The Role of Traditional System of Medicine in Home Remedies

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ABSTRACT

Traditional system of medicine has evolved gradually over a long period of time and has become a successful alternative system in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Many drugs that were used in prehistoric times for healing various ailments are still in use. Many of them have become a way of life as they are used intuitively in our diet either as a culinary cuisine, as spice or condiment, as appetizer or as digestive additive. Some common such drugs are for example: garlic, ginger, onion, celery, kalonji, methi, mustard, clove, curcuma, nutmeg, cardamom, cinnamon mint, olive, ajwian, coriander, fennel, til, zeera and hing (asafaetoita) among others. A conservative estimate suggest that about 80% people in Pakistan especially in rural areas, use herbal medicine as unani / hikmat / tibb or ayurvedic preparations 1,2,3,4.

Key Words: Traditional Medicine , Home Remedies

INTRODUCTION

Traditional medicine in home remedies in Pakistan is as old as human kind. As microbes preceded human development, man found him surrounded with innumerable types of diseases. Initially it was not known that diseases are caused by various types of microorganism such as: insects, fungi, bacteria and viruses. These were associated with evil spirits, devils, shamans and various other unknown causes. Gradually researches revealed the role of microorganisms especially bacteria and viruses towards spread of diseases 5,6,7. Throughout this period man used various drugs of plants, animals or mineral origin 8,9,10,11 without knowing the active principles that helped in healing. Many of those drugs that were used since medieval ages have been retained while others discarded or eliminated from the long list of such original drugs. The use of various drugs was under the influence of the Elders and wise men of those societies that used them. Traditional system in Indo-Pakistan sub continent developed through constant interaction between various cultures with different historical and religious back grounds. Pakistan being at the cross roads of various civilization, because of its unique geographical position, it acquired and adopted whatever knowledge it gained through such interaction. Most influential among various traditional system of medicine such as Chinese, Kampo and Jamu, Unani or Greeco- Arab systems as well as Ayurvedic system, the last two systems of medicine are most popular and commonly used 1,10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herb / Drugs</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Herb / Drugs</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allium cepa L.</td>
<td>Onion</td>
<td>Liliaceae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allium sativum L.</td>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Liliaceae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphanamixis polystachya</td>
<td>Celer</td>
<td>Umbellifera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinnamomum zeylanicum L.</td>
<td>Cinnamon</td>
<td>Lauraceae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coriandrum sativum L.</td>
<td>Coriander</td>
<td>Umbellifera</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Curcuma cyminum L.</td>
<td>Zeera</td>
<td>Umbellifera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curcuma longa L.</td>
<td>Curcuma</td>
<td>Zingiberaceae</td>
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Twenty herbal medicines commonly used as spices, condiments, additive, digestive or appetizer have been described and presented in a tabular form. The table provides the Latin names, local names, family and medicinal uses of these herbs. This shows how these herbs are used since time immemorial and consumed intuitively for the maintenance of health.

**Development of Traditional System: Historical Perspective**

Pakistan occupies a central position between various civilizations. From Alexander the Great to Mughals, over a period of more than a thousand years many cultural interchanges took place. During their migration from west to east and east to west between Turkey, Iran, Asia Minor on one side and India, Indonesia, Japan and China on the other there was a great intermingling of tradition including the way of healing.

The Traditional system of medicine in Pakistan owes its origin from the ancient Unani or Greco-Arab system of medicine which originated from the period of Theophrastus, Hippocrates and Dioscorides who are considered as fore fathers and promoters of the medicine of herbal, animal, mineral origin. Greek Medical text were translated into Arabic and adopted to the needs of the Arabs. Arabs expanded it to the stage of excellence. Many of the Greek text survived only in Arab transcripts.

Some early 10th to 12th century Muslims Scholars played a vital role in propagating traditional medicine in the Middle East and Central Asia, which expanded and reached Europe. Abu Ali Al Hassan Ibn-Sina (Avicenna in Latin) 980-1037 A.D. wrote a monumental treatise, “Qanun fi al tibb” (Canon of medicine) in Ca 1020 which influenced the scholastic
traditions in Europe. This book in five volumes remained the most influential work of medicine and pharmacy for almost five hundred years. Many scholars worked in Eastern Arabia while others worked in Spain, which was dominated by Arabs in those days and had become the second center of learning in medicine.

