

## PARADISE OF WISDOM: INDIAN MEDICAL CONCEPTS IN A PERSIAN ISLAMIC MEDICAL TEXT

### RAJ MUDROSTI: INDIJSKI MEDICINSKI KONCEPTI U PERZIJSKOM ISLAMSKOM MEDICINSKOM TEKSTU

Mahsima Abdoli\*, Kamran Mahlooji\*\*

#### SUMMARY

*Antique traditional medical theories created by old medical doctrines and their historical background have been significantly mentioned today by medical historian scholars. Persia and India had many interactions in different perspectives, such as knowledge, religion, and traditions. One of the most considerable aspects of the relationship between Indians and Persians is the transmission of basic theories of their medical doctrines. As it is reported in many historical texts from the first ages of the Islamic era in Iran, a large number of medical texts were gathered from contiguous civilizations in Iran by order of the Abbasid Caliph. They were then translated into Arabic, Syriac, and Persian. So, Persian physicians and authors used them that way. One of the earlier physicians who reflected the viewpoints of Indian medicine in his famous medical textbook entitled "Paradise of Wisdom" is Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (3rd century A.H./9th century A.D.).*

*Persian physicians in the Islamic golden age (8th to 16th A.D.) played an astonishing role in the development of medical knowledge in several aspects through physician innovations and expression and evaluation of different ideas about medicine. In this regard, some of the In-*

\* Department of History of Medical Sciences, School of Persian Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. ORCID: 0000-0003-3746-774X.

\*\* Department of History of Medical Sciences, School of Persian Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. ORCID: 0000-0001-7699-576X.

*Correspondence Address:* Mahsima Abdoli, Department of History of Medical Sciences, School of Persian Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, No. 67, West Jamali Aalley, Vafamanesh St., Heravi Sq., Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [abdolim@razi.tums.ac.ir](mailto:abdolim@razi.tums.ac.ir)

dian medical theories were expressed by a famous Persian physician, Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari. Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari was a Persian physician of the 3rd century A.H./9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. He wrote the book *Firdous al-Hikmah* (or *Paradise of Wisdom*), the first encyclopedia of Islamic medicine in Iran. The book introduces and describes the basics and therapeutic procedures adopted in Indian medicine, along with procedures of Persian and Greek medical doctrines, by discussing the basic medical theories in these three doctrines. In this paper, we discuss the reflection of traditional Indian medicine as described in *Firdous al-Hikmah* and its influence on later medical texts.

**Keywords:** traditional medicine, Persian medicine, Islamic era, Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari, Indian medicine, Mahaboot

## INTRODUCTION

Medical doctrines grew from ancient times via their specific philosophical and theoretical ideology. Greece, Persia, Egypt, and India may be mentioned as the four most prominent civilizations for their ancient medical schools. Among these four, Persia and India had many common relations because of their geographical and cultural proximities in history, so there is no doubt that the roots of knowledge could subsequently be transferred between these two civilizations (Pouya, 2022).

Specifically, during the Islamic golden age (8-12 A.D.), a significant number of medical texts from Indian and Greek doctrines were transferred to Iran through a translation movement by Abbasid Caliph in Iran (Rababah, 2015). Persian physicians mentioned through their writings some of the foreign medical concepts by translating these texts. One of the pioneers of Persian physicians in the statement of other medical doctrines was Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H./9<sup>th</sup> century A.D). In the following, the perspective of Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (henceforth Tabari) about traditional Indian medicine based on his *Firdous al-Hikmah* book is discussed (Tabari, 2012, p. 528).

## SCHOOL OF TRADITIONAL INDIAN MEDICINE

Indian medical school, or Ayurveda, as one of the most antiquity medical doctrines from about 200 B.C., is based on the Vedic religion, which was common in India for about 3000 years. Ayurveda was basically based on natural medicine, ethnic medical knowledge, and also the concept of balance. According to Traditional Indian medicine, some essential factors are necessary for keeping the body healthful. In this way, there are five essential elements in the universe (Vayu (Air), Jala (Water), Aakash (Space or ether), Prithvi (Earth),

and Teja (Fire)) that can create three humors (Vata dosha, Pitta dosha, and Kapha dosha) for building body. Thus, an appropriate function of organs for maintaining physiological healthiness is related to the balance between five elements. The role of natural therapy is dominant in Ayurveda by using a wide range of herbs to treat diseases(ref). Additionally, in Ayurveda, like other ancient medical schools, there are many specific methods to maintain body health using their ethnic medical culture (Jaiswal & Williams, 2017).

