Introduction
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Traditional medicine is the sum total of all knowledge and practices; whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental or social imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation transferred from generation to generation. Traditional knowledge might also be considered as a solid amalgamation of dynamic medical know-how and ancestral experience.

Traditional systems of medicine and practices that are recognised by Government of India are -


The global importance of traditional medicine and practices has now been recognised and some of the practices have become an integral part of the social culture, particularly in South Asia i.e China, India and Vietnam.

Unani Medicine, also called Tibb, is built upon the ancient Greek medical concept of Hippocrates & Galen. It originated and developed with the help of the contributions made by the eminent physicians of different religions such as Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus and in different regions such as Persia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia & India.

Translation of Greek and other medical texts into Arabic language, and the new books written by the pioneering non-muslims scholars, coupled with the setting up of hospitals and medical libraries in larger cities of the Arab Empire, ushered in an era when muslim scholars stood poised for making original observations and
innovations. Medicine now (from A.D. 900 to about 1100) passed rapidly from the hands of Christians, Jews into the possession of Muslim scholars mostly Jews and Persians. The first and surely the greatest of the physicians and author of this period was al-Razi. Al-Razi, called by the medieval Latinists 'Rhazes', was probably the greatest and the most original of all the Muslim physicians and one of the most prolific writers. He was the first physician known to have refused to surrender to the authority of Galen's erroneous doctrines. As chief physician of a big hospital in Baghdad, his fame spread far and wide.

When Mughal hordes under Chinghiz Khan, Hulagu and Timur brought ruin to the flourishing Persian and Central Asian cities, the scholars and the physicians from these regions were compelled to disperse in places where they felt comparatively safe or where they felt they could continue their creative activities. Since India had good relations with Persia and as economic & political conditions in India were favourable, many physicians and scholars from Persian cities came over to India.

Delhi, the capital of the Sultans, became a centre of culture and glory surpassing even that of Baghdad. During the period of Khilji Sultans, in particular Allauddin Khilji (1296 - 1321) there were eminent Unani Physicians, Surgeons and Ophthalmologists like Badruddin of Damascus, Sadruddin, Mah Chandra Jaja (Chacha) and Alimuddin, all of whom were unrivalled throughout the length & breadth of India.

During the reign of Mohammed Tughluq (1325-1352) it is said there were no less than 70 hospitals in Delhi and 1200 physicians were enrolled as State employees.
During the Sultanate period, besides in the capital, there were great centres of learning and healing in the larger cities in different provinces, as for example; in Gujarat and Kashmir. Above all, medicine made great progress in the South in the Bahamani kingdom. The Bahamani Sultans paid due care to the health needs of the people.

On the break up of the Bahamani kingdom, the Qutab Shahi dynasty of Golconda, which was in power for about two centuries (1495 - 1686) did the greatest service in the cause of providing medical relief and buildings of hospitals like Daru-Shifa. There were distinguished physicians in this period, as for example Mir Momin and Hakim -Ul-Mulk, Nizamuddin Ahmad Gilani who composed many admirable manuscripts on different aspects of Unani Medicine.

During the time of the Mughals, starting from Babur, physicians and surgeons in greater number came to India after having acquired learning from medical centres in Persia, more particularly from Gilan, Shiran & Tabrez.

During the reign of Akbar, a sort of flood of learned men from regions where Arabian medicine was taught, came to India. These people came in search of name and fame, the political conditions in their own countries being not very favourable for their advancement. Abul-Fazl gives a list of 29 eminent Physicians at the time of Akbar. These include Hakim Ali Gilani, Hakim Abul Fatah Gilani (who invented Indian Hookah), Ain-ul-Mulk, Hakim Shamsuddin Ali Sherazi, Hakim Hummam, Hakim-ul-Mulk Gilani and some Hindu physicians like Mahadev, Bhim Datt, Narayan etc.
After the reign of Aurangzeb, while the Mughal emperors continued to support and encourage the teaching and practice in Unani Tibb, the gradual deterioration of their own political and economic situation acted as a setback to this system, as it did to other social facilities and activities.

The English rulers showed no interest in the indigenous system of medicines, either Unani Tibb or Ayurveda, so that they suffered neglect.

It was only much later, towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century and after that, the national reawakening created the interest of a few educated Indians towards their own systems of medicine.

Unani system is based on five principles, viz. elements (arkan), temperament (mizaj), humour (akhlat), pneuma (ruh) and governing power of body (tabiat). According to general belief of Unani physicians there are five elements, while modern chemistry has traced about 108 elements, out of which 82 elements are found in the human body. The concept of temperament is the most complicated one. The notions of qualities like hot, cold, dry, moist and humour have added to confusion. The pathology of diseases in Unani medicine has been associated with the humoral doctrine since long, believed to date back to Hippocrates (377 B.C.). The concept of 'ruh' is also unclear and ambiguous. The concept of 'tabiat' is a seminal concept of Unani medicine. It is generally regarded as synonymous with the modern concept of immunity, but it is more comprehensive than immunity. It deals with the health as well as diseased condition of the body (Azmi, 1995).