

History of Ancient Herbal Medicine

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Abstract:- Ancient herbal medicine, which was conceived by ancient civilizations, is thousands of years old. Across various cultures, herbs have been used to cure illnesses, enhance well-being, and balance the body. This abstract explores the history and evolution of herbal medicine, from its earliest stages in prehistory to its role in modern integrative health practice. Medicinal plants have been found to date back to their earliest use in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and India, where plant remedies were documented by ancient practitioners and developed their first medical Traditional Healing Systems Ayurveda. Greco-Roman classical herbalism further institutionalized plant medicine, which subsequently influenced subsequent medical traditions. During the Middle Ages, Islamic scholars and Christian monks conserved and developed herbal lore, which resulted in a Renaissance flowering of interest in plant medicines. During the twenty-first century, despite the expansion of pharmaceuticals, herbal medicine has seen a resurgence, driven by a renewed interest in holistic and natural approaches to health care. The article highlights striking historical developments, legendary medicinal herbs, and the persistent significance of herbal medicine in the modern health care scenario. Through scientific research, several ancient remedies have been verified, reaffirming the relevance of herbal medicine in modern times.

Keywords:- Introduction, History, Origins of Herbal Medicine, Ancient Civilizations, Traditional Chinese Medicine.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Herbal medicine, or phytomedicine, has a very ancient and noble history that has stretched over millennia. From ancient civilizations to the modern era, plants have been at the center of healing and maintaining human health. The use of plants and herbs to heal illnesses, to alleviate symptoms, and to induce wellness is one of the most ancient in human history. Despite the advent of new medicines, the use of herbal drugs continues to be on the increase, particularly in light of increased concern regarding side effects of man-made medicines and a shift towards more holistic wellness.

This review aims to provide a detailed history of traditional herbal medicine, in which its beginning, evolution, cultural effects, and relevance today are traced. We will explore how ancient civilizations laid the groundwork for herbalism, the contributions of influential herbal traditions Ancient healing traditions like Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine the resurgence of interest in herbal medicine in recent years.

II. HISTORY

Herbal medicine, the art of utilizing plants as medicine, is one of the oldest methods of healthcare that is known to humankind. The history of traditional herbal medicine extends thousands of years and is heavily embedded in the early civilizations of the world. It has played a significant part in the growth of cultural practice, medical systems, and maintenance of health over time. This section describes the most important historical developments and milestones that have influenced traditional herbal medicine From the distant past to the present.

III. THE ORIGINS OF HERBAL MEDICINE

Herbal medicine practice must have preceded history. The earliest human civilizations, with scanty scientific know-how, relied on their environment for remedies and cures. Trial and error, in the initial stages, informed the use of plants as drugs, and humans learned from nature. Plants were utilized for injury healing, enhanced digestion, relieving pain, and boosted immunity, among others.

Archaeological records indicate that early man utilized medicinal plants as early as the Neanderthal era. The Shanidar Cave in Iraq, which is known worldwide due to the presence of Neanderthal remains, also reflected plant medicine use. Some scientists think that Neanderthals used herbs like yarrow and chamomile with the intention of treating injuries and reducing pain. These plant medicines were the basis of what we call traditional herbal medicine today.

IV. ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS AND THE RISE OF HERBAL MEDICINE

➤ *Mesopotamia: The Birth of Written Medicinal Knowledge*

The earliest written records of herbal medicine belong to Mesopotamia, which was an early cradle of civilization. The Sumerians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians created some of the oldest pharmacological writing, much of which dealt with plant remedies. These early pharmacopoeia included accounts of plants and how they were medicinal, setting a foundation for still more advanced methods of herbal cure.

The Sumerian Pharmacopoeia, a compendium of medicinal recipes and herbal remedies, is one of the earliest instances of recorded knowledge regarding the medicinal use of plants. This work, inscribed on clay tablets, contained a variety of plant remedies for conditions like headaches, digestive issues, and infections.

➤ *Ancient Egypt: The Integration of Herbs with Religion and Culture*

Ancient Egypt is famous for its significant influence on the history of herbal medicine. The Egyptians thought that gods and goddesses could heal and incorporated plant-based medicine into religious rituals. One of the oldest surviving medical documents, the Ebers Papyrus, dates from about 1500 BCE. It includes more than 700 medicinal recipes, several of which contain plant materials like garlic, myrrh, and juniper. These plants were employed to cure numerous ailments, including infections, gastrointestinal complaints, and wounds.

Ancient Egyptian herbal remedies were commonly used in conjunction with ritual and magical practices. Plants were not only used to cure physical diseases but were also thought to provide spiritual healing and protection. This integrated approach to medicine, which combined the body and the soul, was a strong foundation of ancient Egyptian medical traditions and had an impact on later medical practices.

➤ *Ancient China: The Foundations of Ancient Chinese healing system*

V. TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (TCM)

One of the most powerful and long-lasting systems of herbal medicine globally, traces its history back more than 2,000 years. TCM is founded on the principles of harmony and balance, with an emphasis on the circulation of Qi (life energy) within the body. derived from the idea that sickness results from the body's energy being out of balance and that the return of harmony through dietary therapy, herbal remedies, and acupuncture can lead to healing disease and better health.

The Shennong Bencao Jing or Divine Farmer's Materia Medica is considered to be one of the classics of Chinese materia medica. This extremely early book, attributed to the mythical Emperor Shennong, catalogues the medical virtues of over hundreds of plants and groups them according to their medical functions. Ginseng, licorice, and ginkgo biloba are some of the herbs that have been used in TCM for thousands of years and are still widely used today in herbal supplements.