## TABARI AND FIRDOUS AL-HIKMAH

Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari, known as Rabban Tabari in Persian, was a famous Iranian philosopher of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H./9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. who flourished in the golden Islamic era (Ardalan et al., 2015). At that time, Persian physicians were familiar with different medical doctrines such as Greek, Roman, and Indian through the context of their scientific communications in the school of Jondishapour, which was located in the south of Iran (Mahlooji & Abdoli, 2021). Tabari, by accessing the achievements of other medical doctrines, wrote his major work in the medicine Firdous al-Hikmah (Sezgin, 2007, p. 312). In the introduction of the book, edited by Muhammad bin Zobair al-Seddiqi, it is noted that: "Tabari was born in an educated family in the Marv city of Tabarestan province (in northern Iran) between the years 770-780 A.D. During his travels to different countries, Tabari mastered some languages such as Pahlavi, Hebrew, Hindi, Syriac, and Greek. It seems that he started learning the medical profession after traveling to Iraq and began to write the book Firdous al-Hikmah at that time" (Tabari, 2012, p. 30).

Al-Seddiqi also noticed that none of the historians had mentioned anything about the date of Tabari's death (Tabari, 2012, p. 23). Undoubtedly, the date of his death is after the year 850 A.D., given Tabari's claim in Firdous al-Hikmah concerning the completion of the book in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Abbassid Caliph Motevakil (which started in 853 A.D.) (Mahlooji & Abdoli, 2021).

Firdous al-Hikmah is Tabari's most significant work in medicine. It encompasses seven branches of science, 30 articles, and 360 chapters (Usaibae, 1951, p. 379). The special significance of the book lies in its incorporation of Indian medical concepts and principles in a Persian medical source of the Islamic period for the first time.

A corrected version was compiled by al-Seddiqi, the chairman of the Arabic branch of Lucknow University, based on the copy kept in Berlin's library museum and the personal copy of Khawja Kamalodin, using a budget from

the Gib Institution and with the efforts of Edward Brown (Sezgin, 2007, p. 312). The book became famous in different medical communities after it was published in 1928 by the Berlin Sun printing press, named Paradise of Wisdom (Moalemi & Mehrbannejad, 2012) (Figure 1).

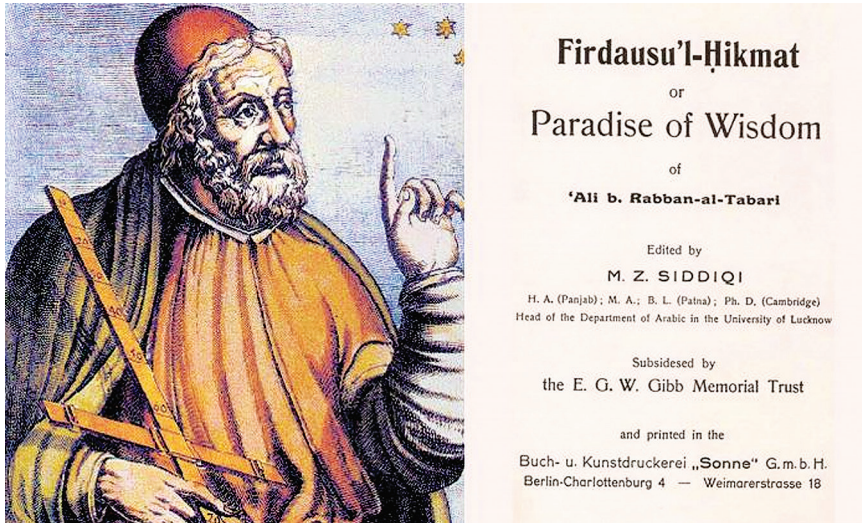


Figure 1: A picture of the “Paradise of Wisdom” book in the Lucknow library in India.

## INDIAN MEDICAL CONCEPTS IN FERDOUS AL-HIKMAH

Tabari (2012, p. 528) allocated parts of the book to explain the basics of the Indian school of medicine. The resources used by him were Sushruta Samhita (by Sushruta around 600 B.C.), Shrek (by Caraka in 200 A.D.), and Nedanah (by Madhanah in 7-8 B.C.) (Sezgin, 2007, p. 312).

