture. These compounds originate from microorganisms, marine animals, and plants. Notably, natural products derived from plants are a result of secondary metabolism, producing compounds that are not indispensable for survival in controlled laboratory conditions but play a crucial role in self-defense and coordination in natural environments. It is essential to clarify that macromolecules such as DNA, RNA, proteins, and their precursors, along with essential intermediates, do not fall within the scope of the definition of natural products. The focus of natural products lies in the unique and bioactive secondary metabolites that contribute to

the diverse chemical landscape of the natural world, shaping their significance in various applications and disciplines.

The significance of natural products in the realms of pharmaceuticals, insecticides, and herbicides has evolved prominently since the discovery of penicillin over 85 years ago. Subsequently, a multitude of natural products has been identified and characterized. What captivates scientists in this field is the vast phytochemical diversity inherent in these compounds and the intricacies involved in discerning their optimal applications in the treatment and management of diseases. Throughout history, humanity has turned to the bounty of nature for the practice of herbal and phytonutrient treatments to combat a myriad of diseases that continue to proliferate globally. Remarkably, around 80–85% or approximately 6 billion people worldwide place their trust in herbal medications for addressing various health conditions. This reliance on natural remedies underscores the enduring connection between humans and the therapeutic potential of plant-derived compounds, reflecting a tradition that spans ages and cultures.

Plants, in particular, have been a focal point in traditional medicine since approximately 2600 BCE, evidenced by the recording of 1000 plant-based products in Mesopotamia. These include the utilization of extracted oils from *Cupressus arizonica* Greene, *Commiphora acuminata* Mattick, *Cedrus libani* A. Rich., *Glycyrrhiza glabra* L., and *Papaver somniferum* L., which continue to be employed for treating a range of ailments, from common colds and coughs to swelling and parasitic diseases. The ancient Egyptian pharmaceutical practices, dating back around 2900 BCE, contribute to the rich history of traditional medicine. The well-known "Ebers Papyrus," dating from 1500 BCE, documents over 700 drugs, many of which are derived from plant sources. Chinese traditional medicine, with records dating back around 2000 years (1100 BCE), has made significant contributions, featuring texts such as *Wu Shi Er Bing Fang* (1100 BCE; containing 52 medicines), the herbal *Shennong* (100 BCE; 365 medicines), and the herbal *Tang* (659 CE; 850 medicines). Indian traditional medicine, dating back over 5000 years, is exemplified by *Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhitas*, each containing 341 and 395 herbal medicines, respectively, dating back to 1000 BCE. The Romans and Greeks also played a substantial role in the development of traditional medicine in the ancient Western world. Dioscorides, a Greek physician around 100 CE, documented the collection, storage, and proper use of traditional medicine in the then-known world. Natural products sold as herbal and/or food supplements constitute a significant portion of the main 50 drugs sold in European pharmacies. Moreover, modern pharmacopeia includes not less than 25% drugs derived from various plants and synthetic analogs based on natural products. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as a comprehensive body of knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences of diverse cultures. Whether scientific or not, these practices are employed in supporting healthcare services and addressing physical and psychological instability. Various traditional medicine systems are practiced worldwide, each with distinct beliefs and cultural origins, with traditional Indian medicine, Ayurveda, standing out as one of the earliest and philosophically rooted practices.

Western studies have uncovered that over 40% of Americans and 20–60% of Europeans engage in some form of complementary and alternative medicine. The utilization of natural products in healthcare management has presented a significant challenge in the early stages of human progress. Early humans might have unintentionally consumed non-consumable plants, leading to adverse reactions such as vomiting, diarrhea, coma, or even death. However, the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another has empowered humans to discern and document information about edible resources and natural medicines. The evolution of traditional knowledge regarding natural products has progressed through generations. Until the early 20th century, plant and vegetable

