

Vol II Issue V Nov 2012

Impact Factor : 0.1870

ISSN No :2231-5063

Monthly Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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Publisher
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IMPACT FACTOR : 0.2105

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2230-7850

Indian Streams Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF INDIGENOUS SYSTEM OF MEDICINE IN TAMIL NADU – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The history of Siddha medicine dates back to pre-historic period and ancient literature of Agasthiar. It may be handed over from Guru to Sishya. Siddhas existed before the birth of Jesus¹ Siddha system was traditional and believed to have originated from the creator, the fountain head of mercy with his three fold functions of creation, preservation of good and destruction of evil. This goes very well with what is expressed in the words "The Physician treat the God Cures". This system was spread to the world through Sages, Saints, and haloed men.

KEY WORDS:

History, Medicine, Ancient Literature,

INTRODUCTION

The Siddha system of medicine in the beginning stage was taught of Guru-Sishya method² (Preceptor and the Learner). The systems of Siddha and Ayurveda has basically same principles. But Unani system of medicine is something different from the former systems. But of course the difference can be seen in some extent between Siddha and Ayurveda.³ Medicine has been taught and practiced in Tamil Nadu from time memorial. The system which is indigenous in the soil is the Siddha system of medicine.⁴ Eventhough certain basic principles of Siddha and Ayurveda are common, their approach is entirely different from each other.⁵ The Indigenous Siddha medicine is a science perfected into an art-coupled with primitive intrusion in to nature's resources and secrets.

The origin of the Tamil language is not only attributed to the Siddha medicine but also attributed to the sage Agasthiya. His name is found in different puranas and his identity is shrouded in mystery.⁶ The Siddha's Tamil works dealing with various subject like medicine, truth about nature, astronomical data, atomic theory, cosmic dance, space, travel, alchemy, longevity etc.⁷ The earliest mention of the use of medicinal plants is to be found in Thirumoolar's Thirumandhiram. Ennayiram. Tholkappiyam and the ancient Tamil works of Sangam literature like Sirupanchamoolam (2nd or B.C) which are believed to have been written thousands of years before the Christian era⁸.

During the period of Ramayana, Srirama visited the ashrama of Agasthiya in the course of his wanderings in the forest. Agasthiya appeared before Srirama during the battle with Ravana and taught him the mantra, ditya Hridayam: for achieving victory in battle.⁹

Price to the works of Charaka Samhita and Shushruta Samhita, the two well-known treatises in Sankrit on Ayurveda. References on Siddha system's is found in classical works. There is no despite about the antiquity of the system. Eighteen Siddhas have existed and passed on their experience in medicine and Yoga to posterity.¹⁰ The herbs and medicines used by the primitives are similar to that of Siddha System of medicine.¹¹ Later, Ayurveda system also incorporated in its Materia Medica. The use of certain metals which was a speciality of the Siddha system.¹²

ORIGIN OF SIDDHA SYSTEM

Sankya Philosophy was the oldest one founded by a Siddha Kapila.¹³ It is also presumed that this philosophy was based on the Tantrism, a Oriental system of Indian continent. This principle of philosophy is seen in Sangam literature especially in Tolkappiyam and Purananuru where it is stated that world is a composition of five elements i.e., Earth, Sky, Air, Fire and Water. This tantric philosophy laid a foundation for the development of the Siddha system in the later period.¹⁴

The system of medicine developed by Siddhas are known as Siddha system. This system is peculiar and unique to Tamil Nadu.¹⁵ It is well established before the Aryans occupied the Sindh region and Gangeti plain, there existed in the south a highly organized civilization. This civilization has a system of medicine to deal with the problems of sanitation and treatment of diseases. This is the Siddha system. But from the beginning the Siddha system has maintained its identity.¹⁶

The evidence from the Materia Medica that is; materials used in medicine, supports the claim that the Siddha system existed separately and was uninfluenced in earlier times by Ayurveda. The medicines mentioned in the Ayurvedic treatise works like Vagbhata's Astianga Hridaya (7 A.D), Charaka Samhita (6th B.C) are mostly of vegetable origin: iron and gold find a place in same recipes.¹⁷

In Siddha texts, on the other hand, from the earliest times Mercury, Sulphur, Copper Arsenic and a variety of other metals and minerals are used as therapeutic agents. Siddhas basic medicine is earlier to that of Ayurveda.¹⁸ Contribution of Siddhas in the field of Astrology is really a commendable one. Herbal medicines otherwise known as Siddha medicines were prevalent even before Tolkappiar.¹⁹ The practice of surgery was in vogue in the Sangam period.²⁰

