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## RELEVANCE OF VARMA ART AND YOGA PRACTICES AS MODE OF TREATMENT FOR CURING COMMON AIL MENTS - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

P. JEYABALAKRISHNAN

### Abstract:

*Folk medicine is as old as the origin of human beings<sup>1</sup>. The science of medicine is of fundamental importance to man's well being and his survival, and so it must have originated with man and developed as civilization advanced<sup>2</sup>. Every woman knew best how to treat herself and her children, and was fully aware of or otherwise acquainted with the use of country medicines, suited to indigenous taste and knowledge and this acquaintance with domestic treatment has been purely hereditary. While ancient people were in ill, they approach the mother nature for*

### KEYWORDS:

Medicine, Human Being, Ancient.

### INTRODUCTION

In the past, cowherds, goat herds, hermits, hunters and the like, who mostly had to live in the wild forests, had to subsist on herbs, plants, roots, fruits and sometimes on animal foods. These people had the first-hand information of the healthy as well as the toxic effects of the various species of flora and they provided raw materials to the medical man to compile his material-medica<sup>4</sup>.

Nature has laid open her first drug store and with innumerable branches all over, with her flora in the open meadows, fields and orchards. Primitives and animals depend on them to avoid diseases and to prevent them from future invasions<sup>5</sup>. Sunlight, water and mud packs must have been man's earliest tools of treatment which have in course of time developed in to a system of medicine known as folk medicine<sup>6</sup>.

Folk medicine is the primitive medicine prevalent earliest in the globe. The ancient system of medicine practiced or the developed system of indigenous medicine is called Siddha medicine<sup>7</sup>. The Ayurveda system is another system of medicine is associated with Siddha medicine, was also in vogue. Siddha system of medicine was practiced particularly in Tamil Nadu<sup>8</sup>. The origin of medicine well be traced back only to the folk medicine<sup>9</sup>. Siddha system was founded by holy man attained divine power. Human beings are pray with devotion to see God but Siddhas by their meditation realize the divinity. Later the Unani system practiced in ancient Greece was brought to India by Muslim conquerors<sup>10</sup>. In addition Homeopathic medicine, which originated in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, was introduced into India<sup>11</sup>. Lastly Allopathic medicine was brought to India by the British<sup>12</sup>.

It is a well known fact that throughout our country there exist numerous folk traditions of local health care in tribal as well as others areas. Many of these 'traditions are validated when evaluated in the light of the Indian Health system; such as Siddha, Ayurveda and Unani systems<sup>13</sup>. The

carriers of these traditional system are the millions of local village healers, midwives, housewives, etc. These traditional practices deal with a number of basic health treatments of common ailments and home remedies<sup>14</sup>. In some Communities there also exist special traditions like Bone setting and Visha Chikitsa for treatment of certain chronic ailments and diagnostic methods such as naddi pariksha etc. These are also came to be known that the importance of the traditional self-reliance model of primary health care prevalent in Indian society in ancient period<sup>15</sup>.

It is a fact that in spite of their great potential, system of Paramparai Vaidhyam are today in a weakened state, it is our conviction that these traditions can be revitalized by encouraging an interaction of these traditions with the organised Indian systems of Health, one i.e., Siddha, Ayurveda and Unani<sup>16</sup> etc.

Siddha, Ayurveda and Unani are called Indian systems of medicine, which are gradually developed after Independence. Indian medicine is an art and science. Though the principles of Indian medicine are rational, they cannot be explained in terms of modern science fully<sup>17</sup>.

Unlike the other systems of medicine, folk medicine is not a separate entity. It is a part and parcel of our daily diet and our hygienic principles start from daily ablutions, community ceremonies, yoga practices and other valiant acts like varma art, Ilakkumurai and psychological thinkings<sup>18</sup>. In this paper an earnest attempt has been ventured to unearth the role of yogic practices, varma art and other preventive measures like diet system and hygienic principles has been used as mode of treatment for common ailments of the people in Tamilnadu.

