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India's Unani System of Medicine: An Age-Old Healing Tradition

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Abstract

Unani medicine entrenched in Greco-Arabic civilisations and deeply rooted in Indian cultural and medical antiquity, characterizes all-inclusive and adapted method to healthcare. Familiarized to India in the 8th century and utilized during the Mughal phase, Unani has progressed into a noteworthy constituent of India's diverse medical system. This old-style system accentuates humoral balance, lifestyle alteration, and natural medications, positioning closely with modern ethics of precautionary and integrative medicine. Nowadays, Unani relishes official acknowledgement under the AYUSH scheme and offers economical healthcare solutions, particularly in underserved societies. Despite its healing significance and historical depth, Unani faces challenges linked to consciousness, calibration, and incorporation with modern medicine. This article focuses the historical development, fundamental principles, existing applications, and forthcoming potential of Unani medicine in India, contending for its revival through general awareness, committed research, dedicated education, funding and policy support.

Keywords: Unani medicine, Ilm-ul-Advia, conventional healing, humoral concept, AYUSH.

1. Introduction

Unani, which translates to "Greek," refers to an ancient Greek medical system that was founded on the four humors and temperaments. Unani medicine acknowledges the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual factors that contribute to health or illness and holds that each person should oversee their own health. Claudius Galenus of Pergamum, who lived in the second century of the common era, is credited with creating the principles that make up Unani healing. Hakin Ibn Sina, often known as Avicenna, gathered the fundamentals of Unani medicine as a therapeutic system in Persia in 980 CE.

Ajmal Khan, who was born in India in 1868, is subsequently widely regarded as the most important contributor to Unani medicine in India throughout the 20th century¹. Like Western medicine, Unani medicine has its roots in Hippocrates and his disciples. In India, Pakistan, and Persia, the Unani medicine is widely used. England, South Africa, and other nations also practice it. Hikmat and Unani-Tibb are other names for the Unani system.

With origins in Greco-Arabic customs, Unani medicine is an age-old healing system that has thrived in India for millennia and woven itself into the country's diverse medical landscape.

The holistic approach to health known as Unani, or "Ilm-ul-Advia" (the science of medicines), places a strong emphasis on temperament, balance, and the interaction of the body, mind, and environment. With its ability to combine cultural history with therapeutic significance, Unani medicine occupies a special niche in India, where various medicinal systems coexist². Given the escalating expenses and adverse effects of contemporary healthcare, Unani medicine focuses on natural medicines, preventive care, and customized therapy presents a strong alternative that merits reexamination and incorporation into the mainstream medical system.

1.1. Four elements of Unani Medicine System

The four elements namely fire, water, earth, and air are the foundation of Unani medicine. All facets of life and the body contain these components. Health results from their balance, whereas illness results from their imbalance. There are similarities between the four elements of Unani medicine and Ayurvedic medicine.

1.2. Four types of temperament

The cornerstone of Unani medicine is the concept of the four temperaments. The four elements plus the characteristics of heat, moisture, cold, and dryness, in particular proportions, make up everything in the cosmos, whether it be a mineral, plant, animal, or human. Every object, chemical, or living thing has an equilibrium state that reflects these attributes, depending on the ratios of these components. "Temperament" refers to the equilibrium of attributes³. The four temperaments are categorized as melancholy (cold and dry), biliary (hot and dry), phlegmatic (cold and moist), and sanguinous (hot and moist). A particular temperament will predominate in each person and organ system. The bodily fluids, commonly referred to as humors, are created from food and beverages and are in charge of preserving temperamental equilibrium. The same characteristics are used to categorize these humors.

1.3. Factors related to lifestyle

Disease can be avoided and health preserved by selecting and controlling lifestyle factors. The following lifestyle factors are suggested by Bhikha⁴:

1.3.1. Drinks and food: Consuming enough water and food on a regular basis to keep you hydrated and in balance with your temperament.

1.3.2. Breathing in and out air in the environment: Modifying your way of living to suit the weather, making sure the air you breathe is pure,

and making sure your lungs are functioning at their best.

1.3.3. Rest and movement: Frequent exercise that fits your personality and lifestyle, together with adequate downtime and relaxation.

1.3.4. Sleep and awakening: Feeling alert during the day and obtaining the recommended quantity of undisturbed, high-quality sleep.

1.3.5. Feelings and emotions: Feeling and expressing emotions in a healthy way.

1.3.6. Retention and Elimination: Effective elimination on a regular basis. While the retention of bodily waste may cause harm in the body.

2. Unani evaluation and diagnosis

Through questioning, tongue and pulse examinations, and urine and stool investigations, the disease of the humors is diagnosed. A person's temperament and humors are used to rule out their diagnosis. Additionally, diseases are categorized based on the temperament in which they appear. Unani treatment aims to support the body's inherent healing capacity and balance the four humors. A crucial initial step in resolving a humoral imbalance is addressing lifestyle issues, such as proper meal adoption and selection. Several herbal formulations are used to "ripen" and subsequently "purge" the offending humor if the problem is more severe⁴.

3. India's Historical Foundations and Development

Greek physicians like Hippocrates and Galen are credited for originating unani medicine, which was further developed by Persian and Arab intellectuals like Ibn Sina (Avicenna). Unani, which was brought to India by Arab traders in the eighth century and established during the Mughal era, flourished in a culture that was already deeply rooted in Ayurveda and other native customs⁵. A syncretic medical culture was fostered by Mughal patronage, which resulted in the translation of classical works into Persian and Arabic and the founding of organizations such as the Dawakhana (pharmacy). Hakims or Unani practitioners, were essential to Indian healthcare during the 19th century, providing services to both the aristocracy and the public.

