

# Ayurveda and Culturally Similar Traditions in Comparison to Allopathic Medicine as Part of Complementary and Alternative Medicine



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## Abstract

**Background:** Ayurvedic and other similar Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) traditions are typically practiced exclusively within their respective communities, which can impact patient's reception of allopathic medical practices.

**Objectives:** To comprehend the differences and similarities between allopathic and CAM traditions in order to promote holistic care.

**Method:** To compare various medical practices under the umbrella of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), with particular emphasis on Ayurveda in contrast to Allopathy

**Results:** The results of this research suggest that while there are major differences between disciplines within Complimentary and Alternative medicine (CAM), when examined alongside Allopathic medicine CAM largely views prevention as tantamount to cure. Contrastingly, Allopathic medicine addresses treatment primarily through biochemical and surgical means.

**Keywords:** Ayurveda, Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), Allopathic Medicine, Traditional Medicine, Holistic Medicine

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## **Introduction**

When examining the structure of healthcare on a global scale, it is important for professionals to understand and embrace the different perspectives that form patient's opinions on the care they receive, and the cultural beliefs that may impact them. While this may seem an onerous task at first, it is helpful to enter into these discussions with an open mind and a thirst for knowledge.

## **Methods and Structure**

In this research, Ayurveda and other traditions used as Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) will be juxtaposed with allopathic medicine. The aim is not to determine which is better, but to help healthcare professionals and physicians to comprehend how these techniques can be leveraged to provide compassionate, effective and informed treatment plans, as part of a team approach.

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## **Discussion**

### **Foundational Principles**

To begin, it is pivotal to determine the foundations of both allopathic and Ayurvedic medicine. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) states that:

The ancient Indian medical system, also known as Ayurveda, is based on ancient writings that rely on a "natural" and holistic approach to physical and mental health.

Ayurvedic medicine is one of the world's oldest medical systems and remains one of India's traditional health care systems. Ayurvedic treatment combines products (mainly derived from plants, but may also include animal, metal, and mineral), diet, exercise, and lifestyle (2019).

By contrast, according to the National Cancer Institute, allopathic medicine is "A

system in which medical doctors and other healthcare professionals (such as nurses, pharmacists, and therapists) treat symptoms and diseases using drugs, radiation, or surgery. Also called biomedicine, conventional medicine, mainstream medicine, orthodox medicine, and Western medicine” (2019).

While these definitions begin to grant the reader an understanding of the core areas of this research, it is important to add that several geo-culturally similar practices such as Unani traditional medicine and Tibetan medicine will also influence this report as topics. This is to ensure that the reader gains a well-rounded, representative view of traditional healing methodologies, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, in regards to integrative healthcare.

### **Ayurveda and it's schools of thought**

To understand the basis of Ayurveda, it is important to grasp that this system of medicine has existed in India and the surrounding regions since the second century BC. As discussed by Jaiswal and

Williams in the article called *A Glimpse at Ayurveda-The Forgotten History and Principles of Indian Traditional Medicine*, the foundations of Ayurveda exist within two schools of thought. These schools of thought are named Nyaya and Vaiheshika. Translated into English, Nyaya and Vaihashika represent the schools of logic and Hindu Philosophy respectively. Further expanded on in the work of Jaiswal and Williams, Ayurveda also has foundations in a manifestation framework, widely known as Samkhya, which was established at roughly the same time as Nyaya and Vaiheshika.

To better comprehend these three core elements of Ayurveda, it is important to learn that at its inception, Vaiheshika school had its focus in the principles of “[...] inferences and perceptions that should be obtained about a patient's pathological condition for treatment.” (Jaiswal & Williams, 2017) This is somewhat similar to allopathic or westernized medicine, because both disciplines take into account subjective observational data during the history taking

process. There is further similarity between Ayurveda and allopathic medicine, owing to the fact that Vaiheshika subdivides the attributes of objects into six groupings based upon substance, particularities of structure, activity, generality, and inherence as well as quality. According to the above-mentioned article in which these categories are referenced, they are called Dravya, Vishesha, Karma, Samanya, Samavaya and Guna in the traditional Sanskrit language (Jaiswal & Williams, 2017).

