

INDIGENOUS SYSTEMS OF MEDICINE IN INDIA* EARLY HISTORY, LITERATURE AND SPECIAL FEATURES

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a science of life having its origin in Vedas. It has no beginning and was acquired from the Gods first by Bharadwaja. Lord Dhanwantari revealed the science of life. The knowledge was imparted to disciples who compiled treatises discussing number of theories about the composition of living and non-living matter and the physical, bio-chemical biological, psychological and spiritual components of man and the vital and motive forces in the body. Medical subjects like anatomy, physiology, aetiology, pathology, treatment, environmental factors and surgery are elaborately discussed in the various works of ancient and medieval period. Use of dead animals, distended bags, learning surgical practices on vegetables and dissection of dead bodies are also highlighted. More than 600 drugs of plant, animal and mineral origin are mentioned. Ayurveda aims at positive health with the gratification of senses, mind and soul. Dietetics, daily regimen and seasonal regimen are covered. Emphasis is laid for treatment on the consideration of age, sex, race, habits, habitat, mental frame, strength and similar other factors meaning that the treatment is to be individualised. Hospitals for men and animals were in vogue.

Siddha system originated by Agasthya is based on concepts mostly similar to Ayurveda. The difference between Ayurveda and Siddha is more linguistic than doctrinal with Siddha system having iatrochemistry as its speciality. The term indigenous medicine in strict sense can be used only for Ayurveda and Siddha but by convention the term is also used for Unani system. The Unani system was introduced into India around 10th cent. A.D. Yoga system propounded by Patanjali is very ancient and Hathayoga, a branch of it, consists of physical culture useful in the treatment of several diseased conditions. Naturopathy is a way of living. The Tibetan system, prevalent in some Himalayan regions uses herbs, minerals, animal organs, spring and mineral waters, moxibustion, puncturing and mysticism and spiritual powers. Amchi system is practised in the regions of Leh, Sikkim etc.

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INTRODUCTION

From prehistoric times, India has been the home of great civilization and culture. The archaeological spade has turned up objects of great value; the vast range of Sanskrit literature originating from Vedic period-sacerdotal texts, the canonical works of Buddhists and Jains, philosophic compendia, lexicographic works, epics, works on polity and Arabic and Persian works - all provide in abundant measure, evidence highlighting the role played by science and technology in shaping the civilization and culture of the land. One can perceive through this vast literature glimpses of achievements in various fields - astronomy, mathematics, iatrochemistry, alchemy, medicine including veterinary science, pyrotechnics, botany, zoology, agriculture and in a variety of other fields.

It was Descartes who said that "if ever the human race is raised to its highest practical level intellectually, morally and physically, the science of medicine will perform that service". It is because medicine is cosmopolitan and universal in its outlook in all ages and so is instrumental to place the country at the pinnacle of glory. Every country has some kind of medicine of its own and it is said by Joh. Hermann Bass in his essay on "Outlines of the history of medicine and the medical profession" (translated by H. E. Handerson) that 'Indian medicine, if we except Egyptian, Babylonian and Jewish, is the oldest in the world. To sum up the judgement of Indian medicine, one must assign to it, at all events, a superiority over the Egyptian and Jewish; indeed it may claim even the first rank among those examples of medical culture which have not experienced a continuous development. That it was not far behind Greek medicine, both in the extent of its doctrines and in its internal elaboration, furnishes us only a very superficial comparison. It cannot fail to extort our admiration when one considers the very early period in which it developed and attained so high a grade and when one takes into account also the people who accomplished so great a work. Yet one can never measure it by the standards of today. Such a course would be as false as unhistorical.

As one looks back it can be found that medicine was carried to a very high degree of perfection and the various achievements reflect the great power of observation, generalisation and analysis combined with patient labour in a country of boundless resources, whose fertility for herbs and plants is remarkable, and placed them in an exceptionally favourable position to persecute studies of medicine. Regarding the medical heritage of India, Max Neuburger in his *History of Medicine* (translated by Ernest Playfair) said "the medicine of the Indians, if it does not equal the best

achievements of their race, at least nearly approaches them, and owing to its wealth of knowledge, depth of speculation, and systematic construction, takes an outstanding position in the history of oriental medicine."

