

THE IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE ON IRANIAN CUISINE INGREDIENTS

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ABSTRACT

In far past, Iranian cuisines and traditional medicine were linked together; thus practitioners mentioned the name of many different cuisines along with their benefits and risks in their books and looked up on them from medical point of view. Ancient practitioners used to give recommendations mostly on adding additives in the ingredients of cuisine so that people could get more benefit and less harm of whatever they ate. Those recommendations gradually spread to community and gained people's attention, in a way that still the effect of traditional medicine is evident in many Iranian cuisines. The present paper reviews and investigates the impact of traditional medicine on the ingredients of Iranian cuisines by providing some samples of Iranian's modern eating habits.

Keywords: Iranian cuisines, Traditional Medicine, Advantages, Disadvantages, Chelo- Kabab, Khoresh-t-e Bademjan (Persian Eggplant Stew)

INTRODUCTION

There was an interminable relationship between cuisines and medical science, since cuisine was an important factor affecting the health of human beings and also cuisine treatment was one of the main methods of treating in those times. While turning the pages of ancient medical books, written by Iranians in-post Islamic period, many cuisines' names are encountered which undoubtedly date back to the pre-Islamic era. In these books beside the cuisines which had only medical aspects and were specific for sick people, the ones which commonly used by the community of those days can also be found; in a way that after describing diseases, practitioners have determined beneficial and harmful cuisines and prescribed certain ones to speed healing, strengthening and even curing the patients. Sometimes changes were made on ingredients in order to have an appropriate cuisine with the patient's mood, thus patient could get more benefits from it. Practitioners have also tried to keep the health state of community in a high level, to achieve this aim they have mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of the cuisines along with successive advices in order to make them appropriate for all kind of tastes and to reduce their harms as much as possible.

Those above mentioned factors have led to a large number of cuisines in medical books, even many practitioners have mentioned the name of different breads, āshs, stews, foods [Ghalieh¹], pickles, jams, sweets independently along with their ingredients and cooking methods. Therefore the books of Iranian traditional medicine are the most important resources to get information about the background or history of Persian cuisines. If there were no books, it was impossible to know the nature of many Iranian cuisines which have

¹ Ghalieh: this cuisine is almost like other Ardineh āshs which are cooked by flour in which red-meat was chopped and then fried in the lamb tail fat, finally the required amount of water, boiled peas, onions and spices such as saffron, cinnamon, cumin and coriander were added (Seyed Almasi and Farshbafiyansafi, 2013).

been lost over the time or the ones which people are not even acquainted with their names. On the other hand by studying Iranian- ancient Islamic medical books it can be understood that the opinions of Iranian practitioners were effective in formation of cuisines and the combination of their ingredients, although a number of cuisines have been abolished in the course of history but still in many of them the footprint of traditional medicine is remained.

Therefore investigation on the influence of traditional medicine in Iranian cuisines' ingredients is crucial both in terms of traditional medicine and cultural studies and given that, such a research has not been carried out independently until today, this paper is going to cover this issue.

As a result of this research, the importance of traditional medicine as one of the factors involved in the formation of Iranian cuisines and the way in which practitioners interfered in ingredients of Iranian cuisines become more evident.

In this study, at first, some of the most famous books on Iranian traditional medicine of different ages have been cited; then some of the historical and cultural resources associated with this paper have been used and for further clarification of the issue some examples of everyday life were also given.

THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE IN IRAN

Before starting the main issue, medical history of Iran is briefly reviewed:

The medical history of Iran started after the migration of Arian tribes. Certainly the emergence of Zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Iran, had an impact on medicine boom, since visiting practitioners and pain treatment were among the teachings of Zoroaster (Najmabadi 2013, 92-93).

In Achaemenids era, Iranian practitioners gained information from neighboring countries such as Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks and Asia Minor Nations and in Achaemenids' court except Iranian practitioners, Egyptian and Greek ones were also there (190), all these events led to the combination of Iranian medicine with Greek and Egyptian ones .

Alexander's invasion to Iran also led to the more prevalence of Greek medicine in Iran (216) after Alexander's death, his conquered countries were divided between his commanders and Iran was given to Selucos Nicator. Since the successors (Seleucids) of this General were pro-Greek civilization ones, flourished Greek medicine in Iran (221 and 223) then Parthian (Arsacids) overpowered Seleucids and their heritage transferred to the Parthian (226-225) thus, Parthian's Medicine was a set of Greek medicine accompanied by Zoroastrians' medicine and Achaemenid civilization (226).