sources primarily served as the principal reservoir of medications for drug preparations. The use of plant extracts in natural products and traditional medicine dates back thousands of years, with ancient formulations documented in historical literature. Plants have played a pivotal role in providing for human needs, encompassing foods, shelters, clothing, flavors, fragrances, and medicines, thereby becoming an integral part of ancient human civilizations. In India, the history of traditional medicine and healthcare records extends back to 5000 years BCE, with health-related needs and diseases documented in ancient literature such as the "Rigveda" (1700–1100 BCE), "Yajurveda" (1400–1000 BCE), and "Atharva Veda" (1200 BCE). Subsequently, manuscripts like the "Charaka Samhita" (990 BCE), "Sushruta Samhita" (660 BCE), and "Dhanwantari Nighantu" (1800 CE) emphasized the use of plants and poly-herbal formulations, forming the basis of widely practiced traditional medicine.

The practice of medicines in India, whether of Indian origin or assimilated from external sources into Indian culture, is referred to as traditional medicine in India. India boasts its own distinctive traditional medicine systems, namely Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Yoga and Naturopathy, and Homeopathy. Despite Homeopathy's introduction to India in the 18th century, it has seamlessly integrated into Indian culture and evolved as another traditional system. Consequently, it has enriched and become an integral part of Indian traditional medicine.

## AYURVED

The literal translation of Ayurveda is "The Science of Life," derived from two Sanskrit words: ayur (life) and veda (science or knowledge). Ayurveda encompasses a systematic tradition of harmonious living, with its origins traceable to ancient texts such as Rigveda and Atharva Veda. While the exact origin of Ayurveda is lost in antiquity, its principles and methodologies were formalized between 2500 and 500 BCE in India. The practice of utilizing natural resources for progress through extensive experimentation and experiences in daily life has been a consistent feature of Ayurveda in Indian culture.

The fundamental principles of Ayurvedic treatment involve two key aspects: addressing the root cause of illness and making the patient more aware of the factors contributing to their sickness. The primary objective of Ayurvedic treatment is encapsulated in the idea that "Ayurveda deals with happy and unhappy life." It elucidates what is appropriate and inappropriate in relation to life, while also gauging life expectancy and quality. Ayurveda is a holistic healthcare system based on the concept that the human body consists of seven fundamental tissues (Rasa, Rakta, Mansa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, and Shukra) and waste products such as excretion, urine, and sweat. These are derived from the five basic elements: fire, water, air, ether, and earth, and three dynamic energies or functional principles known as vata, pitta, and kapha (Tridosha). Any imbalance or disturbance in these fundamental principles can lead to disease. Ayurveda approaches the treatment of a patient holistically rather than focusing solely on the disease. This medical system emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual concerning social, constitutional, bio-personal, biosynthetic, and physiological conditions, which may contribute to specific types of ailments. This approach allows for exploration with modern scientific methods to address various healthcare issues. Ayurvedic preparations often comprise poly-herbal mixtures of plant and/or animal-derived products, metals, and minerals. However, ancient manuscripts, including the modern Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia, underscore the dominance of natural products over other derived substances.

Research on Ayurveda has witnessed significant advancement over the past few decades, encompassing multi-disciplinary platforms that have led to substantial progress in the field. The exploration has yielded the development of various drug lead compounds. Ayurvedic medicines are gaining global popularity due to their traditional acceptance, valuable assistance, socioeconomic benefits, and easy acceptability. Rigorous research

efforts are now ensuring the quality, safety, stability, and efficiency of Ayurvedic medicines. The ongoing quest for novel medicinal plants and their derived agents, particularly bioactive compounds, plays a pivotal role in the continual development and management of healthcare issues in India. This emphasis on research reflects a commitment to exploring new avenues for healthcare and incorporating scientific rigor into the traditional practices of Ayurveda.

