

# Food for Thought – Principles and Practice of Siddha Medicine

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## INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is a summum bonum of human existence and for a healthy life. Properly designed food is essential from the very early stages of life for proper growth and development. Most of the diseases affecting the human population such as low birth weight, protein energy malnutrition in children, and chronic energy deficiency in adults, micronutrient malnutrition and diet-related non communicable diseases are due to improper dietary habits. Siddha medicine is a poetry of divinity and is a holistic system of medicine ensuring promising results in the treatment and prevention of many chronic diseases.

## SIDDHA SCIENCE OF NUTRITION & DIETETICS

### a) **Concept of well-balanced diet and Taste and its biological significance in health**

Current scientific society classifies food substances basically into carbohydrates, fats and proteins. It believes in the nutritious value of food i.e. a balanced diet and its role in the health and disease, whereas Siddha medicine classifies a well-balanced diet based on the proportionate presentation of six tastes in the diet namely the sweet, sour, salt, bitter, pungent and astringent respectively.

### b) **“Food is Medicine thy Medicine is Food”**

Recent trends in modern science mentions a strong correlation between the food, the healthy state and an apparent state of ill health, which further acknowledges the concept of Siddha medicine “Food is medicine thy Medicine is Food” which widely appreciates the usage of food and its role in preventing and managing diseases. However, diseases are at the either end of the spectrum of malnutrition (under nutrition and over nutrition) are important.

Recent evidences indicate that undernutrition *in utero* may set the pace for diet-related chronic diseases in later life. Population explosion, demographic changes, rapid urbanization and alterations in traditional habits contribute to the ill health compendium of origin and usually of development of certain unhealthy dietary practices, resulting in diet-related chronic diseases/non communicable nature.

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Siddha medicine widely practices its theory of dietetics in its therapeutic regimen following the rules of the nature and its synergetic effect in the management of diseases.

c) **Concept of Mukkutram(Tri-dosha), its interlink between taste and Season (Seasonal regimen and Dietary regimen):**

Siddha medicine emphasizes the theory of interdependent phenomenon of macro cosmos (Universe) and micro cosmos (Human body) and applies this law of nature in all its medical application.

அண்டத்தில் உள்ளதே பிண்டம்  
பிண்டத்தில் உள்ளதே அண்டம்  
அண்டமும் பிண்டமும் ஒன்றே  
அறிந்து தான் பார்க்கையிலே  
சட்டமுனி

Aṇṭattil Uḷḷatē Piṇṭam  
Piṇṭattil Uḷḷatē Aṇṭam  
Aṇṭamum Piṇṭamum Onrē  
Aṇṭintua Tāṇ Pārkkaiyilē  
Caṭṭamuni.

According to this existing law of nature, Man is interdependent with his cohabitants.

மிகினும் குறையினும் நோய்செய்யும் நூலோர்  
வளிமுதலாய் எண்ணிய மூன்று  
திருக்குறள்

“Mikiṇum kuṛaiyiṇum nōyceyyum nūlōr  
Vaḷimutalā eṇṇiya mūṇru”

Thirukkural

Siddha medicine basically, classifies three humours namely *Vali*, *Azhal* and *Iyyam* widely called as *Mukkuttram* as the sole and predominating causative factor for health and disease. There exist an interactive adaptive circadian rhythm in both the macrocosm (seasons) and microcosm(*Mukkuttram*) with each other, biological changes in the human body takes place in accordance to this interactive circadian phenomenon. Any imbalance in this adaptive behavior of the cosmos results in disease.

d) **Food and Disease i.e Pathiyam and Apathiyam (Do's and Don'ts)**

According to Siddha medicine, few food regimens are to be followed in order to treat diseases which are mentioned in the literatures of siddha medicine



profile as Pathiyam (food substances to be taken) and Apathiyam (food substances to be avoided). For example, Sesbania green, bitter gourd and corn are to be generally avoided for many types of Siddhic medications. There are various types of pathiyam such as Itchapathiyam, agapathiyam etc.,

**e) Pothu karpam and Sirappu karpam**

The specific usage of medicinal plants and food substances in order to provide general health and prevention of diseases are called as pothu karpam. Sirappu karpam is the usage of dietary regimen of food substances and medicinal plants in the chronic diseased conditions.