Presently in India, various system of medicine such as Siddha, Ayurveda, Unani, Homeopathy, Allopathy, Naturepathy, Chinese system of medicine etc., are in vogue. The Allopathy and Homeopathy systems were introduced to India by the English and the west Germans respectively. While the Unani system of medicine was introduced by the Mughals, the Chinese system of medicine spread through the Chinese trade channels in this country. The Siddha and Ayurveda are the two unique indigenous medical systems practised in India.²¹

The eighteen Siddha are Nandi, Agasthiyar, Thirumular, Punnakkeesar, Pulasthiyar, Poonaikannar, Idaikkadar, Bogar, Pulikai Isar, Karuvurar, Konkanavar, Kalengi, Sattainathar, Azhuganni, Agappai, Pambatti, Theraiyar and Kudhambai.²² The aim of Siddha system is to keep the body and mind in a good condition. (Health is wealth)²³

Fundamental principles

In medical science only three physical elements viz; air (vayu), fire (bile), and water (phlegm) are selected and from them the fundamental principles known as muppini on which the constitution of human beings has been based. These three humours from the connecting link between microsom of man and macrosom of world.²⁴

“Andaththil Ullathe Pindam
Pindaththil Ullathe Andam
Andamum Pindamum Ontre
Arindhuthan Parkkum Poluthe”

The above said verse found in Cattamuni Gnanam explains that the human body is part of the universe and that the body and universe are one and the same and are inseparable.²⁵

Philosophy of Medicine

A system of medicine without understanding and without a true knowledge of natural laws, will remain for ever a system of theories, more opinion and passive observation and inactivity. Diseases in man are caused in the intervention of evil spirits (according to some Siddhas of plants. Man can accomplish nothing through his own but everything can be accomplished through man by power of faith. This truly holds good in the case of a physician.

It is nature that causes diseases and it is again nature that effects their cures and therefore, the physician should know the process of nature.²⁶ Siddhas fully realise that planetary evil effects and sins of previous birth known as Karma are the causes of diseases and other misfortunes. According to patient's horoscope the movement and disposition of the planets are of much importance in medicine and so it is most important for a physician to consider the aspect of heavenly bodies before starting the treatment of the patient.²⁷

The Siddha system has been successful in making effective and powerful medicines out of volatile poisons by the process of Paspam, Chenduram and Kattu. Siddha has been the forerunner of alchemy, the

science of converting base metals into higher ones. The system makes use of rare black herbs for the preparation of medicinal alchemy and Kayakalpam. One branch of Siddha medicine called varma vaidhyam describes the method of treatment, for injuries caused vital organs or parts of the body.²⁸

The hereditary conferred on family members might have led to the hereditary system of teaching and practice of Siddha medicine. During foreign rule this system had its downfall to some extent. After Independence, there was a growing awareness and search for real values of our ancient system among our people which gradually lead to the resurgence of the Siddha or indigenous medical system.²⁹

The Siddha system of medicine is one of the ancient systems contemporaneous with those of the submerged lands; Egyptian Mesopotomian, Chinese and Grecian medicines. The unique nature of this system has its continuous service to humanity for more than five thousand years in combating diseases and in maintaining its physical, mental and in moral health, while many of its contemporaries had completed their courses long long ago.

AYURVEDA

Ayurveda is the name which the ancient Indians given to their science of medicine. Ayul means life and Veda to know or attain. Ayurveda, therefore, is the science by the knowledge of which life can be prolonged or its nature understood. The Vedas are the earliest sacred books of India. In accordance with the traditional origin of the Vedas, it was supposed to have been divinely revealed to the sages. There are two versions of its origin. The medical school traces its origin to Bharadvaja, who received it from the God Indra.

The surgical school traces its origin to Dhanvantari who received it also from the God.³⁰ The real history as hidden in myths and traditions reveals that the Siddha is ancient and Ayurveda has received much from the Siddha even from its very beginning which is the real cause for the appearance of so many things as common to both.³¹

We can reasonably assume that the Agasthiya mission would have benefitted the Ayurveda by imparting Siddha concepts and practices of medicine. Though it may look vague, we can safely and tentatively assume that the Siddha medicine had contributed much towards the formation and development of the Ayurveda.³²

The cultural world of all ages would be thankful to the Ayurveda for its great service to the medical world on collection, preserving, arranging and incorporating in a marvelous way. All the fact then available about the Siddha medicine in one level and recording them even three thousand years ago. In an easily assimilable style in the lingafranca of the scholars and scientists of India.³³

There are two ancient systems of medicine in India, the Siddha which nourished in the south and the Ayurveda prevalent in the north. Instead of giving the name of any individual as the founder of either system, our ancients wisely attributed their origin to the creator. According to tradition, it was Siva who unfolded the knowledge of the Siddha system of medicine to his consort Parvati, who handed it down to Nandideva and who he gave to Siddhas. Therefore, it is called siva Sampradayam (tradition of Siva), or Siddha Sampradayam.