The Yin-Yang school of thought and the Five Elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water) are the basis of TCM practice, with each herb being classified based upon whether it is warming or cooling and whether it is capable of balancing the energies in the body.

➤ *India: The Ancient Wisdom of Ayurveda*

Ayurveda, or "science of life," is an old system of medicine from India that is over 5,000 years old. One of the oldest holistic health systems in existence, it remains widely practiced today throughout India and the world. Ayurveda focuses on maintaining a balance between the body, mind, and spirit and is founded on the idea that health represents a balanced state among three main energies or doshas: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha.

The Charaka Samhita, the most significant book of Ayurvedic medicine, gives a detailed description of more than 300 medicinal herbs and their application in the treatment of different health disorders. Turmeric, holy basil (Tulsi), ashwagandha, and amla are among the most famous herbs in Ayurveda, known for their anti-inflammatory, immune-strengthening, and stress-reducing actions.

Ayurvedic healers also take into account the value of diet, lifestyle, and mental health as components of the healing process, and thus it is a highly holistic type of medicine.

VI. CLASSICAL HERBALISM IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

➤ *Greece and Rome: The Birth of Medical Codification*

In ancient Rome and Greece, herbal medicine was systematized and refined by some of Western medicine's greatest minds. Hippocrates, referred to as the father of modern medicine, placed great emphasis on a natural method of healing and the utilization of plant remedies. His medical philosophy promoted the utilization of dietary modifications and natural treatments, providing the basis for most contemporary herbal therapies.

One of the earliest and most influential works from antiquity on medicinal herbs is Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*, a treatise that listed more than 600 plants and their medicinal uses. Dioscorides was a Greek physician and pharmacist whose work was translated and distributed across Europe and the Middle East for centuries. His detailed writings on herbs like garlic, sage, and mint helped advance herbalism in the Western world greatly.

Galen, a Roman doctor, further developed the writings of Hippocrates and Dioscorides and shaped medical practice for centuries. Galen's employment of herbal medicines, especially in wound and gastrointestinal disorders, became a mainstay of Roman medical practice and went on to shape medieval medicine.

VII. THE MIDDLE AGES: PRESERVATION AND EXPANSION OF HERBAL KNOWLEDGE

➤ *Islamic Golden Age: The Bridge Between East and West*

Islamic thinkers In the period of the Islamic Golden Age (8th to 14th centuries) preserved and expanded on the knowledge of herbal medicine that they received from Greek, Roman, Persian, and Indian sources. Thinkers like Avicenna (Ibn Sina) wrote seminal texts like the *Canon of Medicine*, which included lengthy accounts of herbal medicines and their applications in treating numerous illnesses.

Avicenna's writing allowed the interchange between Eastern and Western medicine to cross over, sharing knowledge of herbs such as aloe vera, pomegranate, and coriander to the Islamic world and then eventually Europe.

➤ *Medieval Europe: Herbalism in the Monastic Tradition*

In medieval Europe, much of the herbal medical knowledge was conserved by Christian monks in monasteries. The monks did not just transcribe ancient medical manuscripts but also grew herb gardens and composed their own manuals of medicinal herbs. The *Hortus Sanitatis*, a 15th-century herbal manuscript, is one of the best-known works from this time and gives useful information about the medicinal properties of herbs like lavender, chamomile, and St. John's Wort.

VIII. THE RENAISSANCE: A REBIRTH OF HERBAL MEDICINE

The Renaissance (14th–17th centuries) saw a renewed focus on herbalism, especially within the context of scientific study. The recovery of ancient Greek and Roman texts and the establishment of botany as a science helped to bring a new appreciation of plant medicine.

Eminent figures such as Paracelsus and John Gerard played an important role in the Renaissance revival of herbalism. Paracelsus, a Swiss doctor, focused on the use of chemically active plant derivatives, which paved the way for the eventual emergence of modern pharmacology.

John Gerard, an English herbalist, wrote *The Herball* in 1597, one of the earliest systematic herbals in English, and it became an essential text among herbal practitioners across Europe.

IX. THE DECLINE AND RESURGENCE OF HERBAL MEDICINE

➤ *The Rise of Modern Medicine*

With the development of synthetic drugs, antibiotics, and medicines during the 20th and 19th centuries, ancient herbal medicine gradually lost its position in the face of newer medical advancements. Industrialization of the medical profession and the growing influence of pharma organizations led to the wide-scale use of chemical treatments.

➤ *The Resurgence of Herbal Medicine*

In spite of the preeminence of contemporary pharmaceuticals, the 20th century witnessed a renewed interest in herbal medicine. Fears about the side effects of chemical medicines, the environmentally conscious movement, and the quest for holistic approaches to health caused numerous people to return to nature to heal. Herbal medicines like echinacea, ginger, and ginseng became popular as natural treatments for everyday ailments.

In addition, the emergence of scientific studies on herbal medicine has confirmed numerous of the therapeutic advantages of herbal medicines. The identification of active ingredients in plants such as salicylic acid (from willow bark, which resulted in the creation of aspirin) and taxol (from the Pacific yew tree, utilized in cancer therapy) demonstrates the continued utility of herbal medicine in modern healthcare.

X. CONCLUSION

The history of the traditional herbal medicine is one of cultural exchange, innovation, and resilience. From its modest start in ancient civilizations to its current resurgence in the modern era, the application of medicinal plants has been a key to human health. Now, with more individuals looking for

natural, sustainable options for synthetic drugs, herbal medicine is seeing a resurgence, bringing ancient knowledge together with contemporary scientific investigation.

As the world becomes more interested in sustainability and whole health, the future of herbal medicine is bright, with natural solutions to the complicated health issues of the 21st century.

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