Equally important is the school of Nyaya which favors garnering extensive knowledge of a particular patient's physical state, as well as the state of the disease prior to beginning any treatment. This is echoed in allopathic medicine via the practice of gathering objective data regarding a patient's physical condition, by way of vital signs, palpation, auscultation, testing and other clinical procedures. While not much is said about the Nyaya school of thought in Ayurvedic medicine by Jaiswal & Williams, it can be conjectured that this is at least partly

due to the fact that the Nyaya and Vaiheshika schools, later merged into a single entity, called the "nyāya–vaiśeṣika school" (2017). More information on Nyaya can be found in *The International Journal of Herbal Medicine*, in an article entitled, *The philosophy of Nyaya, Epistemology and Ayurveda Research Methodology*. Within this research, authored by Dadu, and Purohit in 2015, it is stated that Nyaya focuses on more than just the school of logic discussed by Jaiswal and Williams. In addition to logic and physical examination, Nyaya also centers on the concept of Pramana. According to Dadu and Purohit, Pramana is defined as "deliberations on the valid means of examination" (2015). This includes not only the direct examination as noted in other research but, also Amumana Pramana, also known as the inference, Upamana or analogy in concurrence with Shabda or authoritative testimony. Possessing all these things at the time of a patient's examination renders it valid according to Ayurvedic medical traditions.

To cement a functional knowledge of these founding principles for the reader, it is useful to provide foundational information regarding of the concepts discussed, inclusive of a brief history of Nyaya as an educational tool. According to research by Dadu and Purohit (2015), Nyaya as a philosophical system is “promulgated by the seer Gautama Akshapada”. The *Nyaya Sootra* , which their report indicates Nyaya philosophy is based on, is said to contain five chapters. The first verse therein is said to indicate the utility of the system, as it defines Nyaya itself as “the validation of subjects, through valid means”, corroborating statements previously made on this topic within this report.

Also of interest are Dadu and Purohit’s findings regarding the subjects taught in the school of Drishtanta. It covers what can be considered the “curriculum” of the Nyaya School of logic. The core subject areas covered, are as follows: metaphysics, epistemology, and the twelve objects of investigation. Firstly, metaphysics in the

sense revolves around 16 categories which are known as Padartha within Ayurveda.

These include the previously mentioned Pramana (investigative means), Samshaya (doubt), Prayojana (objective), Drishtanta, also known as an illustrative example and Siddhanta, which is similar to the English comprehension of the word principle, in addition to many others (2015).

Furthermore, there exists a unique type of epistemology, which has its focus in attaining a scientific approach. This is accomplished by way of an intricate balance of logic and reasoning, along with the integration of analogies, coupled with perception to form a functional framework, within the discipline of Ayurveda. While conducting research, this aspect has proven to be most useful because it paves the way for scientific studies to be conducted, facilitating the integration and legitimization of Ayurveda alongside allopathic medicine as well as additional forms of integrative and complementary care. With this in place medical practitioners and other caregivers

will be able to continually adapt and evolve the delivery of care, leading to an ever-expanding aim towards a holistically based approach.

Finally in this trifecta, are the “twelve objects of investigation”, as written in *The philosophy of Nyaya, epistemology and Ayurveda research methodology* ( Dadu & Parohit, 2015) these are called Premaya. Premaya can be likened at least in part, to Western knowledge of the senses, as all of the sense organs such as eyes, ears and nose, etc. are included. However, the physical structure of substances including elements such as size and shape, etc. are also pivotal, in tandem with intellect and neurological factors.

Now that the reader has hopefully attained a functional knowledge of the three main branches of Ayurveda, as well as guiding principles within, the next important task is to discuss the spiritual and cultural beliefs that led to its creation. As with all things that have existed for millennia, there have over time being offshoots from the fountainheads

that are the Indian systems of Medicine (ISM), based upon differences in belief systems, as well as cultural and scientific advances. They can be thought of as branches growing from a tree, which for most, established its roots in Ayurveda. Of these evolving methods of healing, the most notable are Siddha, Unani, Homeopathy, Yoga, Tibetan and naturopathic disciplines.

