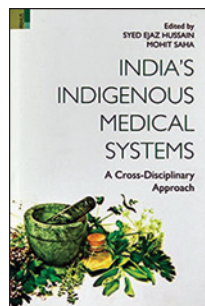


India's Indigenous Medical Systems: A cross-disciplinary approach. Syed Ejaz Hussain, Mohit Saha (eds). Primus Books, New Delhi, 2015. 344pp, ₹ 1395. ISBN 978-93-80607-62-7.



This book provides a unique collection of essays presenting an interesting overview of questions regarding collaboration and conflicts between the indigenous and western systems of medicine. The key milestones in the journey of the indigenous systems from the times of flourishing through those of setback unto the current stage have been discussed with adequate literature support. More interestingly, a thread runs through the book acquainting

the reader to the continued faith of the people of India in the indigenous medical systems despite the setbacks and attacks by foreign rulers. This strong place in the hearts of the people appears to be an important reason for the survival of these systems through the upheaval.

The book is an excellent collection of essays on the Ayurveda and Unani systems of medicine from scholars of varied disciplines including historians, botanists and physicians from the indigenous and western medical systems. It is interesting to read across perspectives from several disciplines and how these together provide a broader view than would have been if these were not tied into a single edited volume. This book is very handy for a reader interested in pursuit of a thorough understanding of the indigenous medical systems. In recent times when health has become subdued by increasingly complex medicine, this collection provides a leverage point from which health and medicine can be seen as a whole.

The book provides an in-depth analysis of the history of disease process and contemporary human interventions beginning right from the ancient times. The book raises and attempts to answer in a rational manner some of the most sought after questions on the subject such as why could the experimental rigour of Sushruta, the great Ayurveda physician or of Al-Hytham not be institutionalized? Among others a very interesting chapter highlights the development of medicine and public health under the patronage of Jehangir, offering lessons for integration of these systems into current national programmes. For instance, the interest of the royal families in making a connection between environment and health and concern for the safety of the common people or the passing of royal order by Jehangir in 1617 that 'no one should smoke because of the harmful effects of tobacco'.

The book is focused on selected Indian systems of medicine—Ayurveda and Unani. However, the title of the book is *India's Indigenous Medical Systems*. At least a contextual primer on other systems such as Naturopathy, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa as also Yoga would have been appropriate. The majority of contributions to history of Ayurveda or Unani-tibb draw on colonial Bengal. One wonders if the conditions and growth of medicine systems varied in other regions of India and how a consideration of facts from those contexts may alter the perspectives presented in the book. A scholarly commentary on this in the introduction would have added better insights.

The book vividly traces of the first interfaces in medieval times in India when interactions between the Ayurvedic and Tibb systems occurred during the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate and how these influenced both diverse traditions. One does not miss noticing how the systems complemented each other in the

Indian ethno-botanical climate. The book brings out how there was a continuous conflict as well as collaboration between Ayurveda, Unani and western medicine and how these systems learnt from each other.

The contents of the book are organized in a systematic fashion taking the reader on a tour from the ancient times of glory for the indigenous medical systems through the several setbacks these received to the current times of a secondary status yet rising scholarship from different parts of the world. The final chapter brings the reader to issues of contemporary relevance such as use of bioinformatics in Indian medical systems and dietary practices as sources of disease prevention. This book deserves much credit for the scholarly and unique collection of essays across disciplines to provide a whole view of the subject. However, a summary of the key points would have been more useful to someone interested in integration of the indigenous and modern systems. The black and white pictures in the entire volume appear soothing to the eye and let the reader revisit the times referred to, although at the cost of difficulty in recognizing some of the plant pictures exhibited.

This book in a pleasing green and white hard cover is certainly an important addition to the subject. Overall, this book is a must read for those interested in understanding medical systems and their integration with modern medicine in current times. Students of Ayurveda and Unani would especially enjoy learning the history of their medical systems little differently than prescribed textbooks or from historians. This collection would be of no less interest to those modern medicine scholars and readers interested in pursuit of the lost heritage and its potential for human health.

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