In the Sassanid era, the school and hospital of "Jundishapur" was founded in Jundishapur city the great scientific and medical center of that period. The great school of Jundishapur did not lose its dignity before and after the advents of Islam and trained many practitioners until Baghdad became the scientific center of that time (2nd and 3rd AH) and the caliphs of Baghdad invited Iranian practitioners from Jundishapur to Baghdad (299 and 387)

Medicine and medical made great progress In Islamic civilization and medical directives of the Qur'an and guidelines of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) (Najmabadi 2013, 379-385 and Gilani 2009, 99 and 108) and the twelve Imams, especially Imam Sadiq (AS) and Imam Reza (AS) have been very effective in this development (Khalili 1991; Gilani 2009, 107 and 102). Persians were great scholars of Islamic medicine, but besides Iranians who were practitioners and trainees of Jundishapur school, Nestorians, Sabians, Harranians and Jews have also

affected Islamic medicine by translating Greek or Syriac books, authoring books and practicing (Najmabadi 2013: ,300-299)

What is certain is that, Islamic physicians studied and used the votes of Hippocrates and Galen and personally criticized them, in which the share of Iranian physicians was unique and this period is known as authorship period (302) thus the medical history in post- Islamic Iran was mixed with Islamic medicine (299-300)

In third to six (AD) centuries Persian practitioners compiled valuable books including Alhavy by Zakariya al-Razi (early 4th century) *Canon* by Ibn Sīnā (late 4th and early 5th century) and *Abnia- an Haqiqhe al-Adwiya* by Abu. Mansur Movafagh Ibn Ali Heravi (early 5th century) (Safa, 1995a: 78-79 and 146) and *Zakhire Kharazmshahi* by Ismail Jurjani (early 6th century) (Najmabadi 2013,796 and Jurjani 2003, Introduction) During the Mongol and Timurid Empires in Iran (7th to 9th centuries) several books were written on medical and pharmaceutical fields and also writing captions for authentic medical books of previous periods, especially Canon, was common in those periods. (Safa1995b, 76 and 1995c, 53)

In the Safavid era (10th-13th centuries) some books were published in Iran and India in Persian among them *Makhzan al-adviyah* by Mohammad Hossein Aghili Alavi (late12th and early13th centuries) was one the most important books of that period. Another famous book of that period was *Tohfa -tul- Momineen* written by Hakim Moemen the personal physician of Shah Soleiman Safavi, about introducing drugs by using old sources (Safa 1995d, 147)

Many treatises and books were also written in Qajar period and Hefza-al Seha (13th century) was one of them, this book was written by the order of Naseeruddin Shah by Malek ol Atteba Gilani one of his specific physicians. (Gilani 1388, Introduction)

After the foundation of the Dar ol-Fonun² (1268 AD) Pollock, Austrian physician was invited to Tehran to teach medicine; Pollock, Dutchman Shelimer and Berlinan Albo wrote books and treatise on medicine, finally Dar ol-Fonun trained intellectuals who began translating and writing books, according to the new scientific methods, there by the modern medicine came to Iran. (Aryanpour1993, 254-256)

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practitioners in the past had two major responsibilities: keeping the health of healthy people and trying to return the health of sick ones (Akhoyni 1965, 17), and since the relationship between correct nutrition and health of people was proven thus more attention was paid on foods from medical perspective which led to the most famous Islamic Iranian Medicine books on proper eating habits; some of the medical recommendations are as follows:

Moderation in eating, avoid doing strenuous activities after eating, inactivity, eating when hungry, avoid salty foods, eat less sweets, observing the sequences of the meal, observing temperament, age and stomach condition, taking small morsels of foods and chew slowly up, not to eat the food too slowly or fast, stop eating before feeling full. (Gilani 2009, 108-109; Aghili Alavi 2009, 45-46 and Jurjani 2003, 44-46)

Iranian practitioners in order to keep the health of people at high level tried to look upon whatever they used to eat from the medical perspective thus mentioned the various types of meats, diaries, dried and fresh fruits, vegetables, spices, breads, āshs, stews, Ghaliehs, pickles, jams, sweets independently along with their benefits, harms and way of reducing their harms, ingredients and cooking methods in their books.

² Dar ol-Fonun is a school which was founded in Naser al-Din shah period by Amir Kabir and its style was like European high schools.

