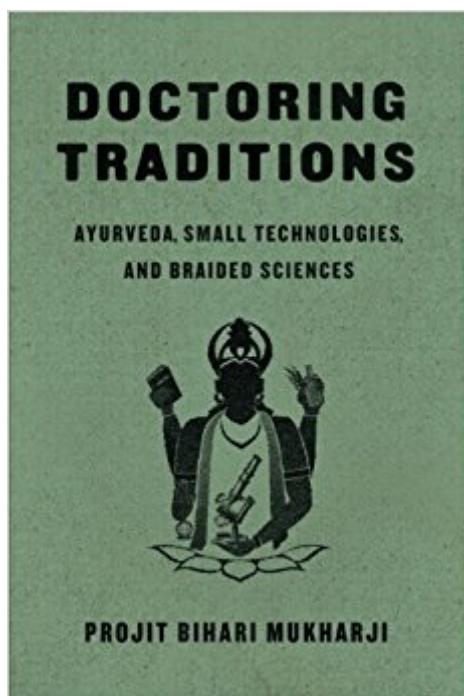


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# Doctoring Traditions: Ayurveda, Small Technologies, And Braided Sciences



## Synopsis

Like many of the traditional medicines of South Asia, Ayurvedic practice transformed dramatically in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With *Doctoring Tradition*, Projit Bihari Mukharji offers a close look at that recasting, upending the widely held yet little-examined belief that it was the result of the introduction of Western anatomical knowledge and cadaveric dissection. Rather, Mukharji reveals, what instigated those changes were a number of small technologies that were introduced in the period by Ayurvedic physicians, men who were simultaneously Victorian gentlemen and members of a particular Bengali caste. The introduction of these devices, including thermometers, watches, and microscopes, Mukharji shows, ultimately led to a dramatic reimaging of the body. By the 1930s, there emerged a new Ayurvedic body that was marked as distinct from a biomedical body. Despite the protestations of difference, this new Ayurvedic body was largely compatible with it. The more irreconcilable elements of the old Ayurvedic body were then rendered therapeutically indefensible and impossible to imagine in practice. The new Ayurvedic medicine was the product not of an embrace of Western approaches, but of a creative attempt to develop a viable alternative to the Western tradition by braiding together elements drawn from internally diverse traditions of the West and the East.

## Book Information

Paperback: 376 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (October 14, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022638313X

ISBN-13: 978-0226383132

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #168,299 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #46 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Alternative Medicine > Ayurveda #145 in Books > History > Asia > India #214 in Books > Medical Books > History

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“In a work of singular insight and originality, Mukharji uncovers the complex braiding of Western medical science and the Indian Ayurvedic tradition in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengal, and reflects on the way in which small objects—from watches and

thermometers to microscopes and medicine bottles—transformed bodily understanding and therapeutic practice. *Doctoring Traditions* is a seminal account of what doctors do as well as what they imagine, and in its assiduous research, bold methodology, and wide intellectual engagement it will resonate with studies of science, medicine, and technology well beyond the confines of colonial Bengal. (David Arnold, University of Warwick) “*Doctoring Traditions* is an excellent addition to a growing body of literature that critically problematizes the cultural history of medicine and science in modern India. Mukharji’s incisive, perceptive, and thoughtful analysis examines the way in which we think about modern Ayurveda. By focusing on the quotidian material culture of medicine as a medium through which to understand how disparate streams of knowledge about health are braided together, he takes us deep into the fabric of embodied reasoning in the context of colonialism’s modernity. A beautifully crafted book, *Doctoring Traditions* is flawless in its consistency, logical integrity, and wonderfully structured, coherent arguments. (Joseph Alter, University of Pittsburgh) “Synthesizing Chinese as well as European and South Asian medical history, Mukharji persuasively demonstrates how bodily understanding and therapeutic practice dramatically transformed between 1870 and 1930 in Bengal through five cases studies of specific technologies: the pocket watch, organotherapy, the thermometer, the microscope, and the body-as-technology of the physicians themselves. Even simple medicine bottles play a significant role in this eloquent narrative on how Ayurveda became modern. (Marta Hanson, Johns Hopkins University)

Projit Bihari Mukharji is the Martin Meyerson Assistant Professor in History & Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania, the author of *Nationalizing the Body: The Market, Print and Daktari Medicine* and coeditor of *Medical Marginality in South Asia: Situating Subaltern Therapeutics and Crossing Colonial Historiographies: Histories of Colonial and Indigenous Medicines in Transnational Perspective*.

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