The term Indigenous medicine in strict sense can be used for Ayurveda and Siddha which are truly Indian in origin and development, but by understanding and convention the term has come to be used for Unani system also in view of its being in the country since over ten centuries. Ayurveda is practised all over India and also in some of the neighbouring countries like Srilanka, Nepal etc. Siddha system is practised in Tamil speaking areas of Southern India. Unani system is being practised in most parts of the country. Others like Naturopathy and Yoga which have become of late separate systems of approach have identity with Ayurveda in certain basic approaches and also in certain areas. Another medical system, which is practised in certain regions of the country like Leh, Dharamshala, Sikkim is Amchi system of medicine, which is normally considered similar to Tibetan medicine, which again shows certain similarities in concepts and approach to Ayurveda. No wonder in a vast country like India many systems of medicine can claim to be indigenous due to their stay and development and also utilisation in different parts of the country, though by and large Ayurveda and Siddha are truly Indian; systems like Yoga, Naturopathy, and Amchi are covered by these due to closer identity and similarity.

AYURVEDA

Ayurveda, popular and ancient medical system, which is widely practised, is composed of two words *Ayus* (life) and *Veda* (from Sanskrit root 'Vid' to know) - meaning science of life. Any study into such ancient system is necessarily bound to take one into realm of history. It is through this one gets insight into the thoughts and forces that moved the human society, their ideals and aspirations, conflicts and challenges, diseases and disorders suffered by them and the manners and methods adopted. One gets a glimpse of how it marched from magico-religious medicine of Vedic period to empirical and then to a systematised and rationalised knowledge. The early beginnings of Ayurveda are shrouded in the mist of antiquity. The mists of time have rolled over the beginnings of most of the efforts of man in realms of thought and of humanistic arts and science. The great pioneers of medical knowledge who are concerned with vital aspects of life, more particularly with happiness and survival remain unknown and only their heirs, successors, disciples and other torch bearers are remembered as the key figures of the wisdom to which we are today

heirs. When one thinks of this, it appears how true when Cardinal Newman asked 'Who was the first cultivator of the corn? Who first tamed and domesticated the animals whose strength we use and whom we make our food? Or who first discovered the medicinal herbs which from the earliest times have been our resource against diseases? If it was mortal man who thus looked through the vegetable and animal worlds, and discriminated between the useful and the worthless, his name is unknown to the millions whom he has thus benefitted'.

Citing the above posers, Edward Berdoe in his 'Popular History of Medicine' observes, "Cardinal Newman has framed his question so far as the healing art is concerned, in a manner to which it is impossible to make a satisfactory answer. No one man first discovered the medicinal herbs. Probably the discovery of all the virtues of a single one of them was not the work of any individual. No one man looked through the vegetable and animal worlds and discriminated between the useful and the worthless. All this has been the work of ages and is the outcome of the experience of thousand investigators. The medical arts have played so important a part in the development of our civilization that they constituted a branch of study second to none in utility and interest to those who would know something of the work of the world's benefactors'.

Perhaps due to remote scope of human involvement in origin of medicine, the compilers have assigned divine origin to Ayurveda. It is considered to be as old as Vedas, the repositories of recorded knowledge. According to some, this is considered as a part of Atharvaveda, and some consider this as an *Upaveda* meaning 'Supplementary Veda'. There is yet another view that it represents the fifth Veda. Regardless of the various views it would appear that the development of Ayurveda was coeval with the evolution of Indian civilization and culture. The Indus Valley Civilization of Harappa culture (2500-1500 BC), Vedic period (1500-800 BC), Brahmanic and Upanishadic period (800-600 BC), Buddhist period (600-B.C.-200 AD), Post Buddhist period (after 200 AD) are the cognisable epochs in the study of healing art.

