

A Review on Fundamental Principles of *Varmam* – An Ancient Siddha Medical Science

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Abstract

Varmam is the special branch of Siddha Medical system still in practice in Southern parts of Tamil Nadu, especially, in Kanya Kumari and in Southern parts of Kerala. The systematic study of varmam energy in the application of martial arts and therapeutic usage is called as Varmakalai. This medical science had been developed by Tamil Siddhas from ancient times and being transferred to generations through oral tradition, palm leaf and paper manuscripts. Varmam points are bio-energetic sites through which subtle vital energy flows and aid physiological functions of the body. These points are located in the junctions of nerves, naadis, muscle and bones. This review brings out the history, classification of varmam, physiological action and pathological aspects of varmam, its relation with bio-energy transmitter pathways (naadi), angular energy connections (Kona nilai) and the application of this art in therapeutics. It plays a promising role in reviving a person from unconscious state, instant pain management in neuro-musculo-skeletal diseases and also in other ailments. The datas were collected from traditional paper manuscripts and printed books.

Keywords

Varmam, Siddha, Neuro-musculo-skeletal diseases



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INTRODUCTION

Siddha Medical System is a unique system, being contemporaneous with many ancient medical systems of the world, dwelt among the Tamil people of South India rendering service to humanity for more than five thousand years in combating diseases and in maintaining physical, mental, social and spiritual health¹. The system is based on writings of Siddhas, who are eminent philosophical, spiritual and medicinal scientists given their contributions in medicine formulations, *rasavadham* (alchemy), *kayakarpam* (revjuvenation), *yogam*, *varmam*, *medical astrology*, *panjapatchi sastram*, *saram*² etc.,

Varmam is the special branch of Siddha Medicine. Though it gained popularity as martial art, its immense medical benefits for many ailments are still ignored. The basic principles of Varmam science explain the fundamentals of Siddha Medical system.

VARMAM

Varmam is a vital energy flow circulating inside the body³. It is the manifestation of the basic five elements (Iym Bootham), three bio-humours (*vali*, *azhal*, *iyam*), ten vital airs (*Vali 10*), ten bio-energy transmitter pathways (*Naadis*), vital energy (*Vaasi*) and Kundalini^{4,5,6}.

VARMAM POINTS

The places where the vaasi energy resides and activates both body and life-energy are Varmam points^{7,8}. These points are located in the junctions of nerves, naadis, muscle and bones⁹. They are bio-energetic sites which aid physiological functions of the body.

HISTORY OF VARMAKALAI

It is believed that Lord Shiva the first siddha taught the art of Varmam to his son Murugan. The lineage extends to Siddha Agathiar, Nanthi devar and their disciples^{10,11,12}. Most of the Varmam texts available in Tamil language were written in the name of Siddhas Agathiyar, Thirumoolar, Bogar, Therayar, Romarishi, Ramadevar. Varmam art has been sustained and nourished for centuries by the tradition of aasan (the master) and disciple. The master would take up the responsibilities of passing his own verified, experimental and textual knowledge to his trusted student who would continue the same process down the line. This art survived and strengthened its roots through this process for centuries and still exists even today on the same principle.

SYNONYMS OF VARMAM:

The *Varmam* energy is denoted by the names like *Vaasi*, *Puravi*, *Kattru*, *Uyir*,

*Maigai, Pranan, Kalai, Swasam, Saram, Yogam, Param, Sivam*³.

*Vayu, Sarvathma, kalam, Prakasamana kattru, Jeevan, Moochu, Akirana kantha aavi, Saivam, Aarubi*⁸.

CLASSIFICATION OF VARMAM

There are two kinds of classification. One is based upon region wise distribution (Kandam -5) and the other is based upon chakraas (Aadharam- 6). In both kinds, the total number of Varmam points is said to be 108 in number. The number of Varmam points located in upper limb is 15, lower limb is 14, below the navel is 9, above the navel is 45 and above the neck is 25¹³.

TYPES OF VARMAM

Varmam points are the places which activate, regulate, supplies energy and functions according to the body needs. The *Varmam* text "*Varma Vilvisai*" enumerates 8000 *Varmam* points and *Kumbamuni narambarai* describes 251 points¹⁴. Most of the *Varmam* texts enlist 108 *Varmam* points of which 12 are *padu varmams* and 96 are *thodu varmams*.

Varma Chinthamani explains there are 828 varmam points which are situated in three regions (kandam) of the body. i.e., Vatha region which constitutes navel to foot and contains 190 varmams, pittha region

includes the area between navel and base of the neck comprises 366 varmams, silaethuma region includes the region above the head containing 182 varmams and 90 varmams are included in thondham¹⁵.

