

A Brief Study on Medical Practices in Qutb Shahis



History

KEYWORDS : Public welfare, Charty, Plastic Surgery, Health and Hygien, Hospital (Darush-Shifa), Unani and Ayurvedic Medicines, Hindu Mathas, Prepared Drags, Herbal Prescriptions, Tribal Meceicin.

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The Golconda Kingdom came into existence after the disintegration of the Bahmani Kingdom in 1518 A.D. Qutb Shahi Sultans of Golconda ruled the Andhra Desha for nearly two centuries i.e., from 1518 to 1687 A.D. Golconda was a vast kingdom with fertile land and rich minerals resources, besides the agricultural land and forests. Golconda was blessed with lucrative mines and other minerals like pearls, diamonds, coal, agates, shabbier etc. Qutb Shahi Sultans cultivated many cultures in the Deccan region and they have respected all local traditions, customs, literature etc. The Sultans of Golconda took great interest to political unity, economic prosperity, and established peace and prosperity.

Apart from public welfare and charity, providing of free medical treatment was significant and very important activity during the period of Qutb Shahis. Not only the charities but also the Government appointed Hakims and Physicians throughout the kingdom for the public health and hygiene. During this period, foreign travelers too gave vivid descriptions relating to the medical treatment. Nocolo manucci came to Golconda in 1686-1687 during the period of Abdul Hasan Tanasha. He was appointed as Physician by the king and received 700 rupees per mensem as his salary.

During this period plastic surgery also was in vogue in the kingdom. Manucci described the method of plastic surgery as practiced by our local deccani doctors in those days. In 1670, when a war broke out between the Mogulas and Bijapur, the Bijapur soldiers cut off the noses of Moguls who had committed depredations and fields. Describing the treatment of the native surgeons, Manucci says "The surgeons belonging to the country cut the skin of the forehead above the eyebrows, and made it fall down over the wounds on the nose. Then, giving a twist so that the live flesh might meet the other live surface, by healing applications, they fashioned for them other imperfect noses. There is left above, between the eyebrows, a small hole, caused by the twist given to the skin to bring the two live surfaces together. In a short time the wounds heal up, some obstacle being placed beneath to allow of respiration. I saw many persons with such noses, and they were not so disfigured as they would have been without any nose at all"¹.

There was not mentioned about small-pox, that the small pox is very frequent in the country, but there is another violent distempers that commonly commits greater range there. It is called akeron, and only seizes children, it is an inflammation of the tongue and mouth, proceeding from too great heat their parents are careful to cool them from time to time with herbs that are good against that disease or otherwise it seizes the guts, reaches to the fundament, and kills the child.²

Sometimes these travelers indulged in incorrect descriptions. Thus Tavernier, writing about 1615, says that there were no physicians in the kingdom of Garnatic (meaning

Vijayanagar). Golconda or Bijapur except those who attended the kings or Princes. At least so far as Golconda-Hyderabad is concerned, this is wrong as the great hospital Darush-Shifa, was there from 1595, and free treatment was given to all and sundry, nearly three hundred and fifty patients were treated and fed at the expense of the Government. Tavernier admits "in great cities there may be one or two men who sit in some known places and given potions and plasters" and "They do not demand the fee for the diagnosis and remedy.

The reasons probably was that, apart from the great state hospitals like the Darush-Shifa at Hyderabad, the state kept salaried Hakims and voids in different towns at its expense, and they were commanded not to charge the patients for treatment.³

In the words of H.K. Sherwani an eminent professor and Historian "Not merely the rulers but also Jagirdars and zamindars had salaried physicians who were not supposed to charge any fee from the generality. This is similar to the Health Insurance Scheme of England at the present day. Even as late as middle of the present country the well-known sharifian family of Delhi Hakims (of which Hakim Ajmal Khan was the last great scion) never charged any fee within the limits of the city of Delhi, because the family had hereditary Jagirs granted by the Moghal Emperors for the purpose⁴.

Tariq-I-zafra mentions "the hospital (Darush-Shifa) was to fulfill the medical needs of the people. The patients were supplied medicines and food free of cost". Further it was also used as a residential college of Unani medical education.⁵ Hadiqat-us-Salatin refers that Hakim Gabriel and Hakim Nizamuddin Ahmed Geelani Ibn Sa'adi Shirazi were the renowned professors of this Institution.⁶

Sultan Mohammed Quli (34) was laid down with high fever to which he ultimately succumbed. His ailment proved incurable. The physicians who were called upon to treat him were puzzled owing to his high temperature and were divided in their opinion on the nature of the disease and the method of treatment. The Unani physician suggested cooling drugs. Whereas the Indian physicians prescribed heat-generating ones, when Khanam Aga, the King's mother was consulted, she approved of the later method which worsened the case and further raised the temperature, ending in his death⁷.

