



The Role of Nature (*Tabiat*) in Persian Medicine

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Abstract

In middle and west Asia, Europe and north of Africa in ancient and medieval time the main paradigm and doctrine of medicine was based on humoral theory. This theory of medicine was based on four temperaments (*mizaj*). Regarding, it was a terminology called *Tabiat* (Nature) in the humoral medicine which plays a key role in the paradigm as a wisdom force in the body to keep body healthy and back body to healthy condition in diseases. There were four principles of nature: Wisdom (*Hikma*), Cosmos, Attorney, and Treatment. Based on the Persian medicine principles, physician is the servant of the nature. He/she should try to help the nature of the patient to restore health.

Keywords: Nature, Persian Medicine, Medical History

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Introduction

The main paradigm of medicine was humoral theory in middle and west Asia, Europe and north of Africa in ancient and medieval time [1]. This theory of medicine was based on four temperaments (*mizaj*) [2]. Some historians believed that this theory of medicine was originated in ancient Greece [3], but some others think the Persians and Indians created it [4]. But, it is clear that in both ancient Greece and Persia (before Islam) it was the main paradigm of medicine. Especially, in Sassanid era (224-637AD-the last Persians kingdom before the Islam), Persians founded the greatest medical University and teaching hospital in the world, namely Jundishapour and combined Persian, Greek, Syrian and Indian systems of medicines and presented a flourished version of humoral medicine [5]. After Islam, the tradition of the Jundishapour transferred to Islamic era by Persians [6]. There was a social movement among the scientists to translate medical books from different languages to Arabic language (as formal language of Islamic Empire). It is called Translation Era [7]. Later, the humoral medicine was flourished by mostly Persian scientists like Akhawayni (?-983AD), Rhazes (865–925 AD), Haly Abbas (949-982 AD), Avicenna (980-1032), Jorjani (1042-1137), etc [8]. This period of time is called Islamic Golden Age [9]. The humoral paradigm of medicine was the main paradigm of medicine in the civilized world until Renaissance. Then, by discovery of molecular aspects in medicine, the humoral theory of medicine was replaced by current molecular theory during later centuries [10].

The philosophy of humoral medicine was a holistic theory and definitely different from conventional medicine [11]. This paradigm and theory of medicine was at least 2000 years the main paradigm of medicine in the most civilized parts of the world and has an important role in progress of medicine. Accordingly, it was a terminology called *Tabiat* (Nature) in the humoral medicine which plays a key role in the paradigm as a wisdom force in the body to keep body healthy and back body to healthy condition in diseases [12]. Therefore, we tried to review briefly the principles of this theory of medicine and the role of nature (*Tabiat*) in it.

The meaning of Nature (*Tabiat*) in medicine

Nature (*Tabiat*) is a deep philosophical terminology in Persian and Greek philosophy [14, 15]. But, in medicine, it indicates an innate power in the body with tact that controls all aspects of the body [16, 17]. It is not under the control of the person. It was believed that its acts are in the events of the best affairs for the body. In the sudden events happened for the body, reflexes of the body are under the control of the nature. In Persian medicine it is called “*Qovaie Modabere Badan* (Body’s power with tact)” [13].

Historical perspective

The belief of existing a supernatural power to control the body dates back to antiquity. In ancient Greece, scientists like Socrates and Galen discussed about the nature [13, 15] and also in ancient Persia, scientists believed to the Cosmos theory and also the principles of humoral

medicine (four elements) [5, 18]. After the Islam, Islamic views added to the ancient beliefs by Persian scholars in the first Islamic centuries (early medieval era), around 7th to 12th century AD. Medicine was flourished during this time and it is called Islamic Golden Age. Therefore, the comprehensive humoral theory of the medicine based on the nature were formed and became the main paradigm of the medicine in the west and east at least until 17 century AD [13, 19].

The role and definition of physicians in Persian Medicine

In the third volume of the book Dinkerd, a Sassanid Pahlavic manuscript belonging to ancient Persia (before the Islam-637AD), medicine for the body was defined as “medicine for the body (*Tan Pezeshki*) and divided into two groups. One is caring body in health and another one treating the body from illness and its benefit was establishment of universe in health, purity and scent [20].” Later, in Islamic era, physicians defined medicine under influence of ancient Persian definition. Akhawayni (?-983AD) defined medicine as “a profession that keep humans’ health and restore it if gone, by science and practice [21].”

Some principles of Nature (*Tabiat*)

Wisdom (*Hikma*): It means that nature does not any vain works. Socrates said: “Nature does not any vain and void issues [22].”

Also Hakim Arzani said: “Absolute sage [God] put up the Nature (*Tabiat*) for keeping and caring body’s benefits and its working in the body

is based on wisdom [*Hekmat*] [23].”

Cosmos: It was a theory originated by Persians in ancient era [24].

In this theory, each part of the body is homological with a part in the universe. According to this theory, some events in the body (as small world) like death follow the universe (as big world) and are as a good matter in evolution [13].

Attorney: It means that the Nature (*Tabiat*) is deputy of soul in maintaining the body interests and managing body issues [13].

Treatment: This principle is due to three past principles. Nature had to keep body healthy and in disorders, tries to restore health. Rhazes (865–925 AD) defined it as “nature is the supreme physician”. Also, Socrates said “nature is enough for treating diseases [13].”

Physician and Nature

Based on the Persian medicine principles, physician is the servant of the nature. He/she should try to help the nature of the patient to restore health. It is mentioned by the Persian physician that a physician can help the nature with the help of below ways [25]:

a- Reinforce the body powers with two ways:

1) By life style modification: there were six principles for health in Persian medicine called as *Sette Zaroorieh* including air (cleanliness, temperature, and geographical situation), nutrition (food and drinks), exercise, sleep and wake, exertion of unnecessary materials from the body, and finally physiological concepts [8].

2) Using spices and medicines

b- Helping to the nature in avoiding body from

harmful agents inside or outside of the body [25].

Conclusion

We need to contemplate the history of medicine in ancient and medieval era and its paradigm and philosophy. Nature (*Tabiat*) with its special meaning in humoral (Persian) medicine is one of the main characters to define medicine and treatment in ancient and medieval era. It was tried to briefly introduce the principle issues of Nature (*Tabiat*). It was believed that Nature was the main controller of the health of the body; and physicians should help it to keep body healthy and also to restore health in diseases.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Acknowledgment

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