### **The Unani Tradition**

To help determine the differences between them, it is wise to return again to the works of Jaiswal and Williams ( 2017). In their research on the subject, they discuss each of these areas of Indian medicine in some detail. Unani medicine is described as “a system of medicine that originated in Greece and was introduced by Hippocrates” the research then elaborates stating that Unani medicine came into use in 460 — 366 BC. The researchers also elucidate core elements that go into the structure of this system. Of primary foundational importance is Hippocrates thoughts on “Humoral Theory” (Jaiswal & Williams, 2017). This

theory was used to determine whether a humor of the body was wet or dry in nature, with the aim of balancing them. This key knowledge was then used to assist in diagnosing and treating diseases using items such as ointments, tinctures, oils and powders. These substances were said to be made most commonly by manipulating plants. In present times, according to Williams and Jaiswal, as well as other researchers, the Unani healing techniques which were brought by Arab, Persian and Mongol peoples, is quite common in India (2017). It has even gaining recognition for clinical use and financial support to facilitate scholarly research.

### **The Practices of the Siddhars**

With regard to the Siddha medicine, it can be said that it possesses very strong linkage to Ayurveda. In research conducted by Madesh and Chitra, entitled an *Overview of Siddha Medicine System in India*, the Siddha medicine is regarded as [...] “the most primitive medical system.” (2018) It was created and had a foothold starting in

excess of 25,000 years ago, by people known as the Siddhars. The medicines were primarily formulated using herbs, minerals and various animal derived products. This was accomplished using knowledge gained by way of the research of numerous important persons, led by Guru Agasthiar, who is regarded as the father of Siddha medicine – much like Hippocrates – is in the West. In this article it is also notable that Siddha medicine is regarded as equal to Ayurveda which is mainly attributed by the authors as hailing from northern India. By contrast, Siddha is attributed to southern India, in the area of Tamil Nadu. (Madesh & Chitra, 2018)

### **The Elements, Humors and Colors of Health**

Similar to Ayurveda, which has been spoken about at length, the Siddha tradition is rooted within the Hindu religion, attributing its first knowledge to the Hindu god Shiva, specifically. Additionally this tradition is similar to Ayurveda in that it is based on the five elements which are: earth,

water, fire, air and sky. Madesh & Chitra's explorations of Siddha as well as ancient Ayurvedic literature state that everything on earth including us as humans are formed from these elements. (2018). There is also noticeable commonality between Unani medicine and that of the Siddhars, this is because both utilize the idea of balancing humors within the body. Throughout the Hindu world and its cultural subgroups, the humors are known as Vatha, Pitha and Kapha. Differences in color between these elements assist in the differentiation of disease states and pathologies of the human body. The examination of Vatha, Pitha and Kapha is typically conducted by examining the ailing body part or fluid excretions in relation to eight areas (also known as "astasthan -pariksa" (Madesh & Chitra, 2018)), for either red black, or yellow color changes. Abnormalities to be examined for in these eight areas, and the potential Siddha clinical findings they indicate, consist of the following, as written by Madesh and Chitra:

- ❖ "Na (tongue): black in vatha, yellow or red in pitha, white in Mkapha, ulcerated in anaemia.
- ❖ Varna (color): dark in vatha, yellow or red in pitha, pale in kapha;
- ❖ Svava (voice): normal in vatha, high pitched in pitha, low pitched in kapha, slurred in alcoholism.
- ❖ Kan (eyes): muddy conjunctiva, yellowish or red in pitha, pale in kapha.
- ❖ Sparisam (touch): dry in vatha, warm in pitha, chill in kapha, sweating in different parts of the body.
- ❖ Mala (stool): black stools indicate vatha, yellow pitha, pale in kapha, dark red in ulcer and shiny in terminal illness.
- ❖ Neer (urine): early morning urine is examined; straw color indicates indigestion, reddish yellow excessive heat, rose in blood pressure, saffron color in jaundice" (2018).

It is readily evident when regarding the data provided, that Siddha ideologies highlight



major differences when examined under the lens of allopathic medicine, due in part to the fact that this theory of humors, was dismissed as a viable medical theory several centuries ago. The existence of differing cultural beliefs and values between the predominantly Hinduism based South Asian culture of the Siddha, and that of predominantly Christianity based Western medicine cannot be disregarded as contributing factors to the variations in attitudes towards care.

