



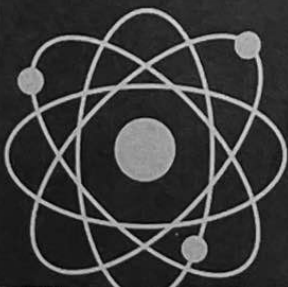
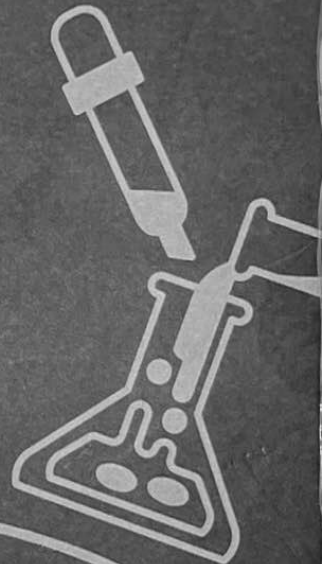
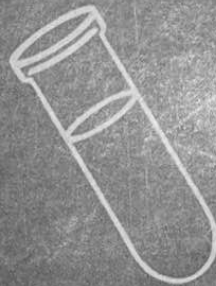
RESEARCH INNOVATIONS IN FOOD, NUTRITION & DIETETICS

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**Infinity
Indica
Publishers**

Imprint of Infinity Indica OPC Private Limited
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Printed at:
Akshara Offset
Vanchiyoor, Thiruvananthapuram,
Kerala, India

Layout & Cover
Infinity Indica Publishers

First Edition, October 2022

ISBN: 978-93-91923-01-3

Price: ₹ 650

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TRADITIONAL MEDICINE: ROLE IN HEALTHCARE PRACTICE

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Abstract

India has a long history of medicine. The Indian systems of medicine are one among the well-known global traditional systems of medicines. It is based on various systems including Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Yoga, Naturopathy and Homeopathy. Each of these are unique in nature having a common thread in their basic principles and practices. These traditional systems of medicine always play an important role in providing primary health care needs globally to a large section of the population. They are still continuing to do so at present and might be so in the future too.

Keywords: Medicine, India, Traditional system, Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani

Introduction

India is a unique country of great cultural and social plurality. In different places people talk in different languages and practice different traditions, customs and religion. This diversity is also visible in the practice of medicine and its acceptance by the people. India has a rich tradition of medicinal wisdom. The Indian system of medicine originated in India as well as from other countries. Traditional Indian medicine is one of the oldest medicinal sciences in the world. Traditional medicines as defined by the World Health Organisation is the sum total of the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not used in the maintenance as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.

Traditional systems of medicines have an increasing acceptance by a large section of the population because of their effectiveness and potency in helping people live healthier lives. India has six recognized systems of medicine in this category. They are Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Yoga, Naturopathy and Homeopathy.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda is an ancient medicine system and is said to have originated in India about 500 years back. The word Ayurveda is a combination of two Sanskrit words "ayur" meaning life and "veda" meaning science. Thus it literally means "science of life". The main concept of Ayurveda is that it personalises the healing process.

As per Ayurveda, the entire universe is composed of five elements: Vayu (Air), Jala (Water), Akash (Space), Prithivi (Earth) and Teja or Agni (Fire). These five elements in Ayurveda are known as Panchamahabhuta. These five elements form the three basic humours (Tridoshas) of the human body in different combinations. The three vital principles of doshas are vata, pitta and kapha. All these together regulate and control the anabolic and catabolic mechanism. The three doshas help in carrying the by-products of the digested food throughout the body. Thus it helps in building up the body tissues.

The body matrix is an important concept of Ayurveda. Life in Ayurveda is conceived as the union of body, senses, mind and soul. The living man is a conglomeration of the three humors (vata, pitta and kapha), seven basic tissues (rasa, rakta, mansa, meda, asthi, majja and shukra) and the waste products of the body (sweat, urine and faeces). Thus the total body matrix comprises the humours, the tissues and the waste products of the body. The growth and decay of the body matrix revolve around the food which is processed in the body. The ingestion, digestion, absorption, assimilation and metabolism of the food consumed helps in the maintenance of health and disease caused. These are affected by the psychological mechanism as well as by Agni (fire).

According to Ayurveda, Agni is the entity which is responsible for all digestive and metabolic processes in human beings. Broadly there are two types of Agni, the Macro-Fire or Jatarangi and Micro-Fire or the Sub-agni in our body which again are classified into thirteen types. Jataranga means the gut or belly (digestion zone) and Agni means Fire. Thus Jataragni means 'Fire in the belly' depicting the physiological components of digestion and metabolism which takes place in the stomach. The fire governs the preliminary process of digestion before the food is converted into a form which could be absorbed, assimilated and utilised for various body functions. All the other types of Agni depend on the quality and quantity of Jataragni. The metabolism gets disturbed if this fire gets increased or depleted, in turn giving rise to a chain

of pathological events leading to many systemic illnesses. If Jataragni is proper, controlled and balanced, the other forms of Agni's under its control will also be in equilibrium. Thus protecting and taking care of the gut fire helps an individual to be healthy.

Thus health or sickness depends on the presence and absence of a balanced state of the total body matrix. The disturbance in this natural equilibrium can be caused due to intrinsic and extrinsic factors giving rise to diseases. The disturbance of the existing normal balance can be due to various factors like dietary indiscrimination, undesirable habits, violating the rules of healthy living, seasonal abnormalities, improper exercise and incompatible actions of the body and mind.

The treatment consists of restoring the balance of the disturbed body-mind matrix through regulating diet, correcting life routine and behaviour, administration of drugs and resorting to preventive Panchakarma and Rasayana therapy.