Some families in Tamil Nadu are well versed in the art of Varmam as a traditional one. The science of varma is as old as the Siddha system of medicines of which, it is a part. According to mythology varmam is originated from lord Siva<sup>19</sup>. In Tamil Nadu the art of Varma still thrives. It boasts even now of several Aasans (i.e.) acharyas adopt in the art of varma. It is a long standing traditional art not only in Tamil Nadu but also in India.

The art of Varmakalai learnt properly will be a valuable asset to Indian medicine. It may possibly show the way to cure many of the so called incurable disease like polio, bronchial Asthma, Cataract of the eye etc. The art of varmam indicates that certain disease like pulmonary, tuberculosis, hydrocele, bronchial asthma, paralysis etc., may be due to injuries in certain sites of varmam. For example, it is said that if one gets hurt at the Kaipootuvarmam (the medial end of the spine of the scapula) which leads to get tuberculosis within about four hundred days time<sup>20</sup>.

#### VARMA KALAI

Among the folk medical practices in Tamil Nadu, "Varma Kalai" or "Varma Chikitsa" is an important one. Vaidhya Rajendran belongs to Kanyakumari district practicing this art for a long period in his family. Diseases like Rheumatism, Poliomyelitis fractures, snake bites, diabetes, melitors, fever, skin diseases are cured by this method. He also says that their family has been specializing in the art of diagnosing just by the patient's appearance and they don't even need to see the 'naadi'. According to them the face reflects the mind and any disease has a notable effect on the patient's mind<sup>21</sup>.

An expert in this art is called as "Aasan" who was in every kingdom as the Royal physician. Varmam means a site where life exists. "Varmam is an important point on the human body, which when pressed or stimulated or hit, would treat a particular condition or cause the total loss of function of a particular part. For this very reason this art was strictly restricted and taught only to those who have overcome anger, or of a very soft nature and who have control.

Varma Soothiram is a book that tells of the character to be possessed by the student of Varma. As the science of Varma deals with the life of people, if it is taught to people of bad character: it will be end as an evil to the entire society. Hence, A varma art has to be taught to those who are pious and are of good character<sup>22</sup>.

Varma points have been classified into six groups, based on how they can be influenced.

Padu Varmam (by violent injury)	12
Thodu Varmam (by touch)	96
Thattu Varmam (by blow)	8

Thadavu varmam (by massage)	4
Nakku Varmam (by licking)	1
Nokku Varmam (by sight)	1

One hundred and twenty two varmas are mainly mentioned. There are several other classifications to this also.

There are some varma points which when hit or injured should be treated within a period of time, otherwise they may become fatal<sup>23</sup>. Such points are called "Kaalam". For eg, "Nachathira Kaalam", which is a point at the external angle of the eye-lid, when it may prove to be fatal if not treated twenty seven Nazhigais (A Nazhigai is about two and a half minutes).

Classifications of Marmas, according to Sushruta are given below.

Divisions		
Mamsa Marma	-	11
Sira Marma	-	41
Snaayu Marma	-	27
Asthi Marma	-	8
Santhi Marma	-	20
Second way		
Sadhya Praanataru	-	19
Kaalaanthara Praanataru	-	33
Vishal Yaghi	-	3
Vaikal Yakara	-	44
Rajaakar	-	824

#### KNOWLEDGE ON DIAGNOSTIC PROCEDURES

An essential aspect of both treatment and prevention of diseases is diagnostic ability. There are a wide range of diagnostic technique that are found in the health traditions that are in use for a variety of conditions. Some of these are techniques that can generally be used for a variety of diseases such as Naadi Pariksha, that is the art of diagnosing health and disease by seeing the Naadi<sup>25</sup>. There are three kinds of pulse known as 'Vaata, Pitta, Cilaattumam' are in the nerves of the index, middle and ring fingers respectively. Earunaadi is in the wrist where the nerves of all five fingers join. The folk doctors compare the pulse beats to the tones raised in veenai<sup>26</sup>.

Gurunaadi is considered as the most important pulse. Doctors usually cover the wrist of the patient with a fine silk cloth in order to hide their testing from others. This is kept secret by the doctors. Country doctors have a tradition of disclosing professional secrets only to their sons or castemen. Sometimes, facts concerning folk medicine have died along with the men who know the art. Palm-leaf manuscripts that bear this precious information have been disappeared due to negligence<sup>27</sup>.