### **Homeopathic and Natropathic Approaches**

As we continue to discover the different disciplines outlined within this research paper, homeopathy can be regarded as somewhat unique, in comparison to the previous examples of Siddha and Unani. This can be linked to its burgeoning prevalence and increased cross-cultural acceptance. As found in research authored by Aphale, and Sharma, entitled *Whole Medical Systems the Rehabilitation Setting*

(*Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurvedic Medicine, Homeopathy, Naturopathy*) published in 2022, homeopathic medicine is chiefly based upon alleviating the specific symptoms of an ailment. In their research, Aphale and Sharma found that homeopathy can be directly contrasted to allopathy. This relationship can be illustrated by way of delineating the fact that allopathic medicine has its base in unearthing the “causative agents” that led to a particular pathology (2022). Similar to the previously discussed integrative healthcare methods, homeopathy is also indicated by Aphale & Sharma to be derived from plant-based sources as opposed to the chemically synthesized formulas which are saturating the Western pharmaceutical market (2022). In regards to the history of homeopathic medicine, it was conceptualized by Samuel Hahnemann while translating a medical discourse into German. Hahnemann was attempting to prove a theory proposed by William Cullen’s work titled: *A treatise of materia medica*. This book, which is a scientific text, written in 1789 outlined that a

bitter-tasting plant known as Cinchona might cure malaria. This was thought at the time because cinchona caused similar signs when compared to malaria (Apahale & Sharma, 2022). To accomplish this aim, Hahnemann elected to conduct an experiment examining the effects of various substances on patients to determine whether they were successful in mimicking the symptoms of various diseases. In this way, the basis of homeopathy was established.

On a related note, naturopathy is often thought of as simply a tool in the arsenal of homeopathic medicine. In reality, it can be considered a separate entity in and of itself. This is confirmed in the 2019 article, *Unifying Principles of Naturopathic Medicine Origins and Definitions*. Pamela Snider and Jared Zeff state that the practice was founded in the United States as a method of treatment in 1901, by a physician named Benedict Lust MD.. While naturopathy was not at first considered a valid branch of medicine, it grew over time from a single

college to over 8000 licensed naturopathic doctors in the profession as of 2019.

The key principles of naturopathic medicine are: first do no harm, also known in Latin as “primum non nocere”. This principle means that naturopathic providers do not use any techniques or substances that could lead to a harmful outcome. They also choose the path of least intervention when diagnosing or treating patients (Snyder & Zeff, 2019). Other pivotal elements of primum non nocere include the avoidance of masking symptoms, in the belief that that will in turn inhibit healing. This is coupled with respect for the ideology of “medicatrix naturae”. Medicatrix naturae can be defined in English as “the healing power of nature” (Snyder & Zeff, 2019). Naturopaths believe that their purpose is to support, facilitate and strengthen nature’s work by eliminating barriers to better health.

Coupled with those theories described above, naturopathic physicians also subscribe to the assertion that, prevention is to be prioritized over cure. This belief is

characterized by the principle known as “preventare” in Latin or prevention in English. This is notably similar to the foundational ideologies of many of the traditions previously covered in this piece. In naturopathy the main ways in which this is accomplished, constitute living in a healthy environment, treating the patient as a whole “tolle totum” a practice in which treatment is personalized on a case-by-case basis and tailored to the specific ailments exhibited by an individual patient. Of equal importance, is the Latin named principle of “tolle causam”, alternatively known as the finding of causes. Tolle causam indicates that one should as a doctor of naturopathic medicine, be able to discover the root cause of the disease and work with the body to assist recovery, rather than simply eliminating symptoms that the body is believed to be using to allow the doctor in detecting an illness as supported by Snyder & Zeff in 2019. The principle of “Doctor as teacher” also denoted by the Latin word “docere” is also mentioned in the author’s writings, as a foundational belief of naturopathy. Doctors

in the field make a concerted effort to place an emphasis on patients being responsible for their own health. Additionally, they attempt to keep an open line of communication between themselves and their patients. Doing so, aids them in making the most of the physician-patient relationship towards the goal of creating a holistic wellness (Snyder & Zeff, 2019).

### **Yoga as Holistic Medicine**

Another complementary and alternative medical practice that focuses on the well-being of patients in the holistic sense, can be found in yoga. Used as medicine, yoga has been found to positively impact various aspects of both physical and mental health. It is also been found to contribute positively to the overall spiritual wellness of patients as individuals. As outlined in research by Ina Stephens, in an article entitled *medical yoga therapy*, “Medical yoga is defined as the use of yoga practices for the prevention

and treatment of medical conditions.” (2017)

The author expounds upon the usefulness of yoga stating that it has been found to aid in correct postural alignment, improve the strength of the musculoskeletal system, heighten endurance and ameliorate balance. These are just a few of the physical benefits that yoga may provide, depending on the specific situation.

