



ĀYURVEDA - Traditional Indian Medicine

The term *Āyurveda*, ("science-knowledge of life"), refers to one of the main *Upaveda* collections (a series of treatises that complete the sacred science contained in the *Vedas*) and at the same time defines more generally the Indian medical 'system', which consists of a body of knowledge, doctrines and practices rooted in the classical philosophical tradition and aimed at the protection and promotion of 'health' and 'quality' of life, which consider the human being in his complexity as union of body and spirit, mind and emotions, individual constitution and universal essence.

In both the theory and practice of *Āyurveda*, the well-being of an individual cannot be separated from the health of the entire universe.

Every man is a microcosm in which every aspect (material, constitutive and absolute) of the macrocosm is represented. One's tranquillity or unrest, and his health or illness, all depend on the harmony and balance which permeate the 'inner self' and its relationships with the external environment.

And at the same time, any kind of activity that the human being undertake using his body or his mind, his health or illness, the harmony or disharmony that can be find in his mind and his body, all this has a direct influence on the environment, on the structure and the harmony of the entire universe.

According to *Hindū* mythology, *Āyurveda* is a divine knowledge that was not originally destined to human beings. It was revealed by *Brahmā*, source and first outcome of universal creation, to *Prajāpati*, father and lord of creatures; he then passed it down to the divine twins *Aśvin*, light of the day and the night, who in turn communicated it to *Indra*, king of the gods.

The later transmission of 'knowledge' from the king of the gods to humankind shapes the genealogy of the development and direction of the various schools.

The fundamental texts of the Classic tradition are the *Caraka Saṃhitā* (2nd century), which describes the philosophical principles of the medicine using the doctrine of *Sāṃkhya* and *Vaiśeṣika*, the treaty written by *Suśruta* (*Suśrutasaṃhitā* – from the 4th to the 6th century), who especially dealt with surgery, and the treatises by *Vāgbhaṭa* (*Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* and *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* – 7th century), who harmonized the teaching of his predecessors.

According to the traditional view, everything may contribute to determining the condition of health, from vegetal, animal and mineral pharmacopoeia to the use of emotions and thought, from nutrition to fasting, from massages to body techniques, from the right mental predisposition to an awareness path.

The physiological and psychological processes in individuals are regulated by three main qualities called *doṣa* ('what generates decay - interrupts the rhythm') which pervades the body and determines the type of individual constitution.

The *tridoṣa* (*vāta*, *pitta*, *kapha*) are in constant interrelation and must cooperate in order for the state of health to be maintained.

Movement, metabolism, and stability contribute to the maintenance of a healthy organism. Excess production and imbalance give rise to illness.

The eight main branch (*aṣṭāṅga*) of *Āyurveda* are: internal medicine, surgery, treatment of the diseases of the head and neck, toxicology, pediatrics, mental disorders and demonology, rejuvenation therapy, aphrodisiac treatment.

There are five families or fundamental categories of therapies aiming to maintain a constant balance between body and mind and they also play an important role in the case of illness: personal hygiene, diet control, use of various medicines, *pañcakarman* (which consists of complex purifying practices), *yoga* and Ayurvedic massage.

The best cure is considered to be the one that proceeds gradually, respecting the rhythms of the patient's body and mind, and which may function as preventive medicine.

Āyurveda

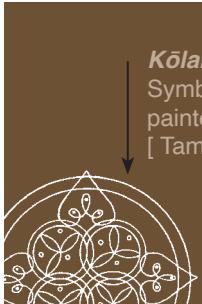
[in *dēvanāgarī* script]

Brahmā

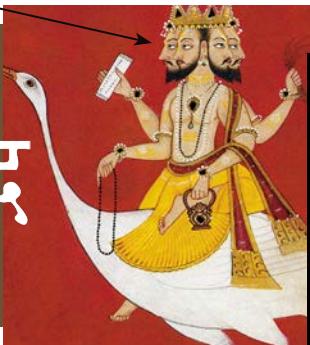
Source and original fruit of universal creation.
According to *Hindū* mythology, the divine knowledge of Āyurveda, originally not intended for human beings, is revealed by *Brahmā* to *Prajāpati*, father and lord of creatures
[India • *rājpūt* painting • *Pahārī Mānkot* • ca. 1720]

