

UNANI MEDICINE IN INDIA DURING THE DELHI SULTANATE*

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Attempts are made in the paper to trace the history of Unani system of medicine in India and while coming to India in the twelfth century A.D. how it spread to different parts of the country, adopted and included in its *Materia Medica* Indian drugs and herbs. The article tries to depict in a succinct manner the progress it made during the rule of Pathan Kings known in the Indian History as Sultans. These rulers who ruled almost the whole of North India before the advent of Mughals were great patrons of arts and science and patronized amongst others eminent physicians and medical writers. The article also sheds light on some important medical works of this period.

India, with its large area and population, a rich civilization and culture, natural resources and treasures of knowledge and wisdom, has always occupied an important position. Unani medicine reached here in the twelfth century A.D.¹ Since then, it has through constant progress, which is rightly attributable to its numerous scholars and practitioners known as *hakims* or *tabibs*, became one of the prominent Indian medical systems. It has penetrated into the remotest parts of the country, has adopted all the useful indigenous drugs and herbs, has influenced other systems, and in its own sphere has always been very receptive and responsive to the influences of other local systems. In course of time it has embraced Indian ideas, therapy and pharmacy and adapted itself to Indian conditions. Large segments of the Indian population, whether in the cities or villages, have an abiding faith in this system and the number of its practitioners runs into thousands.

The great success of Unani medicine in India is also due to the country's long association with the medicinal uses of native plants and herbs. India has a rich, varied and profuse medicinal flora. These natural sources, if fully utilized, may yield safer, surer remedies for many diseases.

As in other systems of medicine, history of medicine formed an integral part of Unani medicine ever since it achieved the status of a branch of systematized knowledge. *Al-Fihrist* of Ibn Nadim, *Tabaqat-al-atibba'* of Ibn Abi 'Usaibi'a, *Akhbar al-hukama'* of Jamal al-Din al-Qifti, *Tarikh al-hukama'* of Shahzuri,

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Wafiyat al-a'yan of Ibn Khalikan and *Kashf al-zunun* of Hajji Khalifa are prominent works dealing with the history of Unani medicine.²

In medieval period the ruling class usually consisted of kings, princes, feudal lords and their courtiers. Some of them were enlightened and extended patronage to learned scholars and talented physicians. By and large, every royal court had one or more physicians. It was the success and renown of these physicians which opened for them the doors of the sequestered courts. Many of these physicians not only treated the royal family but in their spare time recorded their own observations and experiments and when the collection was sizable presented the same to their royal patrons in the form of a written anthology. Some of the kings and their deputies had more than one physician, thus eliminating the exclusive hold of one single physician. The professional jealousy, or in milder terms rivalry between two physicians serving the same master, generated a healthy spirit of competition not only in matters of treatment but in adding to one's knowledge and presenting better medical works. Most of the books penned by these royal physicians dealt with clinical aspects. They made a deep study of the temperament and habits of the people of India, of the medicinal herbs and plants growing here and of the drugs readily available. They made experiments with the locally available medicinal material. They dwelt upon these herbs and drugs, their therapeutic effects, uses, modes of administration, preparation of compounds, reactions etc. in their books. The succeeding generations of these early physicians went on making additions to what their ancestors had left, and thus the literature of Unani medicine continued to grow both in volume and in excellence.³

Every country has moments of its glory and despair. Ancient India made spectacular progress in medicine, and with Suśruta Indian surgery reached its pinnacle. Plastic surgery was not an unknown province for this great luminary. But the remarkable achievements of Suśruta and others remained confined to a particular period and then followed a period which did not produce a team to take up the legacy of Suśruta and advance that further. In the twelfth century, the Unani medicine, also known as *tibb-i Unani*, came to India and gradually took roots. Big and small hospitals and dispensaries were established. The kings and nobles patronized physicians and scholars. This patronage induced many distinguished *hakims* and scholars to come to India and make it their home. The physicians were provided with facilities to set up their own clinics and encouraged to compile medical works. The kings and their nobles sanctioned grants to prominent physicians. Once provided with decent living, they had sufficient time at their disposal to take up the arduous task of creating medical literature.⁴

During the 'Abbasid Caliphate several distinguished Vaidas went to Baghdad where they translated many medical works into Arabic or Persian and influenced the Arab physicians. Later, scholars and physicians from Iran and Arab world came to India. This cross movement had its own influence—the two systems, i.e. Ayurveda and Arab medicine, came closer to each other⁵.