Abu Marwan Ibn Zuhr (Avenzoar in Latin) in 1091 - 1161 A.D. made several discoveries and breakthroughs. He described scabies correctly for the first time, prescribed tracheotomy and direct feeding through gullet and rectum. His book “Kitab al Taiser fi al Mudawat wa al tadbir”, “Kitab al Aghziya”, “Kitab al Iqtisad fi Islah al anjus wa al Ajrad” are well known. Abu Muhammad Abdullah Ibn Ahmed Al-Baitar a celebrated botanist (1197-1248) compiled a comprehensive list of drugs. He recommended rose water, use of colocynth, croton oil, nutmeg and pyrethrum. His book “Kitab al Jami fi al Adwiya al Mafarada” contains 1400 plants, of which only 200 were known that time.


All these Muslims scholars made a mark in traditional medicine. Their teachings and practical demonstration were followed in the west. The Arabs preserved and gave impetus to the art of learning and practice of traditional system of medicine. This system flourished for centuries in the Middle East, South East and Central Asia. It is because of this reason that this system is referred to grec-o-Arab system of medicine. Through the spread of Islam from Arabian Peninsula to the far fetched areas upto Spain and Morocco in the west, and upto Central Asia, Malaysia upto Indonesia in the East, this system expanded and spread. In a larger perspective the Greco-Arab system of medicine has often been designated as Islamic system of Medicine. In order to distinguished it from the system of medicine prevalent in the West it was also cited as Eastern and Oriental system of Medicine.

In Europe the text of classical Greek and Roman were copied from the Arabian record and annotated. The use of herbal medicine in Europe was under the influence of early scholars and naturalist, besides interaction of people and product from out side Europe.

A Brief Prehistoric Record

Most of the information regarding use of various drugs originating from specific plants, animals or minerals came from archeological record, early document or treatises written on leaves, bones, wooden or copper plates or folklore. The tradition of India, Japan and China were found in early manuscripts and documents. Records from other areas are not available as they were either lost, burnt or destroyed during wars by invaders such as Mongols, Europeans, Meso-American or so called Pre Islamic barbarians. Later through sporadic travellers, missionaries, adventures, explorers and some conquerors, colonial officers and researchers much of the information about tradition prevailing in other cultures were collected and documented.

The information was important to European societies specially for their own protection such as poisoned arrows, narcotic or poisonous drinks and for the prospect of finding new medicines. Many spices and condiments were brought to Europe by Portuguese and French from far east. The great sea voyages performed by Vasco de Gama. Alexander von Humboldt and Columbus are well documented.

Traditional System of Medicine in Europe

Since the advent of western or allopathic system the traditional system fell out of fashion in Europe. It was not so much valued and was considered to be less effective. However before the synthetic drugs came into use people depended mostly on old herbal, mineral, or animal drugs for health management.

The earliest information in the European Arabic tradition came from the Sumerians and Akkadians of Mesopotamia. The information that came from Shanidar cave in Iraq supports these findings. The Egyptian documented their experiences and finding on papyrus, a sheet made out of a sedge plant known as Cyperus aquaticus which came to be known as Eber papyrus from 1500 BC. This papyrus was discovered from a tomb by George Eber in 1873 and was deposited in the University of Leipzig. This document is a medical handbook covering description of various diseases and their possible treatment. Other papyrus, known as Berlin papyrus throws light on recipes for pharmaceutical preparation. Some of the earliest naturalist and herbalist came from Greece and their method of treatment and drugs were the Centre of research for many decades. One of those Greek scholars Padanias Dioscorides from Anzrabos (1 BC) described 600 plants of medicinal value and is considered as father of western medicine. His teachings and doctrine
heavily influenced European pharmacy (460-375 BC),
Calidius Galen (Galenus - 130-201 A.D.) and Pliny the Elder
(23-79 A.D.) are well known.

