

## INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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I am delighted that Indian National Science Academy and the Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research have jointly sponsored this seminar on History of Medicine in Medieval India. The Indian National Science Academy has had a long-standing interest in the promotion of the study of history of sciences in India, in an effort to promote the growth of natural knowledge including its practical application to the problems of national welfare. Without a proper understanding of the past, there cannot be a proper conception of the meaning of the present and no perception of future. The history of medicine, as Henry Sigerist said, is *both history and medicine* a part of the history of our civilisation. What were the dominant diseases at that time? How did people maintain and promote their health? How effective were the various therapeutic and preventive measures adopted? In what ways did the socio-economic, religious, philosophical and political factors influence the pattern of health and disease?

You will discuss these aspects during the medieval period and reconstruct the medical past of India as truthfully and as objectively as possible. As the programme of your seminar shows, this reconstruction has to be done from a variety of sources, which need to be interpreted with great care in the light of the prevailing concepts. Texts and manuscripts not only dealing with medicine but also with religion, philosophy, will need to be scanned carefully. Sculptures, epigraphic records, archaeological findings, paintings, buildings of the time, folklore, legends, this is the amalgam out of which our history has to be reconstructed.

The Medieval period that you will be focusing on is of great interest and critical importance in the evolution of indigenous systems of medicine in India. This was the period of extensive contact and interaction between Āyurveda and Unani medicine. Both these systems are deeply rooted in philosophy. Āyurveda is science of life dealing as much with treatment of disease as with maintenance of health. Caraka prescribes regular, daily and seasonal routines of preventive measures for maintenance of health. The principles of diet, nutrition and personal hygiene are well spelt out.

A significant result of the interaction of the two systems of medicine during the medieval period seems to be the introduction of opium and cannabis into Āyurveda. Another important facet of medieval medicine in India is the advances made in the field of *Rasaśāstra* or the Science of the use of metals led by mercury.

“*Nādi parīkṣā*” or pulse examination seems to be yet another major product of this period of interaction between Āyurveda and Unani, a theme Prof. Chaturvedi of Varanasi is going to examine at this conference. This is well described in *Śārṅgadhara Saṅhitā*.

This period can also be described as the *Nighaṅṭu* period. ‘*Bhāvaprakāśa Nighaṅṭu*’ by Bhāvamiśra is a landmark in Indian Medicine marking as it does the junction between the medieval and modern periods.

And so, we come to the sixteenth century which again is critical because it is characterised not only by close interaction between Āyurveda and Unani but also between these systems and early European medicine. Here we have for the first time the description of syphilis and gonorrhoea and treatment by mercurial and other preparations, particularly by *rasa-karpūra*. Now starts the decline of indigenous systems with the progressive inroads made by the Western systems.

In the matter of Medical Education, it would be interesting to examine the principles and philosophy underlying the training of physicians in those days. It would appear that the system at that time was characterised by preceptorship, by close contact between the teacher and the student, by special attention being given to the ethics of medical practice. It is said that there were qualified and well trained women physicians in medieval India and nursing was a well identified profession.

It is my hope that the seminar will throw light on the forces at work in shaping the evolution of medicine during the Medieval period, and will provide knowledge that will be useful to us in the great task we are now engaged in, in achieving maximum possible level of health of all people. William Osler said: “In the continued remembrance of a glorious past, individuals and nations find their noblest inspiration.”

I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Seminar.