*The first centre of Unani medicine in India*⁶

The last Ghazni king, Khusro Shah, was forced to quit Ghazni. He conquered Lahore and settled there. His son, Khusro Malik, who ruled over this area from 1160 to 1168 A.D. was a great patron of Unani medicine and helped his court physician, Diya al-Din 'Abd al-Rafe, to set up the first Centre of Unani Medicine at Lahore.

*Slave dynasty and Unani medicine*⁷

During the reign of Sultan Iltmish (A.D. 1212-1236) a large number of Unani physicians came to India and either set up their own clinics or served at the royal court. Some of them were good teachers and writers of medical books. The tutorials arranged by them proved highly useful. Students came to Delhi from different parts of the country and each *hakim* took a few of them whom he taught medical books and associated them actively in the practical work of his own clinic. This process created an intimate relationship between the teacher and the taught, the latter having a free access to the way of treatment of his mentor. Delhi, being the capital, soon collected a formidable team of eminent physicians. Before the rule of the Slave dynasty was over, Delhi had produced scores of physicians, among whom Badr al-Din Dimashqi, Sadr al-Din Tabib and 'Ala' al-Din acquired great fame.

*Khalji dynasty and Unani medicine*⁸

'Ala' al-Din Khalji ruled over Delhi from A.D. 1295 to 1315. Though a ruthless ruler, he was a good administrator and a kind patron of scholars. Unani medicine continued to progress in his times. Some of the famous physicians of this period were Maulana Hamid Mutriz, Maulana Sadr al-Din ibn Maulana Hissam al-Din Marikali, the Yemeni tabib 'Ilm al-Din, Maulana Iz al-Din Badayuni, Meh Chand, and Jaja.

*Tughluq dynasty and Unani medicine*⁹

Muhammad bin Tughluq (d. A.D. 1351) who succeeded his father, Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq, the founder of the Tughluq dynasty, was a scholar in his own right. He was well conversant with medicine, astronomy, mathematics and logic. Sometimes he himself examined patients and discussed medical matters with contemporary physicians. He was very generous towards scholars and physicians. In his times there were some seventy hospitals and dispensaries in Delhi. Fortunately, a manuscript of Unani medicine *Majmu '-i Diya' i* has been discovered. It was composed during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq. Later historical records reveal that another medical work titled as *Tibb-i Firuz Shahi* was composed in the reign of Sultan Firuz Tughluq, but this manuscript has remained untraceable.

*Majmu '-i Diya' i*¹⁰

In the library of the Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research,

Tughlaqabad, New Delhi, there is a manuscript of *Majmu 'a-i Diya'i* (MS No. 11963). The language is Persian, number of folios 221, measures 19 × 11 cm, 23 lines to each folio, the script is *naskh* and the headings of chapters and sub-chapters are given in red. The name of the author is Diya Muhammad Mahmud Mas'ud Rashid Zangi 'Umar Ghaznawi. The name of the book follows that of the book by the author's uncle, Khwajah Shams Mustaufi, called *Majmu'a-i Shamsi*.

The author lived in the reign of the second ruler of the Tughluq dynasty, Muhammad bin Tughluq, and composed this work in 737/1336 during his stay in Tilang (Dev giri or Daulatabad) where he had moved in compliance of imperial orders. The city was beautiful and possessed a healthy climate, but after the arrival of the author it was attacked by a severe epidemic to which a great number of the inhabitants fell victim. The author himself could not escape its attack and remained confined to bed for a long time. He consulted many physicians, but in vain. At last he prayed to God and saw the next night in dream his uncle Khwajah Shams Mustaufi. The latter advised him to consult his book *Majmu'a-i Shamsi* and treat himself in accordance with its instructions. He also advised him to study medical science. He did accordingly, and with the help of important works of previous physicians composed the book.