## **SIDDHA**

The Siddha system of medicine has a rich history dating back to ancient human civilization in India, approximately between 10,000 BCE–4000 BCE. Similar to Ayurveda, it evolved from the practical utilization of natural resources to maintain good health, making it one of the oldest medicinal practices in South India. Rooted in Saiva philosophy, a branch of Hindu religion, the term "Siddha" signifies "holy harmony," "attaining excellence," or "recognized fact." The practitioners, known as "Siddhars," were revered supernatural beings who acquired intellectual powers through consistent engagement with this medicinal system. The Siddha system is credited to have been established by 18 Siddhars, including Thirumoolar, Ahappe, Agathiyar, Sunthara ananthar, Bogar, Machchamuni, Konganar, Korakkar, Therayar, Karuvoorar, Nandi Devar, Idaikkadar, Iraamathevar, Sattamuni, Kuthampai, Paampaatti, Aluhanna, and Kahapusundar. According to Siddha philosophy, maintaining human well-being is essential for attaining eternal bliss, encapsulating the belief that "food is medicine, medicine is food," and a "sound mind makes a sound body." The principles of Siddha medicine closely align with Ayurveda. The system views the human body as a composite of seven basic materials, three humors, and the by-products of bodily functions. A balance among these humors signifies a state of health, while an imbalance can lead to disease. The holistic approach of Siddha medicine encompasses physical, physiological, moral, and intellectual components, defining 96 principal constituents of a human being. Any alteration in these principles may manifest as a disease. Diagnosis in Siddha medicine is comprehensive, involving an eight-fold assessment, including an examination of speech, pulse, complexion, tongue, and more. Achieving sensory functions and refinement is emphasized through practices such as yoga, mental discipline, sensory organ care, and the experience of pain and pleasure. The psychosomatic system can be restored by administering metals, minerals, and natural products. Overall, the Siddha system of medicine offers a holistic approach to healthcare, focusing on the harmony of the body and mind for the attainment of well-being.

Siddha medicines are relatively less known in the Western world due to a significant portion of the literature being untranslated from Tamil. However, within Tamil communities, Siddha medicine is well-recognized as an alternative biomedicine. Developed with a focus on therapeutic, spiritual, and scholarly aspects, Siddha philosophy places equal importance on the inner soul and outer body. One distinguishing feature of Siddha medicine is its emphasis on alchemy, involving practices such as converting base metals into gold. Unique diagnostic methods, including urine examination and the practice of materia medica, set Siddha apart from Ayurvedic medicines. Currently, Siddha medicines are gaining recognition for their effectiveness in treating various issues, with the exception of emergency cases. Moreover, Siddha medicine incorporates herbo-metal or herbo-mineral preparations that contain nanoparticles, making them particularly effective in managing chronic disorders. This uniqueness adds to the appeal and potential of Siddha medicines in addressing health concerns.

## **UNANI**

The Unani system of medicine originated in Greece and underwent further development by Arabs, evolving into an sophisticated medical science based on the principles of the Greek philosopher and physician Hippocrates

(460–377 BCE), known as Buqrat in the Arab world, along with the contributions of Galen (Jalinoos). Noteworthy Greek and Arab scholars like Galen (131–212 CE), Raazes (850–925 CE), and Avicenna (980–1037 CE) played significant roles in enhancing the Unani system, which is commonly referred to as Greco-Arab Medicine. The foundation of Unani medicine is rooted in the four conditions of living: hot, moist, cold, and dry, as well as the four humors of Hippocratic theory, namely blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Over time, Unani medicine became integrated with Indian culture during the rule of the Mughal Emperors and has since been widely embraced by a significant portion of the population in India. In the Unani system, the human body is perceived as consisting of seven principles: Mizaj (temperaments), Anza (organs), Quo (resources), Arkan (elements), Arawh (spirits), Aklath (humors), and Afal (capacities). These principles govern both health and disease conditions, reflecting the holistic approach of Unani medicine in understanding and addressing the well-being of individuals.

A physician takes into consideration all these elements before making a diagnosis and prescribing treatment. The drugs derived from Natural Products used in this system symbolize life and are devoid of side effects. These medications, which may be toxic in their raw state, undergo preparation and purification before usage. The types of medications recommended in the Unani system of medicine include diet therapy, regimental treatment, and pharmaco-treatment. Diet therapy aims to address specific illnesses by prescribing particular diet plans or by regulating the quantity and nature of the diet on a routine basis. Regimental treatment involves various procedures such as diaphoresis, diuresis, Turkish baths, massage cleansing, etc. Pharmaco-treatment involves the use of natural products. The Unani system of medicine is a holistic approach where single or formulated drugs in their raw form are preferred, effectively addressing numerous states of health and disease. This system offers effective solutions for gastrointestinal issues, nervous disorders, and cardiovascular diseases, showcasing its versatility in addressing a wide range of health conditions.