Siddha

Siddha (Sanskrit: siddha "perfected one") is a term that is used widely in Indian culture and religion. It means "one who is accomplished". It refers to perfected masters who have achieved a high degree of physical as well as spiritual enlightenment. Siddha medicine is a form of traditional medicine originated in South India.

The siddha system of medicine is one of the traditional medicine systems in the world and is mainly practised in the southern part of India. The roots of the system are linked with the culture of the ancient Tamil civilization.

This traditional system of medicine provides preventive, promotive, curative, rejuvenative and rehabilitative health care. This system of medicine is based on ninety six tools called Thathuvam, which includes physical, psychological and intellectual aspects of an individual. The three vital life factors i.e, vadham, pitham and kapam are responsible for good health. According to Siddha concept, the disease occurs when the balance of the three humours – vadham, pitham and kapam is disrupted. Factors like climate conditions, physical activity, diet and stress are thought to influence the whole equilibrium. The proportion of vadham, pitham and kapam are 4:2:1 in normal circumstances. Dietary habits and lifestyle significantly contribute to health and disease cure. Pathiyam and apathiyam describes siddha medicine principle which is a set of do's and don'ts.

The strength of the siddha system of medicine lies in the holistic approach i.e, the physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing of an individual. It adapts simple lifestyle practices, dietary regimens relevant to the six tastes, use of effective and

safe plant based drugs and drugs of animal and mineral origin. Due to the process of ageing, numerous degenerative, physical and mental changes occur and these are managed in the siddha system by the rejuvenative practices.

Diagnosis in siddha is based on eight kinds of diagnostic tools like pulse, perception by palpation, tongue, complexion, speech, eye faeces and urine. The treatment procedures help in normalizing the altered vital life factors.

Unani and Yoga

Tibb or Unani is a form of traditional medicine practised in Middle East and South Asian countries. It refers to a tradition of Graeco Arabic medicine. The teachings of Greek physician Hippocrates and Roman physician Galen forms the foundation of this medicine. This was developed into an elaborate medical system during the middle age era by the Arabian and Persian physicians.

According to the Unani medicinal system, Tabiyatis are considered to be planners of the body creating a healthy environment within the body, preparing to fight against various diseases. Tabiyat is the sum total of the structural, functional and psychological character of a human being. It is an individual's intentional power to combat diseases. If tabiyat is strong, an individual does not suffer from a disease easily. On the contrary, if it is weak, man becomes prone to diseases easily. The human body contains seven natural and basic components called Umoore Tabiyat responsible for the existence of the human body. They are Arkan (element), Mizaj (temperament), Akhlat (humours-body fluids), Aaza (organs), Arwah (vital spirit), Quwa (faculties or powers) and Afaal (functions). The body is composed of various fluids which basically are a composition of the humours. They interact with the environment. When something happens in the environment that impact also goes to the body which leads to the disturbance of humours ultimately leading to the disease.

The diagnosis is based on the symptoms of a disease, inspection, palpation and percussion of different organs. Feeling of pulse, examination of urine and faeces and assessment of mizaj are the most important tools for the diagnosis of a disease. Temperament (Mizaj) of a patient is given importance in diagnosis and treatment of disease using natural remedies mostly obtained from plants. Temperament is also taken into consideration in identifying the suitable diet and lifestyle in order to promote the health of individuals. After proper diagnosis of a disease, a line of treatment is adapted and a judicious treatment is followed to root out the disease.

Yoga

Yoga is an ancient system practised for over 5,000 years. It is a mind-body therapy connecting the body, breath and mind through meditation, stretches, poses and

controlled breathing, thus energising and balancing the whole person. Yoga promotes relaxation and self confidence, improves fitness, lowers blood pressure and reduces stress and anxiety. Practising yoga helps an individual to have good concentration, coordination, flexibility, sleep habits and digestion.

Naturopathy

Naturopathic treatment is all about good health and wellness. The philosophical principle of naturopathic medicine is the "healing power of nature". It is believed that health is more than the absence of disease. It works on strengthening the body's natural defences. Naturopathy works within the body's natural process to affect healing. Thus naturopathic medicine recognizes the ability of an individual to heal oneself promoting the healing processes and removing the obstacles to health.

The six fundamental principles of naturopathic medicine are as follows:

- Do not harm
- The healing power of nature
- Identify and treat the causes
- Doctor as a teacher
- Treat the whole person
- Prevention

Thus naturopathic medicine affirms that it is better to prevent illness and suffering whenever possible. It combines all six principles to identify the potential areas of unbalance and teach patients how to get well and stay well.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is a gentle but effective form of treatment stimulating the natural ability of the organism to heal itself. It is derived from the Greek words 'homoios' which means similar and 'pathos' which means disease.

A central principle of the treatment is that "like cures like" which means that a substance that causes certain symptoms can also help to remove those symptoms. The second principle is based around a process of dilution and shaking. The more a substance is diluted, the greater is its power to treat its symptoms. It is also based on the principle of the single remedy which shows that one remedy should cover all the physical, emotional and mental symptoms of an illness.

Homeopathic products are made as sugar pellets. They may also be in other forms

like ointments, gels drops, creams and tablets. Treatments are individualised. The medicines are based on the complete profile of a patient including their lifestyle, physical condition, mental and emotional states. Thus different people with the same conditions receive different treatments.

Conclusion

Traditional Indian medicine is thus one of the oldest medicinal sciences in the world. Indian traditional medicinal systems like Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani have a very rich history of their effectiveness. To understand and obtain optimum benefit from these systems, it is necessary to have a minimum level of information on their different aspects. They play an important role in providing health care to a large section of the population mainly in underdeveloped or developing countries.

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