Probably cause of the existence of these recipes in traditional medicine books was the necessity of next generation practitioners' acquaintance with them; since in order to get the better results in curing they were required to be aware of the quality and quantity of food that people ate.

like French Toulouse, the practitioner of the court of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1934-1885), who asked Mirza 'Ali Akbar Khan Ashpaz Bashi to write a treatise about the ingredients, way of mixing and cooking the ordinary cuisines of that period in order to adopt his way of curing with Iranian traditions and get better results, thus *Sufra -yi At'ima* was written in 13th century which is one of the main resources for the history of cuisines in Qajar period and contains the names of kitchenware and cooking terms and gives full information about what was eaten by Naser al-Din Shah (Ashpaz Bashi 1974, introduction).

Investigating the Iranian famous and important traditional medicine books suggests that old practitioners tried to find ways so that people get more benefit and less harm of whatever they ate, they thought these solutions through medical advices and guidelines and over the time these advices and guidelines took place in the habits and cultures of Iranian in a way that still some of them are stable.

One of the most important measures of practitioners was about doing reforms on ordinary cuisines of that period which mostly were in the form of suggestions about adding some spices, herbs and condiments in ingredients.

Below are the examples of effects of ancient practitioners' opinions on ingredients of Iranian cuisines: spices were used in preparing dishes by Iranians since ancient times and the benefits of using spices in medical books are mentioned as it follows; eliminate the bad odor of dish and make it aromatic, make it easy to digest, food flavoring, mild its temperament, etc. (Aghili 2009, 115; Gilani 2009, 255-254)

The Number of spices was important, but from the practitioners' point of view the most important ones which modified all kind of tastes were salt, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, pepper, cumin, saffron, Golpar (Persian Hogweed) and ginger (Gilani 2009, 255). Therefore, the use of various spices in Iranian cuisines is derived from old practitioners' recommendations, for instance, adding Golpar to the cooked broad beans while eating which is still routine rooted in traditional medicine and was recommended by Ancient practitioners since broad bean is flatulent and Golpar has anti-flatulence properties (Gilani 2009, 251; Aghili 2009, 206 and Heravi 1967, 41).

According to practitioners' recommendations adding cinnamon to heavy dishes was typical; since as it was written in traditional medicine, cinnamon makes dishes ready for digestion and strengthen the stomach; specially adding cinnamon to some thick dishes e.g. *Harisseh* (Haleem)³ was recommended (Jurjani 2003, 60 and Gilani 2009, 255). Nowadays the ones who sales *Harisseh* especially in Tehran sprinkle some cinnamon powder on it as well.

Also from traditional medicine point of view eating dairy products along with mint was used for eliminating the side- effects of dairy products on nerves; thus mint leaves was dried and powdered or its distillate was added in to the Doogh or it was eaten as an vegetable along with cheese (Gilani 2009, 248) still the mint powder is added to the Doogh or it is sprinkled on the yogurt or mostly is eaten with chesses along with other leaf vegetables e.g. parsley, cress, wild leek, etc.

³ *Harisseh* (Haleem) is a kind of dish which is made of smashed sheep or chicken meat along with cooked and smashed barley which is decorated with cinnamon powder, hot oil and sugar (Montazami 1982, 490 for more information about the different types of Haleem refer to (Ashpaz Bashi 1974, 35- 40) (Afshar 1981, 93 and 250)

Adding onion to the meat and beans is another recommendation of the ancient practitioners; they believed that onion eliminates the toxic and bad smell of the meat and beans, and gives it a much better flavor (Aghili 2009, 221; Gilani 2009, 251) and this is why Iranians used and still using onion in meaty dishes either in boiled or roasted forms (See old culinary treatises such as *Karnameh* (record) and *Made Hayat* by Afshar (1981); *Sofreh Atamah* by Ashpazbashi (1974) and modern culinary books such as *Culinary Arts* by Montazami (1982).

Also the use of garlic in many dishes due to its numerous benefits was recommended by practitioners (Heravi 1967, 85), in traditional medicine books cooking eggplant with oil, meat and vinegar is emphasized (Gilani 2009, 249; Moshajarat Aghziyeh* 1922, 75). Nowadays the main ingredients of *Khoresht-e Bademjan* (Persian Eggplant Stew)⁴ are oil, eggplant, meat and vinegar.