Herbal Gardens in Europe

Herbs established as medicinally important were primarily
collected from wild rural locations, but soon it was realized
that the uniformity of their standard was difficult to maintain.
It was therefore, necessary to domesticate them and grow
them in uniform ecological conditions. For this purpose, in
Europe, gardens attached to monasteries were found to be
most safe and suitable places to grow such drugs.

Monte Cassino, an Italian monastery is one of the examples
of such tradition. Other monasteries such as Charters (France)
and St. Gall (Switzerland) played their part by developing
their own drug gardens which was used for producing fresh
drugs as well as for teaching. Charles the Great (Charlemagne
747-814) ordered that such drug gardens should be developed
in all King’s monasteries and important medicinal plants
should be cultivated there. A list of 24 species of plants were
prepared and grown.

Traditional medicine influenced by Greek-Arab medicine
and doctrine were practiced in numerous European cloisters.
In Sicily, which was dominated by Arabs, first medical center
of medieval Europe was developed in Salerno in 12th
century. The medieval herbal medicine reached its highest
level in the 11th century with the establishment of
De Viribus herbarium and Macer floridus, a Latin poem
(1070 A.D) believed to be written by the Abbot of Beauprai
(Odoof Meune)

Various Traditional Systems Prevalent in Asia.

The most well known and established traditional system
however, came from Asia and they have been enumerated
as under:

1. Sino ------ Chinese
2. Kampo - Yaku ------ Japanese
3. Han ------ Korean
4. Jamu ------ Indonesian
5. Ayurvedic ------ Indian
6. Unani ------ Grecco - Arab

Each one of these will be discussed separately.

Sino or Chinese System of Medicine

The Chinese system has influenced a very wide geographical
area and the application extends up to Korea and Japan. The
Japanese traditional medicine is known as Kampo-Yaku while
that of Korea is called as Han medicine.

An important Chinese book “Shen nong ben caojing” about
2200 years old, containing 365 drugs of plants highlighted
their origin, collection, properties and dosage of the
preparation. The first systematic work on herbal drugs
containing 1892 drugs and 1100 recipes appeared in 16th
century (1518-1593) under the name “Ben Cao Gang Mu”
by Li Shizhen.

Kampo-Yako or Japanese System

The Japanese system heavily draws from Chinese traditional
medicine and is deep rooted in Japan since its inception in
701. During the expansion of Buddhism in Nara period (710-
783) medicine was under the influence of Ayurvedic medicine
from India and Unani system from Arabia. In 984 the court
physician Yasuyori Tambo compiled a treatise, Isincho,
which contained thirty scrolls giving medical knowledge of Sui
and Tang dynasty. The Japanese system was strengthened by
1574 when Dosan Manase combined all the elements of
medical thought leading to a form of independent Kampo
medicine during Edo period. This was the main system of
traditional medicine in Japan until the introduction of Western
system in 1771 by Genpaku Sugita.

Kampo system is now reverting back gradually and a course
has been introduced in the University since 1940. According
to one estimate in 1983 about 40 percent of Japanese doctors
prescribe Kampo herbal prescription. Now research in Korea
and Japan are confirming the benefits and effectiveness of
of traditional medicine (Takemi et al 1985).

Jamu or Indonesian System

Jamu System evolved in Indonesia as an ancient cultural
practice in palaces of Surakarat and Yogyakarta in central
Java, which was established there and later spread to Bali.
This was under the influence of ancient Chinese, Indian and
Arabic medical practices. Old carvings, dating as far back as
800-900 A.D. found in the temple of Borobudur shows that
the leaves of the tree kalpatarah were used in medicine. It
is believed that this tree never dies thus causing long life or
a sort of immortality. After the spread of Islam in Java and
destruction of Majapapat empire many local Javanese fled
mainly to Bali, along with their belongings including books, medicine besides their cultural tradition. Other islands in the vicinity used Jamu along with the mixture of their own local traditional medicine. Most of the old records have been protected by a few families of healers as secret documents, never to be revealed to outsiders, for example those preserved in the palace of Yogyakarta are restricted. Two books on traditional medicine are well known from Indonesia. “Serat kawruh bab jampi jampi” is a book on “all cures” with 1734 formulae and “Serat Centhini” is a book of Centhini of 18th century and is comprised of 12 volumes. These are preserved in Surakarta palace library. During war, when medicines were in short supply, president Sukarno decreed the nation to revert back to local traditional medicine.

