

## ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND MODERN RELEVANCE

Kurban Ali<sup>1</sup>, Sujeet Pratap Singh<sup>2</sup>, Pramod Mishra<sup>3</sup>, Tarkeshwar Prasad Shukla<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Department of Pharmacy SCPM College of Pharmacy, Gonda, U.P., India.

<sup>1</sup>kurbanali788066@gmail.com <sup>2</sup>singhsujeet0068@gmail.com <sup>3</sup>pramoddmishra000@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup>tk007.shukla@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Alternative medicine is the complete variety of area healing practices and traditions, stressing holistic aspects of health and well-being. It roots itself in ancient civilizations, having time-honored systems like Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and indigenous African and Native American practices that have existed for quite some time in offering the methods of natural healing and disease prevention. These have been towards achieving balance of the mind, body, and spirit in patient, individualized, and non-invasive way. However, due to the industrialization, it substantially suffered setbacks. Modern, evidence-based medicine became dominant during the Industrial Revolution. In addition, it is in the 20th and 21st centuries that alternative medicine renewed and revived through integrative medicine, merging both the traditional and alternative methods for holistic care. It is acting up as a facilitator and suffocator in knowledge transfer. Worldwide, colonial powers would transfer botanical and medical knowledge, but at the same time, they dislocated and marginalized indigenous systems while imposing Eurocentric standards. The erasure of native traditions while creating hybrid knowledge systems also has roots in educational institutions and missionary activities. Post-colonial agendas sought to recover and assimilate the ancient practices into the modernity context that maintained voice and vigor for decolonized perspectives on the global knowledge systems. It increasingly finds acceptance and integration in modern health issues, as well as proof that it is well positioned to address contemporary health problems, such as the necessary-and-critical balancing act to be effective for both client and practitioner. Serious commitment in employing best evidence practices to optimize outcomes, however, should accompany the promises so that ancient systems continue to move with the times according to modern science and technology.

**Keyword:** Alternative Medicine , Ancient Civilization , Ayurveda , Islamic Medicine ,Herbal Medicine

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As opposed to orthodox medicine, alternative medicine characterizes an extensive range of treatment approaches and practices. These approaches are based on traditions, cultures, or holistic views of health and well-being, with significant emphasis on the mind-body-spirit balance. Some common examples include acupuncture, Ayurveda medicine, homeopathy, naturopathy, herbal medicine, and chiropractic care. According to the WHO, alternative medicine is "an extensive range of health care practices that are not part of that country's own tradition or conventional medicine and are not completely integrated into the dominant health-care system." [1]. So, just like every other sector, this has been able to grab the spotlight globally through natural healing processes, individualized care, and a less rigorous reliance on synthetic drugs and invasive procedures. In the last few years, alternative medicine has almost completely merged with conventional health care systems in a way that co-joined complementary and integrative medicine. The standard example is several herbal remedies, meditation, and yoga accompanying standard treatment such as anxiety, chronic pain, and heart disease. Still, the effectiveness and safety of some alternative therapy are subjects of continued scientific research and debate. Critical and evidence-based approaches should be used to alternative medicine so that the maximization of benefits would be possible while minimizing potential risks [2].

#### 1) Historical Context and Evolution of Alternative Medicine

##### 1.1 Origins in Ancient Civilizations

The foundations of alternative medicine are closely placed with the history of humankind. It was in ancient times that these cultures practiced a very detailed model of healing, depending on the environment, religious beliefs and philosophies.

##### A. Ayurveda (India):

One of the most ancient well-documented medical systems is that of India; it can trace its history as far back as 3000 B.C. This ancient medical system is description-based on the Vedic texts and adopted the notion of well-being in life as balancing the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha). It is said that by using diet, herbs, yoga, and changing one's lifestyle according to the Vedic texts, the three doshas could be balanced. The primary texts of Ayurveda include the two foundational texts, the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, which detail surgical techniques and pharmacology [3].