There is much debate regarding the extent to which Muslim scholars have been influenced by Indian theories. Franz Romeo Seligmann (an Austrian physician and medical historian, 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) believed that Muslims had no good understanding of Indian medicine, so they generally denied the existence of a school of medicine before the 10<sup>th</sup> century in India and even attributed some Indian proper names to plants of the Sindh region. Muslims believed that Indian medicine was influenced by Greek medicine (Sezgin, 2007, p. 258). However, the correction of Firdous al-Hikmah by al-Siddiqui in 1928 can be regarded as a termination of the two perspectives and recognized as the origin of a change of view on Indian medicine.

Structurally, Tabari arranged his book (Ferdous Al-Hikmah) according to the seven kinds of science involved in medicine. Through the seventh kind, in the fourth chapter entitled “Favorites of Indian books”, he pointed to some medical concepts that conform to Indian medical school sorted into thirty-six parts. The summary of these parts about Indian medical contents, which can be found in Ferdous Al-Hikmah, is listed in Table 1. (Tabari, 2012, pp. 528-562).



Figure 2: A picture showing body types in Ayurveda, cited in [www.nuayurveda.com](http://www.nuayurveda.com).

Table 1. Indian medical concepts in Paradise of Wisdom

Part	Title	Brief Content
1	The stimulus of creating the medicine	When jealousy is settled, greed will follow, pain, thinking, tiredness, domination of each other, fighting, fraud, and lie come forward, and diseases will appear.
2	Subgroups of medical knowledge	Paediatrics, Ophthalmology, cupping, Psychiatry, antidote opium, sexual power, rejuvenation
3	Characteristics of a medicine student	Good-looking, smart, dignified, kind, generous, patient, gentle, tidy, devotee and punctual in studying
4	The appropriate time for treatment and avoiding haste in treatment	Not to treat patients before learning enough about herbal medicine.

5	Creation of humans and animals	Humankind is made of the great and noble bases of soil, water, fire, wind, and air.
6	Creation of Embryo	When three elements (air, illusion, and happiness) gather, sexual desire will increase, the productive cells come out just like the way water flows from the cup and the embryo appears in the uterus.
7	The function of humors and their increasing and decreasing	Importance of Heat, coldness, wind, bile, phlegm, food, fat, brain, and bone marrow in healthiness
8	Maintaining hygiene and efficacy of its maintenance	Ablution, teeth brushing, clean clothes, using perfumes suited to the season, ointment
9	Body exhaust and the harm of curbing them	Urine, stool, wind, sneeze, burp, appetite, desires, favorites, sleep, cough, puke, sexual power, sweat, and nausea
10	The harm of avidity in any kind of food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Dryer foods: weakness, pale and dry</li> <li>– Fat foods: laziness, dullness, anorexia</li> <li>– Cold foods: sloth and overweight</li> <li>– Salty foods: poor eyesight</li> <li>– Hot and sour foods: premature aging</li> </ul>
11	Water	<p>Drink rivulet purified, not too much warm or cold water.</p> <p>Do not drink cold water while having liver problems, dropsy, and jaundice.</p> <p>Drinking cold water fasting causes slimming and stomach heat and after a meal can cause obesity and increased phlegm.</p>
12	Tastes and foods	<p>There are six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, hot, bitter, and acerb. The most beneficial is sweet.</p> <p>Foods must be compatible with the region.</p>
13	Feeding and what must be done before and after it	<p>Starters must be low-calorie foods.</p> <p>Avoid eating unfamiliar foods.</p> <p>Fatty, light, and warm foods are better.</p> <p>Not to eat too fast or too slow.</p>
14	Which drink after each food must be drunk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– After hunting meat: date, raisins, or honey wine</li> <li>– After the chicken and quail meat: fig wine</li> <li>– After pork and caw meat: sugar, rice, honey wine</li> </ul>