(Stephens, 2017)

Notably yoga can also have healing effects on areas not readily apparent, such as regulating blood glucose levels, supporting the cardiovascular system and providing benefits in a multitude of psychological areas. Examples of these include but are not limited to an increase in alertness, decreased aggression, as well as a marked decrease in the symptoms of depression and other similar disorders. According to Ina Stephens, another beneficial factor of yoga as medicine is that it does not have the associated negative side effects that many medications may cause. Stephens also states that this therapy can be used in

combination with pharmacological treatments, such as antianxiety medications, without concern for interactions. (2017) Yoga is also an indispensable full in the hands of medical practitioners because it can be used in some form while people of all ages, beliefs and activity levels, calming the body without any of the risks sometimes associated with high intensity physiotherapy, common in the West. This is possible because of yoga’s unique and gentle aim towards whole – body harmony (Stephens, 2017).

### **Tibetan Medical Practices, A Chinese Perspective**

Much like yoga and other South Asian based medical systems, Tibetan medicine also focuses on bodily harmony. Similarities can also be drawn between the healing traditions of Tibet and those of the Siddhars, Unani peoples as well as the Hinduism — based Ayurveda among others. Prior to expounding on the similarities, it is best to provide the reader with some foundational information on Tibetan medicine as a topic.

It is important to note that this system of medicine is considered part of a family of Chinese healing traditions, according to Zhou Y et al (2020). Their work called *The Status quo and way forwards on the development of Tibetan medicine and the pharmacological research of tibetan materia Medica*. (2020) indicates that “Tibetan medicine (TM) is the second largest traditional Chinese medicine system in China.” It is also noted that this tradition now possesses a modern educational system with dedicated schools and licensures, similar to the educational framework adopted by Ayurvedic practices in modern day India. This is supported by the fact that the Chinese government financially backs through grants and also provides laws to advance the development of this medical system, not only in the Tibet Autonomous Region, but in the whole of the People’s Republic of China (Zhou Y, et al, 2020)

Research into this matter is immensely important to the country’s government and

its people. This is especially true, when one realizes that there are 9629 medicinal preparations within its pharmacological arsenal, coupled with at least 4000 ancient pieces of literature on the subject, some of which are still being restored through the work of researchers. Between 1997 and 2001, 2000 thesis titles were compiled in *The Bibliographic Index of TM Documents in China* alone. These important research endeavors have been taking place in China since 1979 and is slated to continue for many more years. Through partnerships with 92 Tibetan hospitals, many of the medicinal preparations of this practice are brought to the populace and beyond for use or research, with 40 of them even being covered by the *National Basic Medical Insurance Medicines Catalog* (Zhou Y et al, 2020).

Research has shown, that the application of Tibetan herbal and plant-based medications has been employed to treat a great number diseases and conditions. Examples of those include-to a great extent-digestive issues,

followed in prevalence by circulatory issues and musculoskeletal and/or connective tissue dysfunction along with multiple additional use cases (Zhou Y et al 2020). Should the reader desire more information on a specific use case for Tibetan medicine, a table containing the data can be found in the article cited above.

### **Results and Conclusion**

Throughout the entirety of this project, it has become apparent that medicine such as Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani, as well as the others that have been discussed, possess major differences in how they regard patients and the manifestations of individual diseases. There appears a general consensus among researchers cited, whom have noted that the thought process is primarily that prevention is tantamount to cure. This differs from allopathic or westernized medicine, wherein the primary focus is treatment of issues that arise, frequently by way of chemical means (pharmaceuticals) and/or surgery.

Contrastingly, alternative medicine places great importance on physical conditioning, spiritual wellness, in addition to crucial diet and lifestyle adjustments (Stephens, 2017). While this is beginning to take place, there is much to be done to fully integrate these important facets of holistic wellness into treatment protocols used throughout the United States of America, in addition to the western world at large.

## Limitations

There is a particular emphasis on Ayurvedic medical traditions. Further research is necessary to provide a comprehensive, balanced overview of all included disciplines.

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