B. Traditional Chinese Medicine (China):

TCM has more than 2000 years of history and is a medical tradition based on Taoist philosophy. It introduced qi (vital energy), yin and yang, and various practices such as acupuncture, herbal remedies, and Qi Gong to harmonize energy flow in the body[4].

C. Medicine of the Old Egyptians and Mesopotamians:

In ancient Egypt, curers treated patients using herbal medicines, amulets, and spiritual rituals. This is seen in the Ebers Papyrus (around 1550 BCE), one of the oldest known medical texts. Similarly, the Mesopotamians used plant-based remedies and prayers to heal injuries, both physical and spiritual [5].

### 1.2 Medieval and Renaissance Periods

A. Islamic Medicine:

Islamic Scholars preserved adding to the knowledge about Greek, Roman, and Indian medicine, among others. One of the figures included in such studies was Avicenna (Ibn Sina), who was the author of significant works, such as The Canon of Medicine, encompassing herbal medicine and holistic approaches [6].

B. European Herbal Medicine:

While in Europe herbal medicine thrived, monasteries generally compiled herbals-books on the medicinal properties of plants. Hildegard von Bingen was a Benedictine abbess in Germany during the 12th century, best known for her emphatic endorsement of the healing capacity of herbs as well as healing practices through spirituality [7].

### 1.3 Decline During the Industrial Revolution

Not much since the 18th and 19th centuries, when scientific discoveries began to modernize medicine. The new antibiotics, anesthesia, and germ theory focused attention toward evidence-based practices, growingly overshadowing many traditional and alternative ways. However, besides falling to this fate, alternative practices such as homeopathy (Samuel Hahnemann, late 18th) and naturopathy (Benedict Lust, 19th century) became contemporary systems of alternative medicine[8].

### 1.4 Resurgence in the 20th and 21st Centuries

During the final decades of the 20th century, growing discontent about the inability of traditional medicine-specially in forms of treatment toward chronic diseases-can be said to have reawakened an interest in alternative approaches. There are some key points that mark this period. They include:

A. Globalization of Traditional Medicine:

Facts about acupuncture, yoga, and Ayurveda started to be international. The World Health Organization has also been encouraging the integration of these traditional practices in the respective countries' health and medical systems [9].

B. Rise of Integrative Medicine:

Joined up medicine is that model that encompasses both the traditional and alternative treatment modalities, so that holistic care can be accorded to a patient [10].

### 1.5 Contemporary Perspective

Today, complementary medicine can boast of being a multi-billion-dollar industry and is taking on new acceptance into mainstream healthcare. Countries such as China and India continue to lead research by accessing traditional medicines. In contrast, Western countries have been putting all their efforts toward clinical trials to assess these complementary practices better. So, there is nothing left to assess modern technological advances and scientific methodologies applied to studying explored ancient systems that indeed have heritage to bring together with modernism [13].

### 1.6 Colonialism and the Spread of Knowledge

Colonialism performs dual functions in the distribution and suppression of knowledge systems globally. It promotes the exchange of ideas, technologies, and medical practices, but displaces indigenous knowledge systems, made them subservient to Eurocentric worldviews. Understanding the dynamics of colonialism and its role in the dissemination of knowledge entails delving into its positive and negative aspects.

### 1.7 Transference of Knowledge via Colonial Networks

Vast networks were established by the European powers during the colonial period over Asia and Africa; and they extended such vast networks even to the Americas. These networks came in handy in the transmission of scientific and technological knowledge among the colonizers. By way of illustration:

A. Botanical Knowledge: This involved the collecting of indigenous-derived valuable information concerning local flora and fauna by colonizers. Withered people's noted accounts and records were employed to develop medicines,

agriculture, and industry in Europe. Colonialism has brought about the significance of plants like quinine and rubber to the rest of the world.