Study of naadi is an important diagnostic method. Any disorder of the human body manifests itself through the naadi. The blood veins carry the rhythm of the three life minerals. The Vali Naadi vibrates for one mathirai (one inch deepness) time, Azhal naadi vibrates for a half mathirai and 'Iyam Nadi' vibrates for a quarter mathirai<sup>28</sup>. This is a highly sophisticated and intricate art and it is almost the first thing that a local Vaidhya examines when a patient comes to him.

There are also various procedures used for diagnosing specific diseases and conditions. For example, there is a tradition in Tamil Nadu by which pregnancy can be detected. A sample of the patient's urine is collected in a coconut shell and leaves of a particular plant (known in Tamil as Vellaipooraikaanchi) are left to soak in it overnight. If the woman is pregnant the leaves appear spotted. Similarly there are ways and means for diagnosis of Jaundice and other diseases<sup>29</sup>.

One of the classical texts on diagnosis, 'Raavana Naadi Pareeksha' states that there are eight different methods of examining a patient- one should observe- Naadi (pulse), mootram (Urine), Malam (Motion), Jiha (tongue); Shabda (sound) sparsha (touch), Drik (eyes) and Aakriti (overall appearance).

Almost all of these are in use in local health practices. Sometimes even a single examinations can give a significant clue<sup>30</sup>. For example, in many areas of the south, if a patient is brought in with a

suspected snake bite, are given the powder of Arappu (Herbal Medicine) for testing the patients, which has a natural bitter taste. Based on whether the patient identifies the powder's taste correctly or not, a preliminary diagnosis is made that the patient has been bitten by a poisonous snake, or bitten by a non-poisonous snake or that he is not bitten (by a snake) at all and is merely suffering from fright. This is based on an understanding of how poisons affect various Indians like the sense of taste and thus, our abilities to identify the six rasas<sup>31</sup>.

Unlike the modern medicine, Siddhas told about varieties of pulses like collapsing pulse, irregular pulse, feeble pulse, weak pulse and strong pulse etc. In western system, they are using sphygmography to know the condition of the pulse of the patient, this is attached to the wrist of the patient and the condition of the pulse of the patient is recorded.

It is told that for ladies the pulse should be seen in left hand and for gents in right hand. The reasons given in the Siddha text are first due to the kurma chatra and second at the time of conception for male baby, the piraanan runs in the right nostril and for female in the left nostril, this causes the difference in ladies and gents. But anatomically there was not much difference between male and female. If Siddhas stated something means, definitely there will be a reason in it<sup>32</sup>. In modern medicine the pulse means the beating of the artery is felt by the tip of the fingers in radial artery. Nadi (pulse) plays a crucial role in the health of human beings.

#### FOLK PREVENTIVE METHODS OF DISEASES

Apart from treatment, the folks followed a spectrum of preventive measures against seven diseases that are available locally. The use of some varieties of food stuffs which are avoided or consumed preferentially during various reasons. The adaptation of hygienic principles by them are really fascinating preventive methods. In course of time majority of the hygienic principles became community ceremonies<sup>33</sup>.

The causative and preventive factors are given much importance by the Siddhas. Our ancestors told about the toxicity of the things and also how to prevent and rectify it. While we eat ground nuts, we are advised to take jaggery or sugar is a preventive method to reduce piththam.

Psychological thinking's produce physiological changes in the human body. Fear is the best example for contracting the disease like Diarrhea. Terrible emotions also lead to disease like Hysteria. There is a common saying: "forbearance is bigger than sea. That is why our forefathers are always advising us to lead a moral life"<sup>34</sup>. The reason for the occurrence of diseases are mentioned through the songs runs thus;

'Noyinul Pathikel, Nonmai Kurmainthane!  
 Noyali yenpathu Noyali munne  
 Noikal vinnal katharamu Noikal varavethu  
 Nonamaiyal vekuli Nonathapasiyal  
 Nonatha Nirparukal Nonatha Unarval  
 Nokkamannathaga okku yozhi tholilal  
 Nokkarena Natamadi Nokki Natamitalam  
 Notakkararainati Novamaruvarthal  
 Nonbuvirathatipala Notkavaru melival  
 Nonjaiyena vanakunavu Nothuvayiluthalal  
 Nondavarithenaverai Nondiyeruthalal  
 Nonatha Veramadie Nonavani ithala  
 (Siddha Maruthuva Noi Nadal  
 Noi Mudal Nadal Thirattu. Part-I).