Padu varmams are the varmam points which are directly connected to brain energy¹⁶ and serve as major energy storage points. According to "*Pingala nigandu*¹⁷", the word '*padu*' means brain. *Thodu varmams* are the *varmam* points which are connected to *padu varmams*. The word '*thodu*' refers to touch. It means through the act of touch, one varmam point gets connected to another varmam point. Each *paduvarmam* is connected to eight *thodu varmams* i.e., $8 \times 12 = 96$ *Thodu varmam*. They serve as minor energy storage points.

The total number of *Varmam* points which accounts to 108 comprises two terminologies *Varmam* and *Kaalam*. The word *Varmam* refers to static energy and the term *Kaalam* refers to kinetic energy¹⁴.

Other types of *Varmam* mentioned in the texts are *vatha varmam* (64), *pitha varmam*(26), *silathuma varmam*(6)¹⁸. *Varmam* literatures also describes patchi varmam (varmam related with astrology-panjapatchi), odukki varmam¹⁹, thattu varmam etc.,

VARMAM PHYSIOLOGY

Varmam energy plays an important role in maintaining the physiology of the human body. *Varma Kannadi*¹⁸ exemplifies that the Varmam energy helps to protect the physical body.

The physiology of Varmam point occurs by the principle of 'kona nilai' (Angular connections between Varmam points. The Varmam points and energy pathways are interconnected by angular connections¹⁴. It refers to geometric pathways through which the Varmam energy traverses from one point to another. They are circular in the head, crescent shaped in the neck, hexagon on the chest, square shaped in the upper abdomen, triangle in male on the lower abdomen, inverted triangle in the female on the lower abdomen, pentagon on the back²¹. The knowledge of *konanilai* is very indispensable while doing Varmam treatment and massage. Any hindrance in the angular connections leads to diseases.

The chief functions are receiving, transmitting, sending and serving as energy transformers¹⁴. Thus varmam points perform ten functions which differ accordingly.

This function is aided by energy flow like *Aadhara Satthi*, *Gnana Satthi*, *Analam Satthi*, *Mano Satthi*, *Kaaya Satthi*, *Usuvasa*

Satthi, *Nisuvasa Satthi*, *Aathara Satthi*¹⁴, etc. The track through which these energy flows touch some Varmam points and aids its functions by stimulating the predominant vital air. It is interesting to note that all Varmam points are not related to naadi, and there are certain Varmam points which will stimulate the flow of these bio-energy tracks.

VARMAM PATHOLOGY^{22,23,24}

The basic principles of Varmam medical science explain the fundamentals of Siddha Medicine. Since the Varmam point is composed of units of *Vatham*, *Pitham*, *Silaethumam*, any derangement in these units will lead to a disease. As vatham and varmam are air flow, an imbalance in the vatham directly reflects the varmam energy resulting in a disease. Likewise improper angular function (*kona nilai*) will also leads to disease.

When a varmam point is affected the part of the body in which it is located and the other parts connected with also develop disease due to the derangement of bio-humours. Therefore Varmam treatment if started earlier with the above said parameters, patient shall be given the best treatment to alleviate the root cause of the disease.

VARMAM AND NAADI

Siddhars enumerate 'Naadi' as a fundamental principle of art of varmam. According to Siddhars, the term 'Naadi' is not applicable to just channels in which blood flows, but also extends to energy streams through which vital energy flows²⁵. The Varmam text called 'Kumbamuni Narambarai' lists out 18 kinds of Naadis. Of these, twelve Naadis are considered medically important and are explained in most Varmam texts. Each naadi is connected varmam. Among them, three Naadis are given great emphasis when it comes to maintaining health. The knowledge about naadi is important for a Varmam physician to know the pathogenesis of disease and to give treatment.

Three naadis *Idakalai*, *Pingkalai*, *Suzhumunai* which are connected to *abanan*, *pranan* and *samanan vayus*²⁶ are important in the maintenance of homeostasis between *vatham*, *pitham kapham*. Any damage to the flow of these naadis results in a disease.

There are twelve padu varmam or major points in the human body. They are thilardha kaalam, natchathira kaalam, pidari kaalam, sevikutri kaalam, urakka kaalam, thummi kaalam, ner varmam, urumi kaalam, adappa kaalam, siria athisurukki, valiya athisurukki, kallidai kaalam. Each varmam point is

linked with twelve naadis namely *suzhumunai naadi*, *pingkalai naadi*, *idakalai naadi*, *singuvai*, *purudan*, *kaanthari*, *asani*, *karu*, *alampurudan*, *pasali*, *visulodharan*, *sangini naadi* respectively^{18,27}. Thus, the composition of Varmam with energy track (Naadi), vital air (Vaayu) and basic pranana (Vaasi) is being elicited. Naadis are like meridian systems of Varmam energy flow like Acupuncture.

VARMAM AND MEDICAL ASTROLOGY

In Siddha medical astrology, *panjapatchi* which encompasses characters of five birds represents the influence on five elements on human body. These birds are related with five internal organs like falcon to spleen (*vallooru*), owl to liver, crow to gall bladder, cock to lungs and peacock to heart according to Varmam science^{18, 27}. They are further linked to twenty seven stars.