In the case of Ayurveda, it was Brahma, the creator of universe, who taught the science to Prajapati, he to Aswini Devas and they, in their turn, to Afraya etc., so this tradition is called the Brahma or Arsha Sampradaya (the tradition of Rishis). The inference to be drawn from these traditions is that, there is no exact point of time to which the beginning of these systems could be traced. They are eternal, without a beginning or end: they began with man and may end with him.³⁴ This system treats the body on a whole in relation to the cosmos. The term 'Ayurveda' was first mentioned in Silappatikaram denoted that Ayurveda slowly crept in to Tamil land and embraced the native Siddha medicine.³⁵

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SIDDHA AND AYURVEDA

Of all the Indian systems of medicine, Siddha and Ayurveda are very unique and much alike in many ways. One can notice that Siddha system differs materially in certain aspects from Ayurveda.³⁶ Siddha medicine is regarded as a most unique system in the field of Kayakalpam. The Siddhas adopted the Kayakalpam not only to have good health but also to attain Attama Siddhi (Power to control the Universe).

HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy is a system of medicine only. Homeopathy is not an indigenous system of medicine, it was founded not by a layman to medical science but by one of the leading allopathic physicians of

Germany Dr. Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann.³⁷ It is a system which is being practised at international level. The birth of Homeopathy is said to be hundred years old.³⁸ The high and only mission of the physician is to cure is the principle in Homeopathy.³⁹ Medicine and surgery are two different branches of medicine. Surgery is based on Allopathy.⁴⁰

Eternal laws never fail and they have no exceptions. Homeopathy is not founded on any principles but it is merely the discovery of eternal law pertaining to therapeutics.⁴¹ Homeopathy is self complete in its armamentarium of drugs and so does not require any research to find new drugs.⁴² Homeopathy is also called advanced Allopathy.⁴³

ALLOPATHY

Allopathy is still in the experimental stage they have not yet discovered the laws of therapeutics and are still working on theoretical speculations. A. new drugs comes out of their so called laboratories, only to be discarded scan, after its side effects are revealed to be harmful, some months or years after being given to many patients. The methods and theories in Allopathy are always shifting and their discoveries are abandoned rapidly.⁴⁴

Relationship between folk medicine and the organized indigenous systems of medicine

There is a symbiotic relationship between the folk medicine and the developed indigenous systems of medicines. By this, we mean that on the one hand the local health traditions seem to be solutions to problems of health in the various given contexts applying basic principles and understanding of indigenous system of medicine and reciprocally that the classical scientific and organized expression of the scientific principles underlying local health practices. These two seem to be identical i.e., they are the expression of the same basic underlying approach and method finding expression at two different levels.⁴⁵

The modern system of medicine has not so far developed specific and effective treatment to combat cases of Viral Hepatitis.⁴⁶ Folk medicine in modern times is inspired by allopathic and other systems of medicines and attempt to combine its benefits with these of other. Prevention of diseases by folk medicine has more potentialities. Tribal's have wonderful medicine to cure diseases. Folk medicine is very inexpensive and it costs nothing. Physicians treatment based on tradition and for particular diseases never charges. Another important aspect of treatment is with herbs. The aborigines of our country used several herbs for their ailments. They know how to preserve the milk for three month with the help of certain herbs.⁴⁷

The local health traditions or folk medicines are very comprehensive in that they cover not only cures for general ailments home remedies, knowledge of foods, knowledge on Folk magico-medical rituals etc., but also an entire range of speciality are such as Bone setting, Visha Cikitsa, Marma Cikitsa etc.

FOLK MEDICAL RESEARCH

Regarding the Folk medical research in Europe and the U.S Don Yoder pointed out that "in addition to the national collections there were again, a comparative studies on folk medicine developed in the 19th and early 20th century⁴⁸. In Tamil literature we can find a number of references about folk medicine from the age of Sangam and to the modern period. Archaeological and literary sources indicate the existence of the medical profession and practice even in the '3' millennium before Christ in India. The Kanyakumari district has contributed much to folk medicine. The district is endowed by nature with several hills and mountains with rich herbs of medicinal value and minerals. Marunthuvazhmalai, Kanyakumari district where medicinal herbs are available in abundance.

IN BRITISH PERIOD

During the British rule, the need for medical personnel to serve in the army led the British to start medical schools in India. In the beginning, only Europeans and Eurasians were admitted to these schools. Indians gained entry into medicine later. When medical school were founded in Bombay in 1826, and in Madras in 1827, these schools conducted diploma course in medicine⁴⁹. Gradually medical colleges were established in large Indian cities: such as Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and in a few other cities. Medical schools and colleges existed side by side, qualifying medical men to serve in the army⁵⁰.

WOMEN ENTRY IN TO MEDICAL EDUCATION

The entry of women into medical education in the late nineteenth century was necessitated by the strict purdah system practiced not only by Muslims but also by Hindus. The purdah system prevented women from being attended by male doctors, a circumstance that led to a high rate of maternal and child mortality⁵¹.

The custom of feeding all men folk and children of the house first⁵². Women eating last often left with little nutritions of food. The dominance of the medical profession in research on the health labour force derive from the tradition set by Talcott persons. Talcott person (1951) seminal essay is on the social institution of medicine give a clear picture about the enrichment of research activities in that field. Studies of the world production and work have been continued to be influenced by the traditions created by Durkheim, Marx and Weber. These traditions have shaped the studies of medical work as well⁵³.

A NEW OUTLOOK

Even more important than any of the above inputs, what is required is a new outlook towards indigenous systems of medicine. With the developments of modern science and technology and the onset of the worldwide colonialism on all non-western cultures were dismissed as devoid of any systematic and viable science and technology. Yet while modern science and technology has limited its blessings to a small minority, the vast majority of our people still survive with the material and intellectual sustance from our own indigenous traditions. What is needed is a thorough re-evaluation of indigenous traditions of sciences and technologies as part of our present day search for alternatives. Such a re-evaluation has to be free from the prejudices and preconceptions of the western ethnocentric outlook that has till now clouded our vision. This reevaluation, we hope would lead to the development of an alternative science and technology based on more human values and that would lead to a better, self reliant and non-exploitative science and technology⁵⁴.

FOLK MEDICINE TODAY

Folk medical systems, especially those functioning in a pluralistic society comprising several ethnic groups govern domestic healing activities to a great extent. Recent the increasing complexity, technically and cost of modern medicine have spurred renewed attempts at self-medication and the use of herbal preparations, thus reviving folk medical practices.

A number of folk remedies used in the past are now manufactured as pharmaceutical preparations prescribed by physicians. For example, rauwolfia is an extract of the snakeroot plant which was used for centuries in the far east for its calming effect. It is now prescribed physicians to lower blood pressure. Reserpine a derivative of rauwolfia has been used by psychiatrists in treating severe mental disorders. Foxglove was first brewed by Indians to treat dropsy fluid in the legs caused heart problems. This practice occurred for hundreds of years before it was discovered. Foxglove contributed the active ingredients now known as digitalis. Today digitalis is commonly used to stimulate weakened hearts⁵⁵.

Tamil Nadu played an important role in the international medical field, even before the Christian era. In charaka Samhita, we come across a meeting. So to say the first international Medical conference was held in 1000 B.C on the slopes of the Great Himalayas, where 53 sages took part in the deliberations of devising ways and means to bringout Trisutra (three kinds of knowledge pertaining to Indian Medical Science) Viz.. Hetu Sutra (Ethnology), Viyadhi Sutra (Pathology) and Aushadasutra (Pharmacology). A chapter of the book sumhita given a list of participants of the world meet. This meet was presided by Bharadvaja and the sage Agasthiya represented South India. Agasthiya delivered a key note address on Astance (Octopartite) which includes General Medicines (Kaya) paediatrics (bala) Hysteria (Graha) ENT (Urthunga) Surgery (Salya), Toxicology (Visha) and treatment for virility (Resagine)⁵⁶.

Nowadays the Indigenous system have received significant recognition amongst a number of modern allopathic Physicians. It is noteworthy that besides allopathy system of medicine, they choose traditional primarily for disease like varma. Jaundice, rheumatism, arthritis, fracture, loss of hair, eyeache, whooping cough, piles, weeping enzema and leucodermia.

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