Munne Noikal: Some disease occur due to our Karma.

Vinakatharamai: Some of our actions may cause disease.

Nonamaiyal: Hatredness or intolerance towards all the things may lead to Neurosis, Hysteria etc.

Vekuli: Getting angry all the time may cause Tension, Headache Hypertension and Hyper acidity.

Nonathapasiyal: More appetite leads to Gunmam disease (ulcer).

Nonathanirparukal: Drinking water irregularly may suppress the indigestion etc.

**NOKKAMARANAMATHUVAKANOKKI:**

Starting towards the sunlight may cause eye pain. Blinking helps the lachrymal gland for its secretion even though the sunlight is good for eyes<sup>35</sup>.

**OZHITHOZHILAL:**

Lack of exercise may lead to disease. Hence our forefathers advices as to do yoga, Silambam art etc. By doing exercise, the blood circulation will be increased and through sweating some unwanted toxic things leave our body.

Nottamozhikuralkal: speaking loudly always weaken the vocal cords.

**NONBU VIRATHATHIPALA NORTKAVARUM MELIVAL:**

Often fasting may lead to loss of fatigue, deficiency syndrome and T.B.  
Nonjaiyena anuka unavu ayiluthalal: Taking food in sorrow may cause disease.

**NONDAARITHU ENAVORAI NONDIAYALATALAL:**

Wearing wet cloths always may cause disease.

Sleeping, walking in the cool air, taking too much of cold things may cause Kapam (cold) disease<sup>36</sup>.

The Siddhas preventive principles are found in medicine, religion and in literature in a poetical form. Medications are there to prevent the onset of particular disease. Now-a-days folk medicines avert several diseases including measles, malaria diarrhea, whooping cough, hepatitis etc<sup>37</sup>.

**SEASONAL ADOPTION OF DIETS (RUTUCHARYA OR SEASONAL REGIMEN)**

An essential aspect of disease prevention is having knowledge about Rutucharya. It means taking meals in time. There are a number of practices available with the adoption of habits of food etc., based on the particular seasons. Some are in the nature of cultural practices. In many parts of the village's food eaten in winter season tend to be heavier and more difficult for digestion in comparison with foods eaten in summer. Ayurveda tells that in the winter the Agni which is responsible for digestion is highly effective while in summer it is much weaker.

Some other regulations are in the nature of guarding against certain types of diseases which may be more prevalent in a given season. For example, it is a custom in many parts of India to partake of preparations containing tender neem leaves and flowers at the onset of the spring seasons<sup>38</sup>.

**Yoga and other Physical Cultures**

One of the most unique traditions of health cure is the practice of yoga especially Asana (yoga) and Pranayama (breathing exercise) (Moochatakku Yogasanam). Yoga is practiced widely in several parts of the world. It is being used not only for maintenance of normal health and controlling and consolidating our senses but also for treatment of disease conditions<sup>39</sup>.

According to the traditional understanding, yoga is not only a body of exercises, but it is recognized as a Darshana, a major school of Indian thought. The principles of yogadharsna are given in the yoga sutras by the Maharishi patanjali. There are several texts and several schools of practice of yoga in various parts of the country<sup>40</sup>.

Yoga is used successfully in the treatment of a variety of disease. There are a number of community health organizations which practice yoga for therapy. The therapeutics of Siddha medicine consists mainly of the use of metals and minerals. Mercury, Sulphur, Copper, Arsenic and a variety of other metals and minerals figure are prominently used as therapeutic agents<sup>41</sup>.

For example, the Vivekananda Ashram in the Utter Kannada district of Karnataka has successfully used yoga practice for the treatment of a variety of ailments such as Asthma<sup>42</sup>.

