

## AN EARLY ARABIAN AUTHOR ON THE INDIAN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

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One of the greatest services rendered by the early Arabian authors during their palmy days, to the cause of science, consisted in their efforts to bring together the results of the labours of their predecessors in the field of science in different parts of the world, mainly India and the Eastern Roman world and Greece.

In the science of Astronomy they got the works of the Indians as well as of the Greeks translated into Arabic. In alchemy, they first got the works known to them translated into their only scientific and literary language. In the art of navigation they got the use of the compass from the Chinese from whom they learnt the art of manufacturing paper also.

In the science of medicine also they were not content with the results of the Greeks only; rather they went a step further and got most of the important medical works of the Indians translated into Arabic. However, though we find constant references to the Mathematical works of the Indians in the works of the Arabian authors, very rarely do we come across any reference to the medical works of the Indians in Arabic works. In the works of *Ar Razi*, we scarcely find mention of Charak or Susrut.

In the works of Avicenna only the name of Charak is mentioned in two or three places in connection with therapeutics only. But in no other medical treatise of the Arabs do we find any reference to Physiology, Pathology, the theory of medicine or to any other theoretical part of the healing art of the Indians.

There is, however, one exception to this—viz., the *Firdaus-ul-Hikmat*\*\* (Paradise of wisdom), the first medical compendium written independently in the Arabic language in the year 850 A. D. by *Abu Sabl' ali bin Rabban*, the teacher of *ar-Razi* who is generally acknowledged to be the greatest physician of the middle ages.

'Ali', the author of 'Firdaus-ul-Hikmat' received from his own father, Ali Rabban, his education in medical and all other current sciences. According to Ali's own statement *Al Rabban* was a Christian and belonged to an educated "family of secretaries", residing at *Mery* in Persia. He preferred the medical profession to that of his forefathers and practised it not for the sake of praise or profit but in order to do good to humanity and attain Divine attributes". (*Firdaus-ul-Hikmat* pp 1-2).

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\*\* A note on the *Firdaus-ul-Hikmat* and the translation of the 36 chapters on Indian medicine were already published in the Bulletin of Department of History of Medicine. Vol. I, No. 1, pp.26-49, and No. 2, pp. 91-109 - EDITOR.

Having finished his studies Ali was obliged to take another profession owing to unfavourable circumstances. Yet he kept up his taste in the Healing Art and continued his studies. During his studies he realised the necessity of a short self-contained compendium on medicine in Arabic language, which should serve as a text-book to students and a guide to the practitioners of medicine. After many years of labour was thus produced the work, *Firdaus-ul-Hikmat*. Both the work and its author were held in high esteem by highly reputed scholars of medicine. This is evidenced by the fact that, many authors of fame have quoted Ali's work on different subjects, to name only a few – 1. Razi, 2. Al Naks-ul-Kisman, 3. Badruddin Qalauisi, among the medical writers; 4. Al-Beruni, 5. Al Masudi; 6. Yaqut al Hamair; 7. Ibn-i-Isfandiar; 8. Akul miayyad-al-Balakh, among historians; 9. Ibn-ul-Baytar the botanist and; 10. Al Demiri, the zoologist. They have all quoted from *Firdaus-ul-Hikmat*.

After some time *Firdaus-ul-Hikmat* as well as its author were forgotten – only 4 manuscripts were discovered with great effort – one in British Museum used by Prof. E. G. Browne in his lectures on Arabic medicine, wherein Browne drew attention to the importance of *Firdaus-ul-Hikmat*. Browne was so much impressed by the book that he persuaded Siddiqui, to prepare a critical edition of it. It was published by the *Sommer-Druckerei* of Berlin.

In this book we find a full discourse on Indian system of Medicine. Ali says, "having reached the end of the book, I think it only proper to mention in one discourse, a few chapters taken from the books of the Indian medicine and their best drugs, hoping that it would add to the knowledge of students. Having known the points of agreement and of difference between these great nations (the Greeks and the Indians) they would excel in the science, and would attain eminence in its knowledge (theory) as well as in practice. In what I have written here there is a good deal with what the Greeks hold and there is a good deal in which they (Greeks and Indians) differ; the reasoning of the Indians in such cases does not appeal to me. Whenever the reader finds a correct opinion or a right judgement he should accept it, and wherever he cannot agree (with what the Indians hold) he should reject it".

After these preliminary remarks Ali gives the theory of disease and the discovery of the science of Medicine, according to *Charak* and *Shushrut*.

Ali has given a complete compendium of Indian System of Medicine from best medical authors, in 36 chapters.

He has only related the Indian system without criticising it, though he does not always agree with it. His object was to induce a comparative study so as to lead to better results. But his successors did not follow his advice. They were too much enamoured of the works of Hippocrates, Galen and other devotees of the Greek system to turn to the works of great Indian physicians like *Charak* for inspiration. In neglecting Indian system they lost much valuable knowledge. The Indian system contains much which has received the admiration even of modern scientists. As a matter of fact the Greeks themselves had been indebted to India for modern science as well as other

sciences. In this connection the oath of Hippocrates may be compared with the Chapter in Susrut on the initiation of the students to the science of medicine.

There are, however, one or two casual sentences in the Firdaus which throw light on the acquaintance of the general public with the Indian system of medicine at the time Ali lived. For instance, in one place he says: "verily I have collected herein such treatment of diseases by Indians as are known to the people of this part of world; the rest I have left out". It is clear that during the early Abbasi period a fair knowledge of Indian Medicine was common among people in Mesopotamia and Iran. This is corroborated by the fact that a large number of Indian Physicians were living in the court of Baghdad, and some of them were successfully competing with Greek Physicians.

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### SUMMARY

Firdausul Hikmat is the first medical compendium in Arabic, dealing with Indian medicine also. Before that, references to Indian authors or works in Arabic literature are rare. Firdausul Hikmat was written by Ali Bin Rabban in 850 A. D. He belonged to a family residing at Mery in Persia. The work based on many years' labour was held in high esteem by many later authors of fame like Ar Razi etc. The theories on various aspects of Indian medicine based on Charak and Sushrut are dealt with in 36 chapters.

सारांश

भारतीय चिकित्सा पद्धति के एक आरंभिक अरबी लेखक

ले० कविराज पुरषोत्तम देव मुल्तानी

फ़िर्दौसुल हिकमत अरबी का पहला चिकित्सा-संग्रह है जिसमें कि भारतीय चिकित्सा का भी वर्णन है। इसके पहले अरबी साहित्य में भारतीय चिकित्सकों की कृतियों का उल्लेख कदाचित् ही मिलता है। फ़िर्दौसुल हिकमत अली बिन रब्बन द्वारा सन् ८५० में लिखा गया था। वह परशिया के मेरी स्थान के एक परिवार से संबंधित थे। उनकी यह कृति कई वर्षों के परिश्रम से तैयार हुई थी जिसकी सराहना बाद के कई प्रसिद्ध चिकित्सकों जैसे कि अर राजी इत्यादि ने की। इसके ३६ अध्यायों में चरक और सुश्रुत द्वारा प्रतिपादित भारतीय चिकित्सा के विभिन्न विषयों के सिद्धांतों का वर्णन किया गया है।