The sources of *Majmu'a-i Diya'i* are as follows :

1. *Al-Qanun* of Ibn Sina
2. Translation of Galen's *Maqrun*
3. *Firdaus al-hikma* of 'Ali bin Rabban al-Tabari
4. *Kamil al-sana'a* of 'Ali bin 'Abbas al-Majusi
5. *Saidna* of al-Biruni
6. *Dhakhira-i Khawrizm Shahi* of Shaikh Isma'il of Jurjan
7. *Majmu'a-i Maliki*
8. *Shifa al-Maluk*
9. *Maqasid al-abdan*
10. *Bustan al-'attarin*
11. *Sihhat-i 'Ala'i*
12. *Makhzan al-shifa wa Ma'dan al-ghina*
13. *Majmu'a-i Shamsi*, a Persian translation of medical treatises of Indian physicians
14. *Tibb-i Gilani*
15. *Majmu'a-i Mahammadi* by Khwajah Taj al-Din Abu Bakr Firuzjahi Hakim
16. *Sirr-i mahnun* by Khwajah Muhammad Turkan Razi and (the legendary philosopher-physician) Hermes
17. *Nukta al-usul fi Fawa'id al-khayul*
18. A book of Sultan Sanjar (of Saljuqi dynasty) on the treatment of horses
19. *Zuhrat al-zahir fi ma'dan al-jawahir*
20. *Nazhat al-ghina hadiqat al-Shabban*
21. *Manafi al-nas*

The author has tried his best in faithfully quoting from these sources and reproducing the formulas in intelligible manner. He made no alteration in his translations except that he mentioned the names of some of the drugs in current Indian vernacular. He did not fail to consult carefully books on Indian medicine. Chief among such books was *Nag Arjun Sagar*. He devoted a separate chapter (Chapter 41) to the teachings of this Indian physician. He also incorporated in the book his own experiments in medical treatment.

The book is divided into forty-six chapters, the last one being devoted to veterinary science and specially to the treatment of various diseases of the horse. However, this chapter is missing from the manuscript possessed by the library of the Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research.

There seems only one more manuscript copy of this important medical treatise, namely that of Asafia Library, Hyderabad.

Firuz Shah Tughluq (A.D. 1351 to 1388) was a liberal ruler. He took keen interest in public welfare. He reorganized the hospitals and dispensaries which his predecessor, Muhammad bin Tughluq, had founded and added many more, besides founding at Delhi, a Central Hospital named as Dar al-Shifa where medicines and food were provided free of charge¹¹. Experienced physicians were appointed in this hospital whose entire expenditure amounting to some 3.6 million *tankas* was borne by the royal treasury¹². A medical manuscript of this period *Rahat-al-insan*¹³ has been discovered. It was composed by Ilyas bin Shahab alias Diya who dedicated it to Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq. The book gives fair details of the different modes of treatment, herbs and drugs used, diets prescribed and also describes the social conditions of the people.

*Unani medicine in Gujarat*¹⁴

Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji conquered Gujarat and appointed his viceroy there. This indirect rule over Gujarat through a viceroy continued till A.D. 1415 when the last viceroy of Gujarat, Rasti Khan, rebelled against the central authority. Muzaffar Khan, a commander, was sent by Sultan Muhammad Shah bin Firuz Shah to suppress the rebellion. Muzaffar Khan after a brief encounter with Rasti Khan was victorious. He was appointed viceroy in place of Rasti Khan but after the death of Sultan Muhammad Shah he declared his sovereignty. His dynasty ruled over Gujarat for more than two hundred years. The most famous physician-author of this period is Shahab ibn 'Abd al-Karim Nagori who compiled two medical works—*Tibb-i Shahabi* and *Shifa al-Khani*. The former is in verse dealing with the fundamentals and therapeutics of Unani medicine. The author has made a claim that all the medicaments recommended by him were tested and tried in his clinic before their inclusion in his books. The second book *Tibb-i Shifa al-Khani* was composed by its author in 794 A.H. at the instance of Muzaffar Shah. The book contains chapters on anatomy and physiology, describes diseases in detail, discusses their causes and gives guidelines for treatment. He was also given proven

formulae and prescriptions. These formulæ and prescriptions consist of only such drugs as may be locally available. Hindi equivalents of Arabic and Persian terms have also been given. The chief characteristic of Shahabi's prescriptions is that their contents are generally inexpensive and the dosage small.