The compilers of Ayurveda held that the science of healing as one without the beginning and the first promulgation of Ayurveda was by the Gods. Texts and tradition attribute origin of Ayurveda to Brahma, the creator of universe. Daksha Prajapati, the progenitor obtained in its entire, as promulgated by Brahma. The Aswini Kumaras (the twin sons of the Sun-God), the celestial physicians in turn learnt from Daksha Prajapati and from

them Lord Indra acquired. Indra was approached by Sage Bharadwaja for this beneficial lore for the sake of humanity.

One finds in works of Charakasamhita and Susrutasamhita interesting revelations relating to genesis of Ayurveda or its tradition of the heavenly descent which may perhaps be taken as of the divine guidance. It will be of interest to know the occasion when the great sages met at the foot of Himalayas and deputed after a long discourse Sage Bharadwaja who was known for his mighty austerity, to Lord Indra to gain knowledge of the healing art to banish the various diseases plaguing the humanity and coming in their way of discharging their duties and responsibilities and performance of rites and rituals. Sage Bharadwaja imparted his knowledge to the noble galaxy of sages. Atreya, who was among them taught the science of life to his disciples who later prepared their individual compendia of medicine. The one such is Agnivesha Samhita (later revised by Charaka and came to be known as Charaka Samhita).

According to Srimad Bhagavata Purana, it was Bhagawan Dhanwantari who revealed Ayurveda to the world. The mythology says that Dhanwantari emerged during *samudra manthana* (churning of the ocean) from the cosmic milk-ocean with a *kalasa* (pot) containing *amrita* (ambrosia, nectar) by drinking which even one who is in the jaws of death would become immortal. Setting aside its legendary origin, one finds that Ayurveda had already attained a high degree of development even as early as the period of Atreya (1500 BC) when knowledge flowing from different specialised fields of fundamental and applied sciences, was already integrated, generalised and principles enunciated. It will be interesting to note that medical school with Atreya thought and surgical school with Dhanwantari thought have come out as early as that time. The geneology of those connected with both the schools of thought is as below :

Brahma
:
Daksha
:
Aswins
:
Indra
:

(According to the version
in Susruta Samhita)

(According to the version
in Charaka Samhita)

:	:
Dhanwantari	Bharadwaja
or	:
Divodasa	Atreya Punarvasu
:	:
Susruta, Aupadhenava, Vaitarana, Aurabhra, Paushkalavata, Karavirya, Gopurarakshita, Bhoja and others.	Agnivesa, Bhela, Jatukarna Parasara, Harita, Ksharapani

A number of theories of doctrines about the composition of living and non-living matter, the concept of man in his entirety-physical including biochemical, biological including psychological and spiritual components that compose him, the relationship of the human body and organism to its environment, the nature of the vital and motive forces in a living body and other cognate matters were discussed.

Our knowledge of Ayurveda comes from the extent classical treatises like Charakasamhita, also called as Agnivesasamhita by the name of Agnivesa, disciple of Atreya who was the first compiler, Susrutasamhita, Bhelasamhita and works like Kasyapasamhita, Astangasangraha of Vriddha Vagbhata, Astangahridya of Vagbhata besides a number of works like Madhavanidana of Madhavakara, Sodhalanighantu and Gadanigraha of Sodhala, Sidhayoga by Vrindakunda and works of commentators like Chakrapanidatta, Dalhana, Vijayarakshita, Vachaspati etc. Of the works listed the Charaka Samhita, a comprehensive and monumental work, a massive compendium of medical knowledge with many chapters, dealt at length with therapeutic medicine or what is also known as internal medicine though other branches of Ayurveda like anatomy, physiology, aetiology, prognosis, pathology, treatment, influence of environmental factors, medicines and appliances are also elaborated. Equally voluminous work, Susrutasamhita while providing prime place for surgery also dealt with fundamental postulates, embryology, anatomy, pathology, therapeutics, psychiatry, toxicology and a variety of other subjects. About 100 kinds of surgical instruments, blunt as well as sharp including scalpels, scissors, probes, trocars, specula, forceps with different shapes etc. were mentioned. The use of dead animals, distended bags, vegetables for learning the dissection and operative techniques is yet another highlight of this work. Operative procedures like incision, excision, extraction, probing scraping and a number of bandaging techniques are also described. About 600 drugs of plant, animal and mineral origin are mentioned in Charakasamhita and about 650 drugs in Susrutasamhita. Medicinal prescriptions,