Ayurvedic or ancient Indian System

Ayurvedic is the most ancient of all traditional systems. Ancient Hindu and Buddhist writings mentioned nothing about foreign medicines whereas Greek and Middle Eastern documents made mention of the drugs of Indian origin. Ayurveda defines health as a well balanced metabolism plus a happy state of being. Treatment in Ayurveda has a helpful combination of the use of drugs, diet and practice. Pharmaceutics occupies an important place in Ayurveda. Medical preparations are invariably complex mixture being derived from plants and animals as well as minerals and metal products.

The term ayurveda is composed of two part ayur and veda. The former means life and the latter means knowledge. The use of plant is mentioned in Rigveda and Atharveda. The first recorded treatise on ayurveda dated from 900 B.C. and is known as Charaka Samhita. It consist of 8 sections divided into 150 chapters and described 341 plants used in medicine. The other well known treatise on ayurveda is Sushruta Samhita (600 B.C.) with special emphasis on surgery, with six sections, 186 chapters and described 395 medicinal plants, 57 drugs of animal origin and 64 that of minerals and metal origin. In 14th century Sarangdhara wrote Sarangdhara Samhita in which he systematized Ayurvedic Materia Medica.

Ayurvedic medicine derives its origin from the four Vedas of Hindu mythology which refers various aspects of medicine and surgery. Ayurveda keeps into account the existence of soul in the individual body and in the unity of body and mind, ayurveda drugs are classified on the basis of their taste, attributes, potency, taste after digestion and therapeutic effect. Four types of therapies are used in ayurveda such as (a) elimination therapy, (b) alleviation therapy, (c) psychic therapy, (d) Surgery. The first school to teach Ayurvedic medicine was at the University of Varanasi in (500 B.C.)

Unani or Greco-Arab System

There is some similarity in Ayurvedic and Unani system of medicine as both are based on ancient principles derived from early dwellers. The most important similarity is the principle of four elements which is identical to Ayurvedic Panchbhoula principles.

According to Tibb or Unani medicine all the universal inanimate and animate things are produced from Al-Nar (fire), Al-Hawa (air), Al-Ma (water) and Al-ardh (earth). An equilibrium between these produces normal functioning and normal health. Tibb also suggest that the human body is composed of seven natural principles or components of the body known as “Al-Umur al-tabyiah” and absence of any one of these may lead to diseases or even death.

Unani medicines aim at combating diseases with curative, preventive and promotive measures. Medicine obtained from natural sources such as plants, animals and minerals are used in this system also. Unani medicines are cheap and readily available, they are effective and devoid of side effects.

Unani system of medicine developed through amalgamation of the knowledge from various Arab and other countries such as Egypt and Iraq, India and China. The drug preparation consists of powder, syrup, suspension electuaries, distilled metal water and some other forms.

Conclusion

Though the western system of medicine is prevalent throughout the world especially in the urban megacities the traditional herbal medicines are used side by side. In Pakistan according to a conservative estimate about 80% people use traditional medicine especially in rural areas, where either allopathic medicines are not available or can be purchased at a very high price. Now a days many life saving drugs are beyond the reach of common man.

Traditional system of the medicine developed in the Indo-Pak subcontinent through constant interaction between various cultures, with different traditional and religious background.

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the great to Mughals, over a period of more than a thousands years many cultural interchange took place. During their migration from west to east and east to west between Turkey, Iran, Asia Minor on one side and India, Indonesia, Japan and China on the other, there was a great variation of tradition including the way of healing.

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