Sultan Mahmud Shah, the grandson of Sultan Ahmad Shah, the founder of Ahmedabad city, ruled over Gujarat for 54 years. He established a department for the translation of well-known Arabic and Sanskrit books into Persian. During his reign Vāgbhaṭa's scholarly work *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya* was translated into Persian and titled as *Shifa-i Mahmudi* after the name of Sultan Mahmud Shah. Its translator was 'Ali Muhammad ibn Isma'il Asawali Asili. In Ahmedabad there still exists a *muhalla* named Asa Bhil Ka Tikra. In the days of Sultan Mahmud the inhabitants of this *muhalla* called themselves Asawalis and since 'Ali Muhammad, the translator, lived in this *muhalla* he added Asawali to his name. He was a competent physician and in his translation derived full benefit from the exegesis of the original book.

*Lodi dynasty and Unani medicine*¹⁵

Among Lodi rulers, Sultan Sikandar Lodi exhibited keen interest in the academic work of scholars of his time. To distinguished scholars he gave large grants in recognition of their services. He arranged for the education of his Hindu subjects who started learning Persian, the then court language. Some of them acquired proficiency in Persian to such an extent that they could compose poems. Pandit Doongar Mal of this age achieved fame as a poet of Persian. Muslim nobles learnt Hindi and Muslim scholars made a deep study of Indian arts and sciences. Later, they wrote complete books on different branches of these arts and sciences. *Ma'dan al-shifa Sikandar Shahi* also known as *Tibb-i Sikandari*, is the first among Ayurvedic books compiled in Persian in India. Mian Bahwa dedicated it to Sultan Sikandar Lodi. The book is based on more than one dozen acknowledged books of Ayurveda. Bahwa was the son of the Lodi General Khawas Khan. He received good education and gained considerable influence in the court of the Sultan. He had mastery over Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit and an irresistible inclination towards Medicine. He gathered together extant Indian and Iranian medical works, made a selection of their topics and produced his book which contains summaries of the following Ayurvedic works.:

<i>Suśruta</i>	<i>Bheda</i>	<i>Beṅga Sena</i>
<i>Caraka</i>	<i>Vāgbhaṭa</i>	<i>Chinta Mani</i>
<i>Gatu Karāṇa</i>	<i>Rasaratnākara</i>	<i>Madhava Nidāna</i>
<i>Bhoja</i>	<i>Śārṅgadhara</i>	<i>Čarkra Datta</i>
		<i>Gaya Dutta</i>

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- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Studies in Arabic and Persian Medical Literature* (1959) by M. Zubayr Siddiqi, Calcutta University, Chapter on Hospitals in Muslim India, pp. xxxi to xxxix.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, Introduction p. xxxv, main text pp. 36 to 40.
- ⁶ *Tarikh-e-Tib* (in Urdu). S. Abdul Wahab Zahuri. Chapters dealing with Unani medicine in India during Sultanate and Mughal periods (in press).
- ⁷ *Physician-Authors of Greco-Arab Medicine in India* (1970). Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research, New Delhi, p. 6.
Hindustani Atibba Ke Karname published in Urdu medical journal *Hamdard-e-Sehat*, Delhi, May 1960 and June 1960 issues.
- ⁸ *Barani Tarikh-e-Firuz Shahi*, Calcutta, 1862, pp. 352 to 366.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *A Catalogue of Arabic and Persian Medical Manuscripts* (1971), compiled by Shabbir Ahmad Khan Ghorī, Tazimuddin Siddiqi and S. A. Ali, Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research, New Delhi, pp. 18 to 22.
- ¹¹ *Studies in Arabic and Persian Medical Literature* (1959) by Dr. M. Zubayr Siddiqi, Calcutta University, Introduction, p. xxviii.
- ¹² *Tarikh-e-Tib* (in Urdu). S. Abdul Wahab Zahuri. Chapters dealing with Unani medicine in India during Sultanate and Mughal Periods (in press).
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- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
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