pharmaceutical processes, therapeutic methods including psychiatric approach, surgical processes employing a wide range of instruments, descriptions of different types of instruments, a variety of operative procedures, obstetric techniques are elaborately discussed. A number of pathologic conditions like diabetes, tuberculosis, malignant condition, leprosy, skin diseases, liver diseases, cardiac diseases, epilepsy, insanity, bites of animals and insects, ophthalmic conditions, diseases affecting ear, nose and throat and diseases of women and children as well as procedures of skin grafting techniques, orthopaedic manipulations, obstetric operations, number of therapeutic steps are discussed in these works. Most of the descriptions have parallels in the present day approach either in the underlying principles or approach methods.

OCTOPARTITE DIVISIONS OF AYURVEDA

Ayurveda is also called as Astanga Ayurveda due to its containing eight branches of the medical knowledge. The eight branches are as hereunder:

1. Kayachikitsa (Internal medicine)
2. Balachikitsa; also known as Kaumarabhritya (Paediatrics)
3. Bhutavidya or Grahachikitsa (Psychiatry)
4. Salakyatantra (Otorhino-laryngology and ophthalmology)
5. Salyatantra (Surgery)
6. Visatantra (Toxicology)
7. Rasayanatantra (Geriatrics)
8. Vajikaranatantra (Knowledge of Virilifics including therapeutics of male sterility)

It will be observed that the two classical treatises—Charaka Samhita* and Susrutasamhita and works of Vagbhata deal with all these branches of medical sciences. There are other minor works dealing with certain of the aspects related to the Ashtanga Ayurveda like Madhavanidana, Sarngadharasamhita, Bhavaprakasha etc.

BROAD AIMS AND CONCEPTS

Ayurveda is probably the earliest medical science that laid stress on

*It will be of interest to note that there existed a medico-historical-social club by name Charaka Club at New York between 1898 and 1941 started by a group of four—Charles L. Dana, Joseph Colliers, Frederick Peterson and Bernard Sachs. The name of the club was chosen in honour of the Hindu Sage Charaka. The seal of the club had the face of Charaka. The club, among others had, famous personalities like Sir William Osler, Harvey Cushing as members. The club referred to the oath of Hindu physician in one of its proceedings.

positive health, a blending of physical, mental, social, moral and spiritual welfare. The main aim, if not the entire theme of Ayurveda, is well expressed in Charakasamhita in statement "it is that knowledge of life which deals elaborately and at length with conditions beneficial or otherwise to the humanity, and to factors conducive to the happiness, or responsible for misery or sorrow besides indicating measures for healthful living for full span of life". This stresses the need for a balanced living to ensure normal health on a disease-free state (*arogya*). All the ancient scriptures also lay emphasis on healthy living as a prerequisite for achieving the four supreme ends of life i. e. righteousness (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), cultural and artistic values (*kama*) and spiritual freedom (*moksha*). While emphasising the above aspect, however, the Ayurvedic system does not ignore information regarding the disease and its prevention as well as therapeutic measures.

According to Ayurveda, a healthy person (*swastha*) is one in whom there is an equilibrium of the humours and the body tissues, with normal digestive as well as excretory functions, associated with the gratification of the senses, mind and soul (*prasannatmendriyamanah*). The disease is due to an imbalance of the equilibrium of either or all of the above. Of these constituents, soul (*atma*) is the cause of animation, the mind (*manas*) constitutes the psychic or mental component, and the equipoise or otherwise is dependant on the inherent qualities of these constituents (*trigunas* i.e. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas). A person with predominance of *sattva* quality possesses mental equipoise, clarity, purity of thought and ideas, pleasure etc; one with *rajas* quality is full of activity and energy; and one with *tamas* quality possesses in abundance inertia, passivity, bewilderment, delusion and ignorance. All these depict states of mind, as such it is appropriate to state that *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are the qualities (*gunas*) of mind (*manas*). Just as there are three qualities of mind, there are three components connected with the body whose equilibrium or otherwise decides its state. They are three humors – *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. The Ayurvedic Samhitas also sum up the composition of man as a union of spiritual, mental and physical factors.

