

THE EVOLUTION OF HOSPITALS IN INDIA: FROM RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS TO MODERN HEALTHCARE CENTRES

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17141945>

Abstract. India has long held a significant place in history as a cradle of science, art, and culture, serving as a center of civilization for the peoples of the world. Moreover, the peoples living in this land achieved remarkable advancements in medicine from ancient times and continued to develop their medical systems over centuries. This article will discuss the history of hospitals, which hold an unparalleled position in India's medical system.

Key words: Hospitals, Medicine, Civilization, Religious Institutions, Modern Healthcare, Ayurveda, India.

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ БОЛЬНИЦ В ИНДИИ: ОТ РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ УЧРЕЖДЕНИЙ ДО СОВРЕМЕННЫХ МЕДИЦИНСКИХ ЦЕНТРОВ

Аннотация. Индия издавна занимала важное место в истории как колыбель науки, искусства и культуры, являясь центром цивилизации для народов мира. Более того, народы, населявшие эту землю, достигли выдающихся успехов в медицине с древних времён и продолжали развивать свои медицинские системы на протяжении веков. В данной статье рассматривается история больниц, занимающих уникальное положение в медицинской системе Индии.

Ключевые слова: Больницы, Медицина, Цивилизация, Религиозные учреждения, Современное здравоохранение, Аюрведа, Индия.

Introduction

Medicine, as an important field of human activity, emerged earlier than many other aspects of society. For example, primitive people, even before learning how to build shelters, sew clothing, or cook food, had already discovered ways to treat certain illnesses. This was necessitated by the harsh living conditions they faced. Their environment was extremely challenging and demanding. Living without proper homes, half-naked in forests, and often hungry, primitive people endured numerous hardships. As a result, they were frequently afflicted by various diseases and sustained injuries in encounters with wild animals. Naturally, in such circumstances, people sought ways to recover from illnesses and heal their wounds, leading to the development of the earliest rudimentary treatment methods. The great Hippocrates once wrote about this, stating: "Life itself compelled people to search for the art of medicine."

As humanity reached higher stages of development, significant advancements were also made in the field of medicine. One of the key centers of civilization that contributed to the creation of a new system of medical knowledge was India. India's role in the advancement of medicine and healthcare is unparalleled. Sources such as the texts *Ayurveda*, *Siddha*, and *Unani* provide evidence of the long-standing existence of traditional Indian medical systems [1].

These texts discuss the structure of the human body, its nature, health maintenance, disease diagnosis, and treatment methods. It is well known that medical institutions, which we now refer to as hospitals, have existed in various forms and under different names since ancient times. The concept of medical institutions can be traced back to ancient Indian practices, which initially had strong religious affiliations. The history of hospitals in India is intertwined with religious and social institutions, reflecting the values and priorities of different historical periods.

Materials And Methods

The study of India's hospital evolution involved the analysis of ancient texts, medieval Persian manuscripts, colonial records, and contemporary healthcare policies. Primary and secondary sources were utilized, including historical documents, legal texts, and research articles. Contributions from notable scholars and government reports informed the research.

Results And Discussion

Historical development of Health Care in India could be divided into following periods:

1. Ancient period (including Vedic period and the Buddhist period)
2. Medieval period (including post-Buddha and Muslim, Christianity and medical care periods)
3. Modern period

In ancient India, hospitals were primarily established by religious institutions such as Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples. Emperor Ashoka (268–232 BCE), a staunch follower of Buddhism, was instrumental in establishing hospitals for humans and animals alike. His reign marked the beginning of state-sponsored healthcare. These hospitals provided care for the needy, treating illnesses with natural remedies derived from plants, minerals, and metals, as outlined in Ayurveda [2]. Siddhi has been passed from one generation to another through written medium mostly palm leaf parchments. Sushruta and Chakra, ancient Indian physicians laid foundations of surgery and treatment.

During the medieval period, Islamic rulers introduced the *dar-ul-shifa* (houses of healing), which integrated Unani medicine with local practices. These institutions emphasized holistic care, combining physical treatments with spiritual healing. The Mughal Empire further expanded the concept of organized healthcare by establishing state-funded hospitals in major cities. This period also saw advancements in medical education, with medical knowledge recorded in Persian manuscripts [3]. Emperor Akbar (1555–1605), during his period, encouraged the amalgamation of the Unani and Ayurvedic systems. The most significant achievement was the translation of medical texts in Arabic, then into Persian and later into Urdu. The impact of Muslim dominance was very apparent.

The colonial period brought significant changes to India's healthcare system. British missionaries and colonial authorities introduced Western medical practices and established the first modern hospitals. The Portuguese established hospitals in Goa after Vasco de Gama's discovery of the sea route to India in 1498. The British East India Company (EIC) established hospitals in Madras (Chennai) and later in Calcutta (Kolkata). The Fort St George in Madras (Chennai) housed the first modern hospital in India, starting in late 1664 [9]. Surgeons were employed by the EIC to cater to the medical needs of its employees. John Woodall, a London surgeon, played a significant role in selecting medical officers for ships and published "The

Surgeon's Mate," a manual for ship surgeons. Notable among them was the Calcutta Medical College, founded in 1835, which became a center for medical education and research. However, this period also highlighted disparities, as colonial healthcare primarily catered to the elite while neglecting rural and indigenous communities [4,5].

After gaining independence in 1947, India focused on creating a robust public healthcare infrastructure. The government expanded hospital networks, targeting diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and leprosy. Initiatives such as the National Health Policy of 1983 emphasized affordable and accessible healthcare for all. Indigenous systems like *Ayurveda* and *Unani* were also integrated into the mainstream healthcare system [6,7].

In recent decades, India has emerged as a global leader in medical tourism, driven by advancements in technology and the proliferation of private hospitals. Institutions like AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences), Apollo hospital and Narayana represent the pinnacle of modern healthcare and attracting medical tourism and known for their cutting-edge treatments. Simultaneously, government schemes such as Ayushman Bharat aim to provide universal health coverage, ensuring that quality healthcare is accessible to all citizens [8].

Overall, we can conclude that:

- India has a tradition of healthcare systems dating back thousands of years. Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani were the traditional systems of medicine practiced in ancient India.
- Temples often served as centers for healing, where priests and physicians provided medical care.
- With the arrival of colonial powers, organized hospitals were established.
- Hospitals evolved from small establishments within forts to larger institutions.
- The British Raj saw the establishment of more hospitals across India, including military hospitals, civil hospitals, and medical colleges.
- The Unani and Ayurvedic systems also contributed to healthcare.
- After India gained independence, the government focused on expanding healthcare infrastructure.
- India has witnessed significant growth in healthcare infrastructure, including public and private hospitals, medical colleges, and research institutes, after gaining independence.
- Advances in medical technology, specialization, and super-specialty hospitals have transformed healthcare delivery.

Conclusion

The evolution of hospitals in India reflects the country's rich medical heritage and its ability to adapt to changing times. From religious institutions offering basic care to state-of-the-art medical centers, Indian hospitals have come a long way, serving as a testament to the nation's commitment to healthcare and human well-being. In summary, India's hospitals have evolved from ancient temples to modern, specialized institutions. While traditional systems continue to coexist, modern medicine and technology play a crucial role in providing healthcare services to the nation.

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