

THE HUMOURAL THEORY IN TRADITIONAL MEDICAL SYSTEMS; GREEK MEDICINE AND AYURVEDA MEDICINE

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Abstract

Greek medicine and Ayurveda medicine are two major traditional medical systems, both based on the concept of Humours. The Humoural theory, which identifies bodily liquids as the main constituents of living beings, is the basis for disease diagnosis and treatment. Its earliest roots can be traced back to the medical cult practices of Asclepius (700 BCE) and Hippocratic medicine (460 – 377 BCE) in Greece. In the East, the Humoural theory can be seen in Ayurveda as the concept of Tridosha. This study aims to examine the Humoural theory in Greek medicine and in Ayurveda medicine to have a similar approach to disease and treatments despite their apparent difference in identifying the Humours and their number. The research used qualitative research methodology alongside with Historic method which included reading, analyzing and interpreting of historical material in English and Sinhala translations as its main research design. The development of Humoural theories within each system showcased fascinating evolutionary journeys. In Greek medicine, the theory evolved over centuries, with Hippocrates laying the groundwork, later figures like Galen refining it and passing it to the Arabic Muslim world . Thus, this theory eventually bifurcated, with one branch influencing Western medicine and the other potentially contributing to Unani medicine. The dominance of Humoural theory in the West was exposed of its defects with the invention of the Germ theory in the 19th Century. However, it's influence continued to be persisted. On the contrary, Ayurveda's Tridosha theory has been able to survive through the test of time and still survives as a major system of traditional medicine which is practiced apace with other medical systems. Thus, the Humoural theory wasn't a monolithic concept, but rather a framework that evolved and adapted within different cultural contexts. Understanding how these theories developed in Greece and Ayurveda facilitates the appreciation of the intellectual ferment of the ancient world and the diverse approaches to health and healing that emerged across civilizations. It also highlights the interconnectedness of these cultures, with potential cross-pollination of ideas through trade and travel. While modern medicine has embraced a more reductionist and scientific approach, the core concept of balance within the human body still holds relevance.

Keywords: Ancient Greek medicine, Ayurveda, Humoural theory, traditional medicine, Unani medicine