The Indian government now recognizes Unani as one of the official systems under AYUSH, which stands for Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy⁶. Its institutional presence is highlighted by organizations such as the National Institute of Unani Medicine (NIUM)⁷ in Bengaluru and the Central Council for Research in Unani

Medicine (CCRUM)⁸. The system is available in both urban and rural areas of India, especially in states like Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Hyderabad, and has more than 40 Unani colleges and thousands of registered practitioners.

4. Guidelines and Procedures

The foundation of Unani medicine is the idea that a person's temperament and health are determined by their four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. An imbalance of these humors causes disease, and the goal of treatment is to bring the body back into balance through nutrition, lifestyle, herbal remedies, and treatments like regimental therapy (Ilaj-bil-Tadbeer), which involves hydrotherapy, massage, and cupping. Unani's diagnostic methods, which include urine analysis and pulse reading, demonstrate a thorough comprehension of the body's signals and are customized for each patient's particular constitution.

The extensive pharmacopeia of the system includes treatments derived from plants, minerals, and animals. Decoctions, powders, and oils are common therapies; they are frequently made with careful regard to traditional formulae like Majoon and Khamira. To address chronic illnesses like diabetes, arthritis, and respiratory ailments, Unani's emphasis on prevention—through dietary and lifestyle changes—resonates with contemporary health trends.

5. The Significance of Unani in Contemporary India

Unani provides accessible and reasonably priced healthcare solutions in a nation where access to treatment is still unequal, especially for marginalized people. It is affordable due to its use of locally grown herbs and non-invasive treatments, and its all-encompassing strategy fits in with the growing interest in integrative medicine around the world. For example, Unani remedies for digestive problems, skin conditions, and stress-related illnesses have become more and more popular, frequently assisting allopathic care⁹.

Furthermore, Unani foreshadows customized medicine, a new development in contemporary healthcare, with its emphasis on temperament-based treatment. In contrast to mainstream

medicine's one-size-fits-all approach, Unani practitioners provide a nuanced viewpoint by customizing therapies to each patient's humoral balance. Additionally, studies backed by CCRUM have confirmed the effectiveness of Unani remedies for ailments like Vitiligo and psoriasis, enhancing its scientific legitimacy.

6. Obstacles and the Way Forward

Even with its advantages, Unani still has a lot of problems in India. Compared to Ayurveda or Allopathy, the system is not as well-known and is frequently seen as being less strict or antiquated. Due to differences in practitioner training and quality, standardization of Unani medications and procedures is still a challenge. The integration of Unani into mainstream healthcare is also hampered by a lack of robust clinical trials and insufficient collaboration between hakims and allopathic doctors.

Several actions are required to address these problems. First, more money for research and development can help bolster the body of data supporting Unani treatments, which will help skeptics believe in them. Second, in order to increase Unani's popularity, public health campaigns ought to emphasize its advantages, especially its preventive and holistic features. Third, combining Unani instruction with contemporary medical programs may result in professionals who are knowledgeable about both systems, enabling multidisciplinary treatment. Lastly, quality and scalability may be guaranteed by using India's biodiversity to get Unani herbs sustainably¹⁰. Some practitioners have even treated COVID-19 in recent years¹¹, and it has been suggested that this medical approach can also help treat several lifestyle diseases¹².

7. An Appeal for Reviving

Unani medicine is a living practice that has the potential to treat current health issues; it is not only a holdover from India's past. Its focus on prevention, balance, and natural solutions is in line with global trends toward patient-centered, sustainable healthcare. India can leverage Unani's assets to enhance its healthcare environment by allocating resources towards research, teaching, and integration.

Unani serves as a reminder of the knowledge ingrained in the country's cultural past as it negotiates the challenges of contemporary medicine. It is time to accept this age-old system as a partner, not a substitute, in creating a more inclusive and healthy future for India's diverse populace. With the use of science and tradition, today's hakims can set the standard for redefining wellness for future generations.

8. Conclusion

With its deep roots in India's rich cultural and historical heritage, the Unani medical system has endured as a pillar of holistic care. To treat the body and mind as a harmonious whole, Unani integrates herbal treatments, therapeutic techniques, and lifestyle changes, drawing inspiration from ancient Greek, Persian, and Arab traditions. Unani, which has been practiced for centuries in India, is still a vital component of the country's healthcare system and provides alternatives to traditional medicine, particularly in the treatment of chronic and lifestyle-related illnesses. Unani medicine's tenacity in the face of contemporary difficulties is evidence of its continuing applicability. The Unani system can keep improving people's health and well-being worldwide by accepting scientific research, using contemporary technologies, and raising awareness. It is evident that the age-old practice of Unani healing is a dynamic, developing field with much to offer in the fast-paced, health-conscious world of today rather than merely being a holdover from the past.

The Unani system is positioned to play a crucial role in developing a more comprehensive and balanced approach to healthcare as India works toward the merging of traditional and contemporary medicine. It serves as a reminder that knowledge from the past can greatly influence the direction of medicine in the future.

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10. Data Availability

Not Applicable.

11. Conflicts of interest

Not Applicable.

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