**f) Proper preparation of Food**

Food in general are harmless but may prove harmful if the preparation is faulty and storage of food for a long time after cooking.

There are eight types of such thodams (defects) such as *Kanji thodam*, *kuzhaivuthodam*, *kothithodam*, *kaanthalthodam*, and improperly pounded rice, impurities in food articles, disorder to dried food and disorder due to spoiled food.

**g) Balanced food and their preparation**

According to the laws of nature and Siddha medicine, a food substance has dual action both good and bad. For example, a food substance that increases the *Vali* humour will also produce generalized body pain.

**Agents that maintain the equilibrium of the three humours:**

Cardamom, turmeric, cumin seeds, dry ginger, asafoetida, fenugreek, garlic and pepper are the substances which maintain the equilibrium of the three humours-found in traditional routine south India recipe.

**h) Food poison and adverse reactions:**

Some food substances when combined, due to their composition, physical & chemical reactions and others varied nature, taste etc., in course of time may become toxic. For example: combinations of the following foods are toxic. They are Fish or sour fruit, horse gram, millet, wild green gram or greens along with milk, chicken or meat or banana mixed with curds, eating the pork along with flesh of porcupine, consuming radish (*Raphanus sativus*) along with black gram (*Vigna mungo*), consuming black night shade (*Solanum nigrum*) along with long pepper (*Piper longum*), Pepper (*Piper nigrum*), honey and lotus seeds (*Nelumbo nucifera*), mixing betel leaves (*Piper betle*) with oil, cooking of heart-leaved, Malabar night shade (*Basella alba*) and sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) together, mixing any two or three or all of the following foods such as honey, ghee, fat, oil and water in equal proportion, frying pelicanilis bird in pig's ghee, eating the oil or ghee in which fish had been fried, drinking milk immediately after consuming fish, radish or greens, drinking water immediately after consuming sugarcane, mixing arrack with sugar.

i) **Food agents of Prevention of diseases (Therayar's Literature on diet):**

Rules for preventing the diseases have been well enumerated and documented (Piṭiyaṅkū Viti) by Therayar in his valuable works '*Pathartha GunaChinthamani*' as,

**பிணியணுகாவிதி (Piṭiyaṅkū Viti)**

“திண்ணமிரண்டுள்ளேசிக்கலடக்காமற்

பெண்ணின்பாலொன்றைப்பெருக்காமல்

உண்ணுங்கால்நீர்சுருக்கிமோர்பெருக்கிநெய்யுருக்கி

உண்பவர்தம்பேருரைக்கிற்போமேபிணி”

Tiṅṅa Miraṅṅuḷḷē Cikka Laṅakkāmar

Peṅṅinṅpā Lonṅraip Perukkāmal

Uṅṅuṅkāl Nīrcurukki Mōrperukki Neyyurukki

Uṅṅpavartam Pēruaikkiṅ Pōmē Piṅi

“பாலுண்போம்எண்ணைய்பெறினவெந்நீரிற்குளிப்போம்

பகற்புணரோம்பகற்றுயிலோம்பாயோதரமுழுத்த

ஏலஞ்சேர்குழலியரோடிளவெயிலும்விரும்போம்

இரண்டடக்கோம்ஒன்றைவிடோம்இடதுகையிற்படுப்போம்

மூலஞ்சேர்கறிநுகரோம்முத்ததயிர்உண்போம்

முதனாளிற்சமைத்தகறியமுதெனினுமருந்தோம்

ஞாலந்தான்வந்திடினும்பசித்தொழியவுண்ணோம்

நமனார்க்கிங்கேதுகவைநாமிருக்குமிடத்தே

Pāluṅpōm Eṅṅaiyperin Vennīriṅ Kuḷippōm

Pakarpuṅarōm Pakarṅuyilōm Pāyōtaramua Mūtta

Ēlaṅcēr Kuazaliyarō Ṭiḷaveyilum Virumpōm

Iraṅṅatakkōm Onṅraiviṅṅōm Iṅatukaiyir Paṅuppōm

Mūlaṅcēr Kaṅri Nukarōm Mūttatayir Uṅṅpōm

Mutaṅāḷir Camaittakari Yamuteninṅu Maruntōm

Ñālantāṅ Vantiṅṅinum Pacittoziya Vuṅṅōm

Namaṅārkkīñ Kētukavai