15	Drink	Drinking wine causes a relaxed mind and happiness by widening the veins and deflating coldness and asthenia.
16	Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cow milk: most beneficial</li> <li>– Goat milk: for treating tuberculosis, old fever, and diarrhoea</li> <li>– Camel milk: Appetizer and arousal of sexual power, for treating haemorrhoid, dropsy, and carbuncle</li> <li>– Ewe milk: the hottest milk, not desirable</li> <li>– Elephant milk: body powerful, reducing wind pains</li> </ul>
17	Planning for the seasons of the year	Freezing cold winter, very hot summer, mediocre (neither hot nor cold) spring, and medial in dryness fall are useful for healthiness; otherwise, diseases will rise.
18	Some advice from their books	It is better for thinkers to treat as beneficial manners for the world and hereafter.
19	Causes of disease	Seven causes: genetic, congenital, psychic, fatigue or dread, revealed, and old age.
20	Kinds of disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Simple curing</li> <li>– Hard curing</li> <li>– Manageable</li> <li>– Incurable diseases.</li> </ul>
21	Methods for diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Examination</li> <li>– Hand rubbing</li> <li>– Query</li> </ul>
22	Factors of diseases, time of their flaring up, reasons of wind generation in the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Repositioning of wind</li> <li>– Increasing phlegm</li> <li>– Increasing bile</li> </ul>
23	What creates humors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increasing wind</li> <li>– Increasing phlegm</li> <li>– Increasing blood</li> </ul>
24	Kinds of treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Relaxation</li> <li>– Psychotherapy</li> </ul>
25	Hiccough	Treat by the bone of domestic animals and hedgehog's thorn
26	Cough and its signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cough of wind: dryness of chest and headache</li> <li>– Cough of bile: bitter taste, yellow eyes, saliva, dizziness, and delusion</li> </ul>

		– Cough of phlegm: headache, asthenia, and fullness of chest
27	Thirst	The factor of thirst must be recognized to avoid blocking orifices by phlegm
28	Diarrhea and tuberculosis and their signs	– Diarrhea: body weakness, the sting in the navel and abdomen – Tuberculosis: dreaming of crow, abscess, and wound on bk
29	Fevers and their signs	Fevers of wind, bile, phlegm, fatigue, sadness, fear, admiration, frustration, magic, the curse of parents and their signs
30	Treatment of fevers	Some ways for treating the above kinds of fever such as foods, smelling, ointment, vomiting
31	Bleeding and bleeding	– Tying cold and dry drugs (foam of sea) – Burning bleeding wounds
32	Signs of longevity and short life and what depends on disease	– Signs of longevity: soft slime hair, prominent forehead, rosy lips, good teeth with long fingers medial neck – Signs of short life: changing manners and features
33	Harassing people souls	Winds can combine with people and overcome them.
34	Laxative, emetic, and febrifuge drugs	– Method of making “Maki drug” for fever – Method of making a laxative drug (bile patients)
35	Taken from an Indian woman’s book on facial cleansing and treating cervix	– Three kinds of drugs for rejuvenation of the uterus – Four kinds of drugs for uterine weakness – Pregnancy medicine – Twin birth medicine – Skin rejuvenation and lightener
36	Compound medicine and methods of making	– Leprosy drug – Barham Rasaeni drug (a rejuvenation drug) – Salajit drug (a rejuvenation drug) – Molten steel – Burned silver – Burned gold – Purification of Salaje – Mahdiana drug (an invigorating drug)



## CONCLUSION

The translation movement, which occurred in the Islamic era in Iran (8-9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), prepared a conducive field for the entry of many other adjacent pieces of knowledge into Iran. In contrast, medicine, among other pieces of knowledge, obtained a striking position because of the large number of texts and translations to Arabic at that time. So, Persian medicine and Greek and Indian medicine doctrines affected each other philosophically and theoretically. Although chronologically, we can find the basic concepts of medicine in older doctrines, such as Persia and India, each civilization has a specific characteristic according to its epistemological point of view.

As it is mentioned above, Traditional Indian medicine had a specific thought about five essential elements and three humors in combination body. Although in that time, the theory of four elements and four humors was used by Persians and Greek philosophers. However, in other medical concepts, such as herbal therapies and signs of diseases and treatment, many similarities can be found between traditional Persian and Indian medicine. Accordingly, Indian herbal medicine, which was used in some of the more recent Persian books in the Safavid era (18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), had been mentioned in the early Islamic era by Persian physicians such as Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H./9<sup>th</sup> century A.D).