The word *amirthanilai* refers to energy circulation from big toe to head and then from head to big toe. This is usually based upon lunar effect in which from no moon day, the energy from right big toe traverses upwards to head and from full moon day the energy descends from head to big toe. Varmam text emphasize there are fifteen places where the elixir like energy flow

(amirdham) is stored on particular days^{18, 27} which help to ascertain the quantum of impact of varmam injury and also to diagnose and treat diseases.

LOCATIONS OF VARMAM POINTS

Varmam points in the body can be determined by anatomical location, proportional measurement, graphical measuring method, locating by reference to adjacent varmam points, location by classification, finger breadth measurement method, thread - measurement method²⁸.

A deep knowledge about Varmalogy is needed to exhibit the Siddha pathology. It is further needed to execute Thadaval Murai (Massage). Because each and every stroke advocated is based upon *thuvathasa naadi, thasa vaayu, vaasi, ethirkalam, marukalam, adangal, adukkugal, sarappai, amirtha nilaigal, kona nilaigal*. Treatment should be started considering the *Naadi, Ethir Kaalam, Maru Kalam*.

Adangals are the places of enormous energy storage and can be called as bio-energy transformers. They are the places where the vital idakalai and pingkalai naadi meets²⁵. They are used for emergency treatment to revive a person from unconsciousness. When *adangals* are ineffective, **thiravukols**

are advocated. Varmam texts describe in detail about 110 adangals and 13 thiravukols¹⁴. It is very important to learn these techniques only from a proficient Guru or aasan, which is also suggested in Siddha Varmam literatures.

VARMAM POINTS STIMULATION METHODS

When anyone of the basic functions of Varmam is affected it leads to disease. The treatment Protocol includes stimulation of Varmam points, external treatment like Oileation, *Ilaikizhi, Neikizhi, Mamisa kizhi, Purakayiru, Thuvalai, Pattru* etc and internal medicines varies according to age, sex and physical body type²⁹.

The stimulation of Varmam points is called as '*Kaibaham*', '*seibhagam*^{5,30}'. This is executed in 12 different ways like *anukkal, asaithal, thattal, thadaval, yenthal, oondral, pidithal, nazhukkal, amarthal, pathukkal, karakkal, pinnal*¹⁴. *Varma soodi*²² explains about *pidithal, , nazhukkal, karakkal, pathukkal, thattal*²¹.

Each Varmam can be applied in 12 different ways in four different amount of pressure (Mathirai) i.e. *Mathirai Kanakku – Pathi Kanakku*¹⁸. These parameters refer to amount of pressure applied during Varmam treatment. The depth of touch is *Mathirai*

Kanakku and the Pressure of touch is *Pathi Kanakku*. A sound knowledge of application of Varmam points in this context can be best gained in Gurukula training.

VARMAM MEDICINES

Apart from these manipulative techniques, Varmam literatures encompass medicines of herbal and animal origin. These are unique, as the preparation and availability of most of the ingredients in the formulations are confined to South Tamil Nadu, India. They are usually used in fractures, chronic diseases both internally and externally. To name a few, *Kaaya thirumeni tailam*^{30,31}, *Kaaya sarvangam*³⁰, *Kaaya rajangam tailam*³², *Murivennai*³³, *Vasavennai* etc³⁰.,

VARMAM STIMULATION FOR DISEASES

The Varmam points are energy storage points which traverse through particular energy channels or streams. Proper stimulation of Varmam points helps in treatment of diseases. One who knows to apply varmam in a proper method by analysing the Vatham, Pitham, Silaethumam's imbalance can treat diseases. We can infer that each varmam point constitutes idakalai, pingkalai, suzhumunai naadi and vatham, pitham, silaethumam in different proportions. Thus tuning apt

varmam points in proper methodologies help to treat disease by balancing the three humours, whose imbalance cause diseases.

In olden times, it is often employed to revive a person from unconscious state and to correct the energy flow of the person who has fallen from great height like trees. This therapy serves as main therapy in the management of neuro-musculo-skeletal diseases and also as an adjuvant therapy for many illnesses relating to gastro intestinal conditions, seizures, depression, menstrual disorders, respiratory conditions etc. This may work by regulating the neuro transmitter flow, synaptic transmission and signal pathways.

CONCLUSION

Thus the review had thrown light on the ancient Tamil language based Varmam medical science which possesses keys to fundamentals of Siddha Medical System in aspects of foetal formation, physiology and pathology of body through maintenance of basic five elements, body humours, naadi etc. Varmam, a vital point manipulation technique helps to correct the subtle things of the body. Extensive scientific researches should be carried out to evaluate the mechanism and pathway of Varmam energy flow which renders remedy for many

ailments without side effects and often with minimum medicines.

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