The Krishnamacharya yoga Mandiram in Chennai has also made successful use of yoga for therapeutic purposes including the treatment of mental retardation on which they have a special programme<sup>43</sup>. Some of the voluntary organisations like DATA and TEDDY Trust in Madurai giving concentration on the practice of yoga. There are eight supernatural powers which may be achieved by man through yogic practice<sup>44</sup>. According to Tirumular, the eight kinds of miraculous powers (Siddhis) attained by the Siddhars, are as follows.

**ANIMA (FLYING)**

The faculty of reducing gross body to the size of an antom to enable him to fly in the space.

Mahima (Expansion)

The power of expanding oneself without limit.

Karima

The power of reducing the primordial elements within himself of a point desired.

Lahima (Lightness)

The power of becoming as light as a feather.

Prapthi

Faculty of knowing everything, past, present and future and to secure everything as desired.

Prahamiyam

The power of penetration like rays by which one can attain immortality.

Esathuvam

Supreme power over a nimate and inanimate in the universe.

Vasithuvam

The power of securing any desired object. Those who attain or achieve the above said powers are known as Siddhas<sup>45</sup>.

The word 'Siddha' comes from the word 'Siddhu' which means an object to be attained or 'perfection' or 'heavenly bliss'<sup>46</sup>. It also includes mooppu in the folk medical system. Mooppu is divided into three types. First one medical Mooppu which easily cures disease of the body. The second one is Vaatha Mooppu which in vigorate the body and prevents aging and the third and last is yoga mooppu which reveals the hormonal secretion of our body by doing yoga and the secretion of hormones can be controlled and longevity of the person promoted<sup>47</sup>.

**Yoga verses Physical Exercises**

To play is healthy not only that but also attam which means moral duty. Our ancestors thought without playing Orai (Orai was played on the gress sandy layer in the courtyard of the house) game along with play-mates is not only an immoral duty but also leads to reduce the wealth i.e., the health of the physical conditions and wealth of the social conditions<sup>48</sup>.

The conception of a physical exercise in India has been distinct and different from what prevails today as exercises. The traditional physical exercises of India such as yoga are sarvanga sadhanas that is a practice which can provide exercises to various parts of the body in a balanced



manner<sup>49</sup>.

Some of the exercises in the India Tradition are well known such as Mallayuddha (wrestling), Kalarippayattu (physical exercise) a combat tradition of Kerala, silambam art (stick, fencing) a combat tradition of Tamil Nadu<sup>50</sup> etc.

## UNIQUE TRADITIONS

### Bone Setting

One of the important areas in which Health traditions are very strong atleast in some parts of the country is the area of bone setting. In various parts of the country there are practitioners who specialised in 'setting' broken bones i.e., the skilled manipulation of the broken parts of the bone so that they set and aligned correctly in a position where they can heal. After the setting or during the process almost invariably an herbal paste and medicated oil is applied in the area which helps the healing process<sup>51</sup>.

In bone setting there are some specialisations and some parts of the country and excelled in that profession. The four well known bone setting centres in Tamil Nadu are Puttoor, Coimbatore, Madurai and Kanyakumari. There is a family in puttoor for several generations has been well versed in setting bones. They prescribe herbal preparations and was applied at the site of fracture. In Kanyakumari district, a number of families engaged in setting bones generation by generation successfully.

Prof. Natarajan an orthopaedic specialist in Chennai states that the type of sling used by the traditional bone setters for fractures in the arm, is superior and more flexible than the "cuff and collar link" of English origin which is still used by our orthopaedic specialists.<sup>52</sup>

The special feature of the bone setting tradition in Tamil Nadu is the use of varma points for anesthesia. While many traditional bone setters are experts at setting bones, the process is said to be very painful since no anesthesia is used. However, in Tamil Nadu the bone setters are also called as Varma Aasans. The knowledge of Varma points is used to provide anesthesia at the time of bone setting<sup>53</sup>.

Yet another bone setting tradition in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu specialises in treatment of fractures which are accompanied by open wounds. It appears that bone setters are present not only in rural areas but also in and around several cities. It is clear that the tradition in this area has several strong points and that an exchange of ideas between practitioners of this art in various areas would be very fruitful<sup>54</sup>.

Thus, the traditional application of tools for curing important diseases having meaningful scope for modern system of health care.

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