Ayurveda discusses with meticulous care on dietetics, on sleep and on ways of living in different seasons, the role of environment on health and in causation of a disease and similar subjects. Ayurveda emphasised that the medical treatment shall be oriented not merely to disease but has to take into account, the patient, his environment, the meteorological considerations, age, sex, race, habits, habitat, diet, appetite, physical conditions, mental frame, physiological constitution, strength and vitality

and a number of factors like this. This means that the treatment is to be individualised and the physician who meticulously adopts this never errs either in his diagnosis or treatment. Sections on anatomy have discussed about physical anthropometry. The measurements of various body fluids are also mentioned.

Chapters on classification of diseases, aetiopathogenesis therapeutic principles and measures provide a wealth of knowledge which perhaps today might reappear as discoveries with new techniques and technologic advances at our disposal for investigation and study.

Ayurveda has an extensive materia medica which includes substances of animal, vegetable and mineral kingdom. Ayurvedic works have mentioned that the best of habitats of medicinal plants is the Himalayas, the most majestic of the mountains. The drugs grown there are to be properly culled and collected in appropriate seasons and used. The perusal of Ayurvedic works indicates the meticulous care that has gone into the various prescriptions mentioned under clinical conditions. The texts have described the properties of drugs, potency, metabolic changes the drugs undergo, based on principles of Ayurveda.

All the time one finds that the plants formed mainstay of treatment. The various pharmaceutical steps/processes-maceration, trituration, decantation, sedimentation, precipitation, extraction with water, distillation, fractionation, preparation of emulsions, preparation of infusions, preparation of medicated oils, extraction of oils and juices, preparation of medicines by fermentation process-are just a few described. The innumerable remedies mentioned in the work are sure to provide rich dividends if investigated and many unfailling remedies may be brought out for diseases hitherto unconquered.

MEDICAL HOSPITALS AND HERB GARDENS

The existence of hospitals for men and animals in India as early as 3rd century BC is very well known. The Mauryan Emperor Asoka after witnessing the horrors of Kalinga war ordered the establishment of hospitals for men and animals as well throughout the kingdom. The rock edict at Girnar mentions this. The Chinese pilgrim FaHien who visited India during the 5th cen. AD during the period of Chandragupta records the free hospital houses for dispensing charity and medicines. A number of evidences at different periods are available on this. It will be of interest to know that there are Ayurvedic works pervading into the

domain of veterinary science and also into realm of plants. A number of measures relating to maintenance and treatment concerned to these are mentioned.

SIDDHA SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

Siddha system of medicine, Unani-Tibb, Yoga, Naturopathy, Tibetan system, Homoeopathy, Acupuncture besides modern medicine are also practised in India.

Siddha system of medicine also called the Agasthya system whose literature is in Tamil is confined to Tamil-speaking areas of South India. Concepts, principles, doctrines, both fundamental and applied have similarity to Ayurveda with specialisation in iatrochemistry. Siddha system of medicine is said to have descended from Irayanar (Siva) to Ammayar (Parvati) and from them to Murugan, Nandi, Agasthiyar and other Siddhars. Agasthiyar who is considered the originator of Tamil language is referred to as the propounder of this system. A number of medical works are attributed to him. This system like Ayurveda is based on dosha-dhatu concept and the concept of Panchamahabhutas - the physiological qualities and functions of these and the factors that can cause discordance eventually leading to disease states are described as in Ayurveda. As earlier said, the difference between these systems is more linguistic than doctrinal. The speciality in this system is its iatrochemistry.