## YOGA AND NATUROPATHY

The term "Yoga" originates from Sanskrit, a language primarily spoken and used in India. Sanskrit holds significance in mainstream Indian ceremonial contexts, such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. While the word "yoga" has various interpretations, it is most commonly understood to mean union. Yoga serves as a practice that delves into both preventive and curative aspects, aiming to enhance awareness as individuals engage in the exercises. On a related note, Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) finds its roots in cognitive behavior therapy, presenting a distinct approach to mindfulness known as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. This model incorporates mindfulness practices into cognitive therapy methods, offering a unique perspective on enhancing awareness and addressing various psychological concerns.

Naturopathy is a distinct form of primary medicine that harmonizes age-old healing traditions with scientific advancements and contemporary research. Guided by a unique set of principles, naturopathy recognizes the body's inherent healing capacity, places emphasis on disease prevention, and encourages individual responsibility for achieving optimal well-being. In the framework of naturopathic philosophy, disease is perceived as a disruption to health, and the subsequent recovery is approached in alignment with natural healing systems.

## HOMEOPATHY

The principle of Homeopathy remains one of the most debated therapeutic practices and has roots traced back to Hippocrates from Greece around 450 BCE. The contemporary practice of Homeopathy is more commonly



associated with a German doctor, Dr. Samuel Hahnemann (1755 CE–1843 CE). The term "Homeopathy" is derived from the Greek words "Homois," meaning similar, and "pathos," meaning suffering. Homeopathy is a therapeutic technique that utilizes preparations of substances whose effects, when administered to healthy individuals, mimic the symptoms of the illness in the patient. The methodology is believed to operate on two main principles. The first principle is "Like cures like," suggesting that a healthy individual would exhibit the same symptoms when exposed to a drug, and that particular drug is considered the cure for the corresponding illness. The second principle involves "Infinite dilution," where therapeutic activity is purportedly enhanced by repeated dilution and succession, even when diluted beyond Avogadro's number.

Homeopathy involves treating illnesses with remedies that can induce symptoms identical to the disease when taken. For instance, the bark extract of *Cinchona officinalis*, containing quinine, would produce symptoms similar to malaria when administered to a healthy individual. The practice of homeopathy has been established for over two centuries in India and is now prevalent worldwide. It has seamlessly integrated into the cultural and traditional fabric of India, gaining recognition as one of the accepted systems of medicine in healthcare services.

The roots of Indian traditional medicine can be traced back to its origin in India, evolving through a continuous process from the Vedic period. This medical tradition prefers single drugs or blends in their crude forms over complex formulations. Although the origins and development timelines of various traditional medicinal processes are diverse, there is a shared foundation in their fundamental principles and practices, which involve the use of plants and plant-based preparations in healthcare. The extensive utilization of plants in different medicinal systems is evident. Additionally, approximately 85–90% of the Indian population relies on the traditional system for essential healthcare services.

## CONCLUSION

The therapeutic knowledge embedded in Indian traditional medicine has given rise to various regional approaches with similar or divergent theories and methodologies. The Planning Commission was established in 1951 post-independence, and later, in 1995, a distinct department named the Department of Indian System of Medicine and Homoeopathy (ISM&H) was formed. In 2003, this department underwent a transformation and became known by the acronym AYUSH, representing Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy. It operates as an independent department under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Despite the proficiency of modern pharmaceuticals and the prevailing confidence and trust, Indian traditional medicines face challenges. There is a growing need to integrate the entire traditional medicinal system and organize it with a highly optimistic approach to disseminate our medical tradition effectively. Therefore, there is a requirement for ongoing phytochemical and biochemical research, coupled with continuous efforts for the revival and propagation of the Indian medical heritage for the overall welfare of society.

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