- B. California: Europeans have transferred their scientific practices in such disciplines as cartography, engineering, and modern medicine into their colonies, often at the expense of indigenous indigenous knowledge systems[13].

## 2.2) Undermined Indigenous Knowledge Systems

While colonialism encouraged the flow of certain forms of knowledge, it invariably subverted indigenous traditions, languages, and activities:

- A. Suppression of Traditional Medicine: Indigenous medical systems such as Ayurveda, African herbalism, and Native American healing systems were considered "superstitions" and marginalized. The British colonial authorities imposed the Western system as the standard.
- B. Destruction of Oral Traditions: Most of the indigenous population relied on oral traditions for knowledge transfer. These were erased by colonial policies, which emphasized writing and European languages [14].

## 2.3) Role of Missionaries and Educational Institutes

All missionary activities during the colonial period were instrumental in making these ends reach out to their audience in the world and beyond. Most of them also set up schools and universities where they taught the Western curriculum in colonized areas. Such institutions become avenues to reach education, but oftentimes-form alienation, isolation, and disconnection from the indigenous cultural and intellectual heritage. Examples include: Christian Missionary Schools: These were primarily responsible for spreading literacy and Western scientific knowledge, while often dismissing indigenous beliefs and practices as primitive. Colonial Universities: For example, the University of Calcutta and Maker ere University were meant to socialize local elites into Western thought and help create a class of intermediaries for colonial administration [15].

## 2.4) Formation of Dual Knowledge Systems-Hybrid Knowledge Systems

Oppressive elements of colonialism notwithstanding, the resulting relationships between the colonizers and the indigenous population formed hybrid knowledge systems: Syncretism in Medicine: sometimes traditional medicines clubbed with Western, making them integrative. For instance, Ayurveda adopted tools of diagnosis introduced by the 'British'.- Agricultural Innovation: European methods being practiced with the indigenous enabled more production in crops as well as irrigation[16].

## 2.5) Knowledge Dissemination through Post-Colonial Lenses

It is the commitment of the people during the post-colonial period to reclaim and revive indigenous knowledge systems. India and South Africa, for example, have initiated policies that would incorporate traditional practices into education and health systems. All this is based on using decolonized knowledge and acknowledging non-European civilizations for their contribution to global understanding [17].

# 2. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

It is a crucial aspect of healing characterized by diversity and inclusiveness. Alternative medicine refers to a tradition of healing that has evolved over several millennia, deeply rooted in cultural, spiritual, and philosophical frameworks. The historical trajectory-alternatively moving from ancient to modern times, from division to revival during the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries-keeps demonstrating resilience and adaptability in the instance of alternative medicine. The impact of colonialism on knowledge systems was double fold, that is, dissemination of medical and scientific ideas across the globe and suppression of indigenous practices. The third and final leg of the colonial legacy comprises hybrid systems of knowledge which embraced both traditional and Western ways. Alternative medicine becomes stronger and more introduced in any given main healthcare due to its holistic, patient-centered philosophy. The current landscape of alternative medicine shows the importance of evidence-based approaches for safety, effectiveness, and acceptance in the larger public. While the more natural and personalized nature of alternative medicine is appealing, some alternative practices are still lacking sound scientific validation. So, research, trial, and link of traditional healers and modern medical practitioners are very important. The colonial role of medical knowledge dissemination often becomes a reminder in the decoupling of education and health systems. If indigenous knowledge is to be rejuvenated, it should also be justly integrated into global systems for a balanced and inclusive framework in healthcare. Hybrid systems of knowledge speak about the constructiveness of cross-cultural collaboration and innovation. As with integrative medicine, Eastern and Western systems of medicine provide models of convergence in response to contemporary health issues such as chronic diseases, mental health, and preventive care. Ultimately, the self-respect between alternative medicine and conventional medicine can foster the development of a comprehensive healthcare system in the world's diverse populations without alienating any culture or tradition in the process.

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