Ancient practitioners believed that adding vinegar to the dishes can make them light and also can remove the bile or gall which is produced by the liver (Heravi 1967, 126), therefore the presence of vinegar in most of the Iranian dishes has a medical reason. *Shir-berenj*⁵ (rice milk) is one of the old dishes which was favored by practitioners (291) because they believed that the combination of rice and milk, makes it a mild food and in order to have much energy people should eat it with honey or sugar (Gilani 2009, 270); today this mild dish is prepared for the sick people or for breaking fast during Ramadan by Iranians which is usually served with jam and *Doshab* (extract of grape). It was one of the votive foods in Qajar era (Ashpazbashi 1974, 79).

Chelo- Kabab is one of the most popular meals in Iran and the *Chelo- Kababs* of Tabriz are well known. NaderMirza the prince of Qajar along with recording his observations of Tabriz in 12th century, also wrote about this food: " *Chelo- Kabab* is cooked in the bazaar of Tabriz and it is clean and the people of Tabriz like it, they take their friends to the places where the *Chelo* is cooked and sold, it is usually eaten with cotton candy and *Sekanjabin*⁶. *Chelo* is cooked well, the fresh butter is put under the rice, *Kabak Barg*⁷, pepper and sumac powders are sprinkled above it."(NaderMirza 1981, 220 -219) therefore, *Chelo- Kabab* is the combination of cooked rice in the forms of grains which is mixed with fresh butter while eating and Sumac powder is sprinkled on it; *Chelo* is eaten with *Kabāb-e Barg* or *koobideh*⁸ and as it was mentioned by Nader Mirza, after eating this food some sweet things are consumed.

Eating this dish along with butter, sumac powder and *Doogh* has medical reason since they believed that adding butter to the *Chelo* can increase the energy of the rice (Jurjani 2003, 49). Also eating *Chelo* with fresh *Doogh* and sumac powder is good for lowering the body heat and thirst (Aghili 2009, 133) and due to the cool temperament of rice in many medical books

⁴ First meat is cooked with onion and water then salt paper and tomato paste is added. Eggplants are pilled and fried in the oil then added to the baked meat which has about one glass water to be cooked together but not smashed finally vinegar or lemon juice is added to dish (Montazami 1982, 586).

⁵ In far past it was called *Shriba* (ash of the milk), rice was cooked with some water until it became soft then milk was added and the combination of milk and rice was cooked until it thickened now days when it is cooked rose water is added to give a good odor then it is poured in the bowls and served with sugar, jam and *Doshab* (Montazami1982, 635; Ashpaz Bashi1974, 41)

⁶ It is the mixture of boiled and thickened sugar syrup and vinegar (Ashpaz Bashi 1974,4)

⁷ *Kabāb-e Barg* (Lamb Fillet Kebab) is a Persian style barbecued lamb or beef kebab dish. The main ingredients of *Kabab-e Barg* are fillets of beef tenderloin, lamb shank, onions and olive oil. The meat is cut in strips and given a marinade in olive oil, onions, garlic, saffron, salt and black pepper. It is then skewered and grilled. Tomatoes are grilled on separate skewers. It is usually served with rice or bread, sometimes seasoned with sumac (Montazami1982, 525).

⁸ *Kabab koobideh* is an Iranian minced meat kabab which is made from ground lamb or beef, often mixed with parsley and chopped onions and put some on the skewer and cook on the fire (528).

it is emphasized that in order to eliminate its disadvantages some sweet things should be eaten after that since sweet things have warm temperament(Jurjani 2003,50).

CONCLUSION

In Iranian traditional medical due to the healing and health keeping properties of dishes much attention was paid on them , thus Iranian practitioners gave some recommendations about Iranian dishes and their suggestions effected the Iranian's habits and cultures. Undoubtedly, the role of practitioners and medical science in transferring the cuisines from one nation to the other was evident and in Abassid period the focus was on the Iranian cooking (Afshar1981, 20) thus the practitioners of Jundishapur School had a significant role in transferring Iranian cuisines to Baghdad and maybe even some of the recipes of Iranian traditional cuisines are invented by Islamic- Iranian medical practitioners e.g. the Abkameh (Morri) is attributed to Kaldaniyon practitioners.

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APPENDIX



Note: The above picture belongs to the manuscript book of Moshajarat Aghziyeh (tree diagram of dishes) which is kept in the parliament library of Iran. The first vertical row is dedicated to the names of Ashes and in horizontal rows the best things for food ingredient are offered then the nature, benefits, side-effects and how to eliminate the side-effects of the ash are mentioned, in left page the way of their cooking style and ingredients are mentioned briefly.