

UNANI MEDICINE IN INDIA

1524 to 1605 A.D.

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The credit to organize Unani Medicine on sound lines in India goes to the Moghuls. Babur and Humayun got very little time to do something substantial for public welfare. Most of their energies remained directed to consolidate their rule by suppressing rebellions which took place one after the other. However, medicine and surgery did not fail to receive their attention. There were the two departments on the successful functioning of which depended the health and fitness of their soldiers, whose vast majority had come from across the Indian borders. These soldiers found in India a climate different from that of their own cold regions. They had to take up fierce battles, face hazards of long marches and subject themselves to rigours of weather. All these factors had their telling effects on their physical fitness. Consequently, they needed constant medical aid and supervision, both from the surgeon and the physician.

Babur and Humayun both had great respect for talented physicians and surgeons and treated them with exemplary generosity. Quite a large number of experienced physicians and skilled surgeons was associated with the army of Babur. The big and small commanders had also physicians and surgeons in their own contingents. In his memoirs *Tuzak Babari* Babur refers to an eminent surgeon Atka Bakhshi who was sent to him by his maternal uncle for treating his wounds. After this difficult assignment was over, Atka Bakhshi joined Babur's army and treated the soldiers. In treating wounds he administered medicines both internally and externally. He could even successfully deal with compound fractures. Once Babur received a deep cut in his thigh and Bakhshi treated it by applying a poultice made of *mahwa* flowers.

The physicians who had come with Babur mostly remained with his army. But some of them set up their own clinics where they treated patients with drugs locally available. They attached great importance to blood-letting. They resorted to this process through different veins in different diseases. When Babur's

mother fell ill, the royal physician Syed Tabib used this process, however, she showed no improvement and died after some time. The mother of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, the last Lodi king who lost his kingdom as well as life at Panipat while facing the invading army of Babur secretly administered poison to Babur. When Babur began to show the effect of poison, his physicians prepared an antidote by dissolving a simple drug *Gill-e Makhtum* and a compound medicine *Tiryaaq-i Faruq* in hot milk and gave it to Babur to sip. This emulsion served as a purgative and in a few weeks Babur recovered.

Historical records reveal the names of at least three well-known physicians and surgeons of Babur's court. They were:

1. Mir Nizamuddin Ali Khalifa also known as Mir Khali'fa—was a wise man. He was also well versed in medicine.
2. Hakeem Abul Baqa—was an expert in medicine.
3. Hakeem Yusuf bin Muhammad Yusufi.—was a reputed physician of Khorasan and came to India at Babur's invitation. He settled down at Agra. He served Babur, and after him, Humayun as a special physician. He had an inquisitive mind and a critical approach. With the keenness of his mind and on the basis of his observations and deep study he made several additions to the medical knowledge existing in his times. He wrote the following books:

Jama il Fawa'id : It is a book on general medical principles.

Tibb-e Yusufi : In it he describes diseases and prescribes treatment for each of them.

Dalail Nabz : It explains how to feel the pulse of the patient and diagnose his ailment.

Dalail Bol : It explains how to diagnose a disease by visual examination of the urine of the patient.

Sitta-Zaruria : It tells how health can be preserved.

Riaz al Advia : It deals with the properties of simple drugs.

Rubiyat-i Yusufi : This is a book in verse in quatrain form.

Hakeem Yusufi's most pronounced contribution is that he introduced many drugs of Persian and Arabic origin into the Indian *Materia-medica*.

During the reign of Humayun a noted physician of Shiraz, Khwajah Khawind came to India and settled here. He was the disciple of Maulana Imaduddin Mahmud of Shiraz. He continued in the service of Humayun for long and treated him, his family and courtiers.

During the long and peaceful reign of Akbar knowledge and culture received tremendous impetus. A combination of foreign and Indian talent produced remarkable results. Though himself unlettered Akbar had a great respect for learned scholars, the best of whom he collected at his court. His liberal attitude encouraged the advancement of knowledge. In 990 A.H. he asked his Amirs to offer suggestions for public welfare. One of his physicians, Hakeem Abul Fatah, suggested that due attention should be paid to the art of medicine, more physicians recruited and hospitals and dispensaries established. Akbar accepted the suggestion.

In *Ain-i Akbari*, Abul Faql has listed twenty-nine prominent physicians and surgeons, both Hindus and Muslims, all of whom were on royal pay roll. Since by this time the profession of a physician had become exceedingly profitable many more might have started their own practice.

Out of the twenty-nine royal physicians and surgeons Hakeem Ali Gilani left a conclusive proof of his genius by leaving behind him at least one book on Unani medicine which has not lost its relevance with the passage of time. This is his *Sharh al-Qanun*, the commentary on the *Qanun fil-tib* of Ibn Sina known to the west as Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*. The Commentary ranks among the most authoritative books of Unani medicine and is available in print.

Akbar built a large hospital at Fatehpur Sikri and another at Agra at the place where now stands the Agra Fort Railway Station. A small portion of the Fatehpur Sikri hospital is extant providing an indication to the expanse of the original hospital. In the complex of buildings at Fatehpur Sikri at the end of the slope on the outer approach road there still exists a structure in fair condition with plastered walls and domed roof. It is known as Hakeem's House. On the floor of this structure there are traces of channels which go to small enclosures which have the appearance of bath rooms. This building was designed by Hakeem Abul Fatah, a confidant of Akbar, and used by him for treating patients by hot and cold baths.

Besides being lucrative, the profession of a physician commanded great respect. Hence, many among the educated decided to become physicians. They learnt this art by becoming apprentices to some senior physicians who were firmly entrenched in the profession. A physician took three or four apprentices at a time, taught them basic books of Unani medicine and associated them closely with his work. These apprentices watched when their teacher examined the patients, took notes when he decided the line of treatment and copied the prescriptions. These prescriptions they collected in a note book called *Bayaz*. This *Bayaz* was preserved throughout life, additions, mostly the result of new experiences and experiments, were made to it and thus it continued to grow both in content and volume. On the death of the proud possessor, this priceless com-

pendium passed on to the deceased's heirs. The tutorial form of education proved immensely useful since the number of apprentices was limited, the teacher's guidance was immediately available and there was personal element in the relations of the teacher and the taught. These apprentices had to work extremely hard, hence only those who had a real aptitude for the profession remained with their tutor.

Since such factors as the genuineness and purity of raw drugs and use of ingredients in prescribed quantities were essential for the success of a physician, most of the physicians desired to have their own pharmacies. At these pharmacies compound medicines with genuine ingredients were made and supplied to a patient on presenting the prescription of the physician—the owner of the pharmacy. To augment these facilities there were *attars* who stored raw drugs in large quantities and prepared compound medicines, mostly *arqs* and *sherbats* in bulk. The profession of a physician (Hakeem) and of a dispenser (*attar*) soon gave birth to two distinct classes yet interdependent. In many Indian towns entire *mohallas* (localities) have been named after either of the two classes such as *Galli Hakeeman* or *Kucha Attaran*.

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