Tavernier informs us that European system of treatment was also accepted by the sulthan. He says that his frined pieter De laan, a Dutch Chirurgeon (Surgeon) who lived four leagues from Golconda probably at the town of Hayathnagar, was so well known in the kingdom that he was called to the palace for treatment of ailments. Thus, when, sulthan Abdullah Qutbshah was suffering from a severe headache the Dutch Physician was called. The Queen mother and the princes also were treated for their ailments.

It is interesting to read that he was first given a bath, and his hands were cleaned and rubbed with sweet oil in order to make them thoroughly immune from germs and microbes. Then a curtain was drawn and the Queen's arm was incised and made to bleed, De Laan was awarded fifty pagodas which amounts to two hundred rupees as his fee.⁸

Unani and Ayurvedic Medicines also must have been in common use, with abundance availability of a variety of herb-mineral drug substances. Although some of the treatments handed down to us seem rather quaint. Thus Thevenot says that "mordechin" or cholera was treated by the cauterisation of the feet or by binding the patient tightly, while flex or looseness of the bowels was treated by rhubarb (rewand chini) and powdered common seed (zira) taken in limewater.⁹

Golconda had the Indian system of medical treatment practiced by the indigenous people and Greek system practiced by Arabs, Persians and Indian Muslims. Thus they had in their time both the systems known as Greek and Indian. The sulthans encouraged the physicians to follow holistic approach to treat the diseases. Thus we can see a synthesis of all the systems. The examination of pulse in diagnosis was quit common¹⁰

The royal physician recommends that Harees is good for backbone. Samosas should be taken with old wine, Qalya makes one a genus and Kababs are bad for the stomach. Falooda for lungs and Qataif (Turkish sweet prepared with honey and served with thick cream) should be associated with sour pomegranate to avoid its bad effects.¹¹

The upper class families called the Hakims from Eleppo, China and some parts of Transoxiana for their treatment. In the same way many Hakims, both Indian and foreign, were called for the treatment of Mohammed Qutb Shah.¹² The Hindu Mathas of the period also appear to have been extended medical facilities to the contemporary society. For eg. A Golaki Matha at Mandaram maintained a maternity hospital, a general hospital, a doctor and other attendants. All these services were, understandably meant for the use of the general public. The inscription records that all classes of people including the fifth caste were to be served there. These promoted the study of Ayurvedic and yoga for the benefit of their medicines as well as for the general public. They might have prepared drugs for treating various diseases and extended those facilities to the people¹³.

During the period under study, the prostitutes were very much vulnerable to the spread of contagious diseases. They took precautionary steps to avoid them. prostitutes also used to appoint physicians to safe guard their health in their houses¹⁴.

John fryer, who visited the canarese country at the end of 17th century writes about the venereal diseases and use of mango as a herb against these diseases.¹⁵ In vaidya cintamani, Vallabha charaya also prescribed the skin of mango tree in the treatment of venereal diseases.¹⁶

Mercurial preparations were preferred to herbal medicines in venereal diseases. Bahuleshwara Caritra, a contemporaneous literary work informs us that a house of a prostitute was an adept in rasa (Mercurial system of medicines which was prescribed by scientists as more efficacious). The prescriptions of the physicians were many including the herbal and mercurial. As a result, the local physicians or the patients could get any herb easily. Especially, the method of collecting and administering the herbal prescriptions was very simple and cheaper.¹⁷

During this period, the volume of drug substances increased leaps and bounds as many new fruits and roots were exchanged with many countries. Many works were written on the nature and uses of new substance. In addition to herbal substances, the meat, blood, fat, liver, bones, urine, hair, secretions, bile, marrow, horns, nails, bristales, hoops and the bright pigment called gorocana of various animals products were used as drug-substances. Civet and the bright pigment of various animals such as cow, goat, monkey, etc., were the most popular and widely used animal substance. The koyas, who were known as Mudulavandlu used to collect the dug substances. Next, the Cencus were also famous for their knowledge in identifying the drug-substances. The Erukala and Cencu women used to sell various kinds of medicines and some roots which were believed to have had power of dumping a person and diverting the mind of a person.¹⁸ Perhaps these were used as anesthetic drugs.

Tavernier gives a vivid description of bezoars or medicinal stones which local people used to produce making use of the gall of animals like goat, cow, monkey, etc., and exported them from the kingdom to abroad. These bezoars were believed as very much useful as antidotes to poison. 19

Thus, we find that the medical scientists of Medieval Deccan were so alert that they soon identified the characteristics of the symptoms of the diseases with minute variations. They succeeded in formulating drugs that had greater efficacy in curing/controlling the diseases. They were mostly patronised by the state and sometimes by the rich and munificent as this profession was regarded as pious and meritorious. It is also observed that an holistic approach was followed in treating the diseases. This was encouraged by the kings by holding discussions and disputations among the physicians of different schools such as unani, Ayurveda as well as flok and tribal systems. The responsibility of attesting the merit of folk and tribal practices uses laid on the Unani and Ayurvedic scholars, which was personally supervised by the kings.

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