The book Ferdous Al-Hikmah, an old book in Islamic Persia with a comprehensive and independent part about Indian medicine by reporting different aspects of this medical school, such as introducing many diseases by their signs, treatment of diseases, foods and drinks, hygiene and maintaining health, water and air, essential elements, humors, and herbal medicine, has a striking role in the entire Indian medicine in the Persian Islamic medical texts which had been performed by Tabari. Thus, later Islamic physicians could more easily access and use viewpoints and therapeutic procedures of traditional Indian medicine.

## References

1. Ardalan, M., Khodadoust, K. & Mostafidi, E. (2015). A Review of Ferdous ai-Hekma fi al-Tib by Ali ibn Raban Tabari. *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine*, 8(7), 1-6.
2. Jaiswal, Y. S. & Williams, L. L. (2017). A glimpse of Ayurveda - The forgotten history and principles of Indian traditional medicine. *Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine*, 7, 50-53.

3. Mahlooji, K. & Abdoli, M. (2021). The Report of Ali ibn Sahl Rabban Tabari about Jondishapour hospital in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. *Journal of Research on History of Medicine*, 10(3), 199-202.
4. Moalemi, M. & Mehrbannejad, A. (2012). The Role of Tabarist Scientists and the Scientific Environment in the Transmission of Sassanid Knowledge to Islamic Civilization. *The History of Islamic Culture and Civilization*, 3(9), 61-90.
5. Pouya, H.K. (2022). Indian Medicine and Iranian's Role in Its Transition to the Islamic Era. *Journal of Subcontinent Researches*, 14(42), 281-308. 10.22111/JSR.2020.24753.1760
6. Rababah, D. H. A. (2015). The Translation Movement in the Arab World: From the Pre-Islamic Era Until the end of Umayyad Dynasty (Before 610-750 A. D.). *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 3(3), 122-131. 10.11648/j.ijll.20150303.13.
7. Sezgin, F. (2007). *History of Arabic Literature*. Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance.
8. Tabari, A. R. (2012). *Firdous al-Hikmah fi al-tib*. Tehran: Traditional Medicine and Mataria Medica Research center of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences.
9. Usaibae, I. A. (1330). *Oyun al-Abna fi Tabaghat al-Ateba*. Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Elmiah.

## SAŽETAK

*Antičke tradicionalne medicinske teorije koje su nastale na temelju starih medicinskih doktrina i njihovu povijesnu pozadinu danas značajno spominju znanstvenici koji proučavaju povijest medicine. Perzija i Indija imale su mnoge interakcije u različitim perspektivama kao što su znanje, religija i tradicija. Jedan od najznačajnijih aspekata u odnosu između Indijaca i Perzijanaca jest prijenos temeljnih teorija njihovih medicinskih doktrina. Kao što je navedeno u mnogim povijesnim tekstovima iz prvih razdoblja islamske ere u Iranu, velik broj medicinskih tekstova prikupljen je iz susjednih civilizacija u Iranu po nalogu abasidskog kalifa. Tekstovi su zatim prevedeni na arapski, sirijski i perzijski pa su se njima koristili perzijski liječnici i pisci. Perzijski su liječnici tijekom zlatnog doba islama (8. – 16. st.) imali zadivljujuću ulogu u razvoju medicinskog znanja u nekoliko aspekata preko liječničkih inovacija i izražavanjem i vrednovanjem različitih ideja o medicini. Neke od indijskih medicinskih teorija iznio je poznati perzijski liječnik Ali ibn Sahl Rabbanal-Tabari koji je djelovao u 3. stoljeću po Hidžri/9. st. Napisao je knjigu Firdousal-Hikmah (Raj mudrosti), koja je prva enciklopedija islamske medicine u Iranu. Knjiga opisuje osnove i terapijske postupke usvojene u indijskoj medicini, zajedno s postupcima perzijske i grčke medicinske doktrine, raspravljajući o temeljnim medicinskim teorijama u te tri doktrine. U ovom radu raspravljamo o odrazu tradicionalne indijske medicine kako je opisana u Firdousal-Hikmahu i njezinom utjecaju na kasnije medicinske tekstove.*

**Ključne riječi:** *tradicionalna medicina, perzijska medicina, islamsko doba, Ali ibn Sahl Rabbanal-Tabari, indijska medicina, Mahaboot*