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Azhagiamandapam, Thiruvithancode, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, India - 629174



POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY


INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON

Historical Studies And Research

Certificate

This is to certify that Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms P. PUSHPA LATHA, Asst. Prof. of History of Muslim Arts College participated in the International Conference on Historical Studies and Research organized by Postgraduate and Research Department of History, MUSLIM ARTS COLLEGE, Thiruvithancode, on 23-03-2023 and presented a paper entitled A Study - Medical Heritage of Ancient Tanjore.


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**International Conference
On**

HISTORICAL STUDIES

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**23rd MARCH 2023,
THURSDAY**

Organized By

PG & RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

MUSLIM ARTS COLLEGE

THIRUVITHANCODE - 629174,

KANYAKUAMRI DIST

TAMIL NADU - INDIA

CONTENTS

SL. NO	TOPIC	PAGE NO
1	RISE OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS <i>Prof. Dr. G.P SUDHEER, Dr. N. MARYUSHA</i>	1
2	RECOVERING THE SUBJECT SUBALTERN STUDIES AND HISTORIES IN SOUTH INDIAN HISTORY: A CRITICAL STUDY <i>Dr. M. SYED IBRAHIM</i>	4
3	THIRUCHARANATHUMALAI - A HISTORICAL STUDY <i>C. SELVARAJ</i>	11
4	RANI KI VAV-THE UNESCO HERITAGE SITE <i>Dr. J AMALA THANKA KUMARI</i>	14
5	INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE <i>DR. N. SUBHA NANTHINI</i>	17
6	A GLANCE OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN AYE KINGDOM <i>Dr. P. ASHMI JENEX</i>	24
7	WELFARE POLICIES OF THE DELHI SULTANATE <i>Dr. S. DORAL</i>	32
8	WELFARE SCHEMES OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT <i>Dr. P. JUSTIN PAUL</i>	37
9	A STUDY ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT <i>Dr. C.R. SELVAN</i>	43
10	MANIFESTATION OF THE HINDU THEISM AND PANTHEISM <i>Dr. R. MAHESWARI</i>	46
11	LOURDHAMMAL SIMON- DEFENDER OF THE COASTAL COMMUNITY <i>Dr. T. ANITHA</i>	50
12	HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL STYLE OF THE PALLAVAS <i>Dr. P. RAMALAKSHMI</i>	52
13	A STUDUY - MEDICAL HERITAGE OF ANCIENT TAMILAKAM <i>Dr. P. PUSHPALATHA</i>	59
14	HISTORY OF NATTUKOTTAI CHETTIARS A TRADITIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY <i>Dr. K. THANKARAJ</i>	63

A STUDY - MEDICAL HERITAGE OF ANCIENT TAMILAKAM

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Abstract

The contribution of the Tamils to the world civilization is very significant. The Tamils have contributed a lot in various fields like literature, art, architecture, cultural and medicine. Most ancient medicines contributed by the Tamils are being used worldwide. Those medicines were also used to cure several serious diseases. The present paper discusses on the various contribution of Tamils towards medicine such as Siddha system of medicine. Further, the paper focuses on the Maruthuva Malai, the medical heritage of Kanyakumari.

Introduction

Tamils have established an indigenous culture of their own and excelled in different fields. In the field of medicine their achievement and legacy to the world are commendable. Even from the very ancient period Tamils have identified various diseases and found suitable herbal medicines to cure them. Tamils developed home-grown system known as Siddha system to cure serious diseases. This system obtains medicines from herbs, herbal roots, leaves, flowers, barks, fruits etc. In addition, the Tamils also practiced a system of treatment to cure serious diseases with the knowledge possessed about the minute functioning of the human organs as well as complete knowledge of physiology of human.