UNANI TIBB

The origin of the Unani-Tibb system of medicine can be traced to the early Ionian (Greek) or Yavana medicine. It owes its present form to the Arabs who not only saved much of the Greek literature by rendering them into Arabic but also enriched the medicine of their day with many of their own contributions. This system was introduced into India by the muslim rulers round about 10th century A. D. While defining Tibb, Avicenna the Persian physician of 10th century A. D. mentioned it as a branch of knowledge which deals with the states of health and disease in the human body for the purpose of adopting suitable measures for preserving and restoring health. This is reminiscent of the view advocated in great classics of Unani. This system has its own areas of specialisation and occupies vantage position in therapeutics of certain conditions. The attainments and writings of Rhazes and Avicenna (ibn sina) have particularly a superior place.

YOGA

Yoga system of philosophy is practised in India since many centuries.

Patanjali, the author of Yoga Sutras is considered as the propounder of this system. There exists a view that Patanjali and Charaka were one and the same. What Charaka is for Kaya Chikitsa, Patanjali is for psychic medicine. It advocates for mental and physical discipline eight fold path comprising of *yama* (abstention), *niyama* (observance), *asana* (physical postures involving muscular coordination), *pranayama* (regulation of breathing), *pratyahara* (voluntary control of the sense-perception), *dhyana* (meditation) *dharana* (contemplation) and *samadhi* (absolute mental concentration). Hathayoga, a branch of yoga, consists of physical culture involving both voluntary and involuntary muscles of the body and is claimed to be useful in the treatment of a wide range of diseased conditions. Of late this system is gaining popularity in western countries also.

NATUROPATHY

Naturopathy is not mainly the system of treatment but is a way of life. The simple laws of nature are adopted for the maintenance of health. The same laws are adopted in the treatment suitably. The daily and seasonal regimen are followed for maintenance of health. There are two approaches in vogue - one advocating the use of ancient Indian methods and the other which mainly adopts modern physiotherapy.

TIBETAN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

The Tibetan system of medicine has been in vogue in Ladakh district, Lahaul, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and some other regions in the Himalayas. The system traces its origin to Ayurvedic system of India. Since the dawn of history man has been in search of ways to find cure and relief from mental and physical diseases. The ways were in the form of benediction, witchcraft etc. It is at that time Buddha delivered this original Tibetan system of medicine while the Lord was meditating in the medicinal forest, somewhere near Budh Gaya. It was later in the reign of Tibetan King Strang-ki-chan (750 A.D.) one renowned Pandit named Barochana was sent to India and he translated into Tibetan script with the help of Acharya Chandra Dave. The text was then brought to Tibet.

This medical system had accumulated a huge literature in the course of time and Amchis of great fame and reputation were produced, whose contribution in this system is immense.

Therapy under Tibetan system is divided into treatment by herbs, minerals, animal organs, spring and mineral waters, moxibustion (herbal

and mineral), puncturing and by mysticism and spiritual powers. A number of herbs and metals are used in this system.

Even today, in medicine, it is no wonder that we see the existence of the traces of the various stages of evolution like empirical approach, magico - religious outlook, metaphysical background and the rational and investigative attitude. Charaka and Susruta seem to excel the scientists of all times to come even by their outlook and ideas, a few such are mentioned below :

Ayurveda (meaning science of life) has no limits.

Acquire knowledge from whatever source it is available.

There was no time when either the stream of life or the stream of intelligence did not flow.

He who knows one branch of his art is like a bird with one wing.

One who has studied one science only cannot provide proper interpretation; physician who has studied different disciplines only can provide definite and suitable interpretation and meaning.

Those who act after thoroughly investigating are wise.

The changing trends of thinking in the world of medicine today have made considerable impact on the minds of all concerned with healing art and welfare of humanity and consequently scientists have begun to look into the vast medical knowledge of the ancients for the potentials and props to meet the increasing challenges in the health and medical care of today.

The stress they lay on promotion and maintenance of health, prevention of disease more than the treatment part with the fibre of social medicine and morals interwoven make them pre-eminently suitable for the community and the country. Students and scientists of today in their retrospect meet the great sages and it is possible they will be able to provide meaningful correlation of ancient insights and thoughts and the modern discoveries. To retrospect and prospect is indeed to play Janus to look at, one and the same time, both to the past and future. Difficult though this, it cannot but profit us. The history of development of ideas can provide guidance for future line of action and let us light the torch on the flame of ancestors. It is only the knowledge of evolution that can bring about revolution in the medical world much for the benefit of humanity at large.