Kōlam

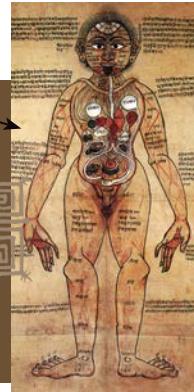
Symbolic diagram painted on the ground
[Tamil Nadu]



आयुर्वेद



Anatomical painting with annotations of medical nature in Sanskrit
[Indo-Nepalese area • XIX cent. • graphic rep]



Padma (lotus flower)
From the balustrade of *Stūpa* no. 2 at *Sāñcī*
[India • I cent. BCE]

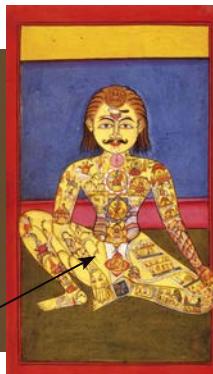


Tridosha (the three *dosā*: *vata*, *pitta* e *khapha*)
[in *dēvanāgarī* script]

प्राण

Prāṇa (vital breath)
[in *dēvanāgarī* script]

त्रिदोष



Text of traditional medicine (āyurveda) on palm leaves
Telugu script (derived from the *Brahmi* form, used in the south-central regions of India)
[India • XVIII cent. • engraved palm leaves]

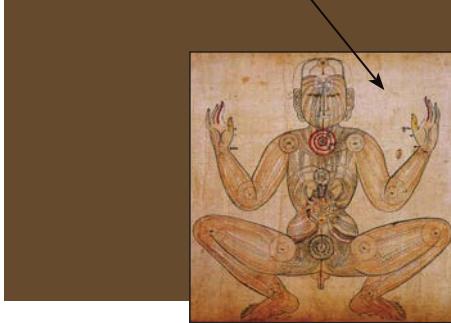
The human body as microcosm
and metaphor of the path of spiritual quest.
Describe the attainment of *Yoga* as a cosmic figure representing the universe.
[India • XIX cent. • graphic rep]



Cikitsāsārasaṅgraha
Series of folios from one of the oldest known manuscripts of the 11th-century medical treatise, also known as *Varīgasena samhitā* after the name of its author.

Presents notions and fundamental principles of Āyurveda, diseases, treatments, diagnostic methods and therapeutic prescriptions.
[India • XIII cent. • graphic rep]

Representation of the *cakra* (vital points) of the 12 junctions and 12 channels in relation to the 12 months of the zodiac.
[India • XIX cent. • graphic rep]



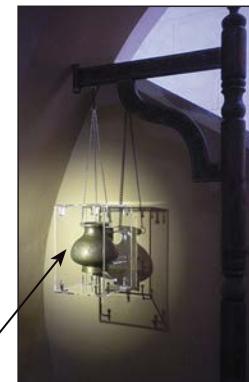
The macrocosm symbolically converges within the human body.
Representation used for the practice of meditation
[India, Bihar • XIX cent. • graphic rep]



Spice container
[India • XX cent. • wood]



Diagram in the form of *Svastikā*
Solar symbol and of the movement of the stars



Ritual vessel for collecting water
used in daily ablutions and in Ayurvedic therapeutic practices.
[India • XIX cent. • brass]

Mortar
used for the preparation of Ayurvedic compounds
[India • XIX cent. • brass]



Lotā
Spouted pouring vessel used in Ayurvedic therapeutic practices
[India • XIX cent. • bronze]



Aripan
Symbolic diagram dedicated to Viṣṇu
Traditionally created by women during ceremonial occasions, preparing the ground with mud and cow dung and drawing with rice powder or paste
[Mithila Art • Bihar]

Vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala
From the *Vāstu sāstra* ('Science of construction').
Yantra representing the harmony of the universe as an architectural structure that incorporates the cosmic man *puruṣa* and universal forces.
[India • III/VI cent. • graphic rep]

Wooden measure
[India • XIX cent.]
with roots of *Sarpagandhā*
(*Rauvolfia Serpentina*, *Apocynaceae* family)
Used for the treatment of hypertension, insomnia, epilepsy, corneal opacity
(parts used: leaves and roots).