History of Siddha

Siddha is the oldest and the most relevant medical system available to mankind. Siddha Vaidyam originated in South India and is deeply rooted in the culture. Siddha Vaidyam is understood to have been taught first by Lord Siva to his wife Goddess Parvathy. Parvathy in turn taught it to her son Lord Muruga who then transferred this wisdom to his disciple Agasthya, who spread it amongst humans. Agasthya and his 18 disciples has been the most prominent clan of ancient time Siddhars, who perfected this art in this world. The teachings were taught in Tamil. The Siddha slogans of Aadi Nool are as follows: i) Mangala ulakam pottum vaidyanathan thanpal ii) Sankari ketta

saram Shanmughan thelinthu pinpal iii) Thanka Agathyarkku othacharthulla cheedar thannal iv) Ingithamake chonnar epparum Aadi Noolae. This Tamil slogan clearly proclaims that the insight of Siddha knowledge had originated from Lord Siva himself. Hence the Siddha Vaidyam is said to employ Deva Vaidyam.

The Siddha system tackles the body, mind and spirit at the same time hence was known to cure any kind of diseases. Siddha has a strong foundation of tens of thousands of years of clinical practice and collective wisdom of several generations of Siddhars, who dedicated their lives for research and acquisition of knowledge.

18 Siddhargal

Man is considered to be on the top of evolutionary tree. Man is considered superior to all animals with many abilities and disabilities. Man possesses the unique ability to attain self-knowledge. Siddhars or 18 siddhargal are considered the holy saints of India. They were just normal people who had the will to understand the principles of human life and thereby casted themselves to conquer a semi-divine state. Siddhars attained this spiritual perfection through rigorous practice and experimentation.

The main theme of Siddhars was to increase the life span of mankind. The practice that subsisted in their life style was "Siddha medicine" and the name as was formulated by Siddhars themselves. The following are the name of the 18 Siddhas: 1) Nandi 2) Agastyar 3) Thirumular 4)

Punakkisar 5) Pulathiar 6) Korakkar
 7) Idaikkadar 8) Bogar 9) Pulikkaisar 10)
 Karuvoorar 11) Konganavar 12) Kalangi
 13) Azhukanni 14) Agappaiyar 15)
 Pampatti siddhar 16) Theraiyar 17)
 Kuthambai 18) Sattaimuni.

Nandi is considered as the direct disciple of Lord Siva and has contributed Nandhi kalai gnanam 1000. Agastyar is the father of Tamil literature. He is also considered as the direct disciple of Lord Siva. He is mastery over language, medicine, alchemy and spirituality. Thirumular is known as the prince of mystics: His contribution towards Siddha system of medicine includes 'Thirumanthiram' and Saiva 'Siddhantham'. Nansi is his guru. Punakkisar is from Nannaser. Pulathiar is from Papanasam and Tirualavutaiyar temple. Korakkar's contributions are Korakkar brahma gnanam which includes Korakkar brahma gnana soothiram and Korakkar karpa choothiram. Korakkar mooli is used by him in the preparations of poorna lehyam. Idaikkadar contributed rasavatlham and kayakarpam. Bogar is known as the propagator of spirituality. He contributed a lot in the field of alchemy, medicine and yoga. Pulikkaisar Karoovurar vadha kaviyam, Karuvoorar sive gnana bodhakam and Thirusaippa are the master piece of Karuvoorar. Konganavar is the son of Bogar. He is expertise on philosophy, medicine and spirituality. Kalangi is from Thirukkataavur. Azhukanni contributed Siddhar gnanakovai. Agappaiyar worked on Gnana siddhi. Pampatti siddhar practiced in Maruthamalai, Dwarakai and Virudhagireeswarar. Theraiyar is master of astrology. This contribution on diseases and disorders are creditable. Kuthambai is from mayiladuthurai. Sattaimuni contributions include Sattamuni pini gnanam 100, Sattamuni vadha kaviyam 1000, Sattamuni vatha soothiram 200 and Sattamuni gnana vailakkam 51 Maruthuva Malai is considered as the medical heritage of Kanyakumari. According to the ancient

fragment of the Sanjeevi Mountain, a piece of land which fell down here, and it was carried by Hanuman from Mahendragiri to Lanka for healing the fatal wounds of Lakshmana, the brother of Rama, the epic hero. It stretches for more than a km, reaching a height of 800 feet at the highest point. It is located in the southern most tip of the Western Ghats of Agasteeswaram taluk of Kanyakumari district. It is about 1 km from pothaiyadi, 2 km from Swamithoppu and 11 km from Nagercoil.