भारत में स्वदेशी चिकित्सा पद्धति, प्रारंभिक इतिहास साहित्य, एवं विशिष्ट पहचान —के. रघुनाथन

आयुर्वेद जीवन का विज्ञान है जिसका उद्गम वेद है। इसका कोई शुरुआत नहीं है बल्कि सर्वप्रथम भरद्वाज ने इसे देवताओं से प्राप्त किया था। भगवान ध्रुवन्तरी ने जीवन के विज्ञान को प्रकट किया। इस ज्ञान को विभिन्न शिष्यों ने ग्रहण कर संहिताओं का संकलन किया जिनमें सजीव तथा निर्जीव पदार्थों को बनावट सम्बन्धि विभिन्न सिद्धान्त मानकों के भौतिक, जीववैज्ञानिक, जीव-रासायनिक, मनोवैज्ञानिक तथा आध्यात्मिक घटकों सम्बन्धित ज्ञान तथा शरीर में स्थित परमावश्यक, और प्रेरक शक्तियों का विशद विवेचन है। शरीर रचना, शरीरक्रिया, निदान विज्ञान, विकृति विज्ञान, चिकित्सा, पर्यावरण सम्बन्धि तथा शल्य शास्त्र जैसे आयुर्विज्ञानीय विषयों का व्यापक विवरण प्राचीन एवं मध्ययुगीन कृतियों में उपलब्ध होता है। मृत पशुओं और त्रिस्फारित बोरों का प्रयोग, सन्निज्यों एवं शवों पर शल्यक्रिया का अभ्यास पर भी प्रकाश डाला गया है। छ सौ से अधिक औद्भिज प्राणिज एवं खनिज औषधियों का उल्लेख किया गया है। आयुर्वेद का उद्देश्य इन्द्रियों, मन तथा आत्मा की प्रसन्नता से प्राण धन त्मक स्वास्थ्य उपलब्ध कराना है। आहार शास्त्र दिनचर्या तथा ऋतुचर्या जैसे विषय भी अछूते नहीं हैं। आयु, लिंग, जाति, स्वभाव, निवास मानसिक प्रकृति, शारीरिक बल तथा इसी प्रकार के अन्य सूक्ष्म विषयों पर चिकित्सा नितान्त वैयक्तिक होनी चाहिए। मानवों तथा पशु पक्षियों के लिए अस्पताल हुआ करते थे।

अगस्त्य द्वारा प्रणीत सिद्ध प्रणाली अधिकतर उन सिद्धान्तों पर आधारित है जो आयुर्वेद के सहरो हैं। आयुर्वेद और सिद्ध में सिद्धान्तों की अपेक्षा भाषा सम्बन्धित भेद अधिक है। चिकित्साजन्य रसशास्त्र सिद्ध प्रणाली की विशेषता है। स्वदेशी चिकित्सा पद्धति शब्द का सही अर्थ आयुर्वेद एवं सिद्ध प्रणालियों के लिये किया जाना चाहिए किन्तु परम्परागत ढंग से यूनानी के लिए भी इसका प्रयोग होता है। यूनानी प्रणाली का प्रवेश भारत में सर्वप्रथम दसवीं शताब्दि में हुआ था। पतंजली द्वारा प्रणीत योगशास्त्र काफी प्राचीन है और हठयोग ज्ञान योगविद्या की एक शाखा है, अनेक शारीरिक क्रियाओं का समन्वय है जो कई रोगों के निवारण में अत्यधिक उपयोगी है। निसर्गोपचार एक ज्ञान पद्धति है। तिब्बतीय प्रणाली जो कुछ हिमालय के भागों में प्रचलित है, वनौषधियों, खनिजों, प्राणियों के अंगों, झरनों तथा खनिज जल, वेधन, रहस्यमय तथा आध्यात्मिक शक्तियों का प्रयोग करता है। लेह तथा सिककिम के प्रदेशों में आमची पद्धति का प्रचलन है।