



A Comparison of Codified Traditional Systems of Medicine and the Non-Codified Systems of Medicine like Folk Remedies and Tribal Medicine



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Introduction

I am a biology scientist and interested in Traditional systems of medicine like the codified classical systems like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Amchi and the non codified systems like the village remedies and folk medicine like Tribal medicine. I was the Chief Coordinator of the All India coordinated research project on Ethnobiology (AICRPE) which started by Ministry of Environment and Forest in the year 1982 and continued upto 1998 with 27 centers in all over India with about 600 scientist drawn from Anthropology, Botany, Zoology, Chemistry, Pharmacy, Pharmacology both modern and the Traditional systems of medicine etc. It has generated many publications by Ministry of Environment and Forest Govt. of India. It gave an in-depth study and analysis of the tribals of India (10 million) people living in rural and forested villages as well as in accessible place like high mountains and similar situation. It gave an excellent position for the administrators and politician to manage the tribals in the country.

The masters of ancient Indian codified systems of medicine namely Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Amchi seemed to have an in depth knowledge and understanding about the delicate relationship between food, nutrition and medicine (health). They also had a clear understanding of the delicate cellular mechanisms of the body and the deterioration of the functional capacity of human beings. These ancient medical masters and developed certain dietary and therapeutic measures to arrest/delay ageing and rejuvenating whole functional dynamics of the body system. This revitalization and rejuvenation is known as the "Rasayan Chikitsa" in Ayurveda. It is specifically adopted to increase the power of resistance to disease and improve the general vitality and efficiency of the human being. "Rasayana Therapy" is done for a particular period of time with strict regime of diet and conduct. Rasayana drug are very rich in powerful antioxidants, hepatoprotective agents and immunomodulators. Rasayana is one of the eight clinical specialties of the Indian classical Ayurveda, aimed for the rejuvenation and geriatric care. Rasayana is not a drug therapy, but is a specialized procedure practiced in the form of rejuvenation recipes, dietary regimen and special

health promoting conduct and behavior ie. "Achara Rasayana". Sushruta (1800 to 2000BC) while defining rasayana therapy says that it arrests ageing increase life span, intelligence and strength and thereby enable one to prevent disease. There are over 30-35 medicinal plants mentioned in different treatise of Ayurveda and Siddha having rasayana properties. The important among them are *Sida cordifolia*, *S. cordata*, *Abutilon indicum*, *Tinospora cordifolia*, *Acorus calamus*, *Ocimum tenuiflorum*, *Withania somnifera*, *Emblica officinalis*, *Asparagus racemosus*, *Piper longum*, *Commiphora mukul*, *Semicarpus anacardium*, *Centella asiatica*, *Curcuma longa*, *Chlorophytum borivilianum*, *Chlorophytum tuberosum* and *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* etc.

In 'Ayurveda' the term 'Rasayana' therapy thus refers to the use of plants or their extracts as rejuvenators or as an elixir to enhance longevity, to improve memory, intelligence, good health, promote youthfulness, improve the texture and luster of the skin/body, improve the complexion and voice, promote optimum strength of the body and sense organs. Rasayana materials can be special foods/nutritional items, medicinal herbs or a combination of all these three. Thus the use of the medicinal plants as a source of dietary supplement or as a nutraceutical is well documented for centuries. Ayurveda considers that an individual with advancing age accumulates waste and toxic substances and declines in vitality and loss of resistance/immunity;

- A. 'Dhatu Kshaya'-weakening of the functional dynamics of the cell or tissue system of the body.
- B. 'Ojas'-the state of excellent health expressed in general strength, vitality and luster of the individual-with 'Bala'=immunity against diseases.
- C. 'Dhatuvidhi'-i.e. rejuvenation of the whole tissue system is done by 'Ojasvardhaka Dravyas'- the substance that improves the functional efficiency and immunity of the individual. This therapeutic process is known as 'Rasayana Chikitsa'-Rejuvenation therapy.

The technologization and undue objectification of human life and health care systems of the present era have culminated to an extreme nexus between physician and patient by the interpolation of a third entirely mechanical entity, the machine, replacing the creative synthesizing role of the traditional physicians. This has resulted in the dehumanization of the medical system. In contrast to this scenario of the modern medicine, the traditional medicine attempts to embody a holistic approach i.e. that of viewing an individual in his totality within society and the ecological environment. It emphasizes the view point that ill health or disease is brought about by an imbalance or disequilibrium of man's physiological, psychological, behavioral, ecological and spiritual environment and not just by an external pathogenic agent, be it a micro-organism or otherwise. No doubt, the modern medicine has accomplished great strides in developing many new life saving drugs. Modern health care system stressed more on the curative and to a lesser extent to the preventive aspects of diseases and very little has been done on the health promotive aspects. Problems of health have been replaced by problems of drugs and diseases. Instead of medicine for man, we have men for medicine. Modern medicine may help man to provide apparent physical health but is devoid of mental, social and spiritual health. Modern medicine is more concerned for the cure of disease but remains indifferent to health preservation. It is in this context that the relevance of the holistic approach of the traditional health care practice becomes important. There have been an ever increasing production and consumption of phytomedicines based on various traditional systems of medicine both in developing and developed countries. A steady global market for many such herbal products is emerging.

Perhaps, this uniqueness of the individual human beings was well known to Indians who have developed various ways and means

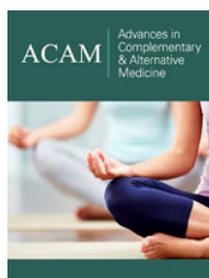
to diagnose an individual by pulse, reading face and the palms etc. The Palm reading, known as palmistry, made an interesting contribution to the world. According to the Indian palmistry, the lines one find on the palm and on the fingers are so individual specific that one cannot match the palm/thumb impressions of two individuals alike in this world. From the historical records we learn that the concept of fingerprint was an Indian contribution. During the early period of the colonial rule, the East India Company at Calcutta Port used to engage large number of illiterate laborers. While making payment to the daily wagers, the company faced problem of recognizing the individual labourers, as these illiterate labourers could not affix their signature while receiving wages. A local Bengali Palmist came to the rescue of the British colonial masters to solve this problem. The palmist told the British masters that no two individuals in this world are identical and each and every individual born on this world is unique. He further told that this very uniqueness of the individual is reflected in the pattern of lines seen on the palm, particularly in the thumb. When the palmist persistently told and showed the thumb impression of hundreds of people from the locality and demonstrated that no two-thumb impressions are alike, the British agents did a thorough verification and finally were convinced of the fact that thumb impressions are unique to each individual. Later the British parliament officially passed a bill attesting the thumb impression as the final identity mark of an individual. It was thus the fingerprint became a commonly accepted identity mark. The modern molecular biologists have now developed techniques to uncode the blue print of the organism by deciphering the DNA profile, the DNA fingerprints and device individualized/customized into food and medicine based on one's genetic makeup- nutrigenomics and pharmacogenomics.



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