Maruthuva Malai, which is also referred as Marunthu Vazhum Malai and is interpreted as Medicine living Mountain. Maruthuva Malai is one among the major mountains in the Hindu mythology. The famous social reformer, Shree Narayana Guru is deemed to have meditated in a cave in Maruthuva Malai. It is a genuine place of adobe of medicinal herbs which are considered as a source for Ayurvedic remedial herbs. A Sivan temple is available at the peak of the mountain shielded by a canopy of trees. The Agasthya Cave is also present at the peak of the Maruthuva Malai. Siddhar Agasthya is believed to have existed in the Maruthuva Malai. Maruthuva Malai has nine theerthams - Shiva, Agasthya, Rama, Sita, Hanuman, Palar, Devendaran, Brhama and Kalidhasan.

Preparation of Medicine

The Siddha system of medicine is the medical heritage of the Tamils. The Tamils are well known for their art of making medicine out of herbal plants even from the ancient period. The Sangam literature and the inscription of the medieval period provide sufficient information regarding the medicines that used during the period. The ancient Tamil Literature bears testimony to the contribution of Saint Agasthiyar of Pothigai Hill to the Siddha system of medicine.

The siddha system of medicine was prepared out of vegetable kingdom like roots, fruits, leaves and the stems of herbal plants and also by using minerals such as mercury, iron, gold, fat etc, in a suitable proportion it required for. The green leaves that are termed as mooligai in Tamil were the first product of medicine. The green leaves, fruits and the vegetables were used as medicinal products for curing diseases. This indigenous medical system is found very effective than the Western medicines in curing deadly diseases such as cancer, asthma, fits etc, which is one of the legacy of the Tamils to the world civilization. The literature Rudrakantam of Kambaramayanam deals with four types of medicines: 1) Sanchiva Karani 2) Santa Karani 3) Salliya Karani 4) Savalniya Karani. Mirda sanchivani is a new type of medicine prescribed in Sundarakantam. The medicine 'nei' prepared out of herbal plants is used to cure wounds. Siddha did not wane due to its inability in its efficacy but due to lack of experts who could handle this purest and surest of medical sciences. Siddha medicine is now re-awakening to restore its lost glory of unfathomable wisdom, completeness in cure and unshakeable in its practicalities. The treatment in siddha medicine is aimed at keeping the three humors in equilibrium and maintenance of seven elements. The treatment should be commenced as early as possible after assessing the course and cause of the disease. The treatment is classified into three categories: Deva maruthuvam (Divine method), Manuda maruthuvam (Rational method) and Asura maruthuvam (Surgical method). In Divine method, medicine parpam, chendooram, gurukuligai made of mercury, sulphur and pashanams are used. In rational method, medicine made of herbs like churvanam, kudineer, or vadagan are used. In surgical method incision, heat application, bloodletting, or leech application are used. It is assumed that when the normal equilibrium of the three humans Vaadham, Pittam and Kapam is disturbed, disease is

caused. The factors assumed to affect this equilibrium are environment, climatic conditions, diet, physical activities and stress.

Plants used in siddha system of medicine for arthritis has been studied from various siddha literatures. In Bogar Nikandu, about 4,448 diseases are described and various herbs are indicated for these diseases. Siddha system of medicine caters a totality of herbs and is unique in exhibiting fewer side effects. It has a better answer for curing refractive diseases like arthritis, cancer, bronchial etc.

The unparalleled benefits that Siddha medicine offers are mainly in its preventive measures, which begin even before the birth and its ability, to holistically and naturally address ailments that arise throughout life in terms of complete cure. Comparing to allopathic medicines, Siddha medicine treats the whole person, revitalizes and rejuvenates the organs, and thus proves to be a good alternative.

Conclusion

The paper discussed on the medical heritage of Tamils. It is clear that Siddha has a strong foundation of clinical practice and collective wisdom of several generations of Siddhars, who dedicated their lives for research and acquisition of knowledge. Today's Siddha physician is guided by the experience handed down through centuries and hence makes Siddha the most potent medical system available to mankind. Siddha Kalai aim to provide full healing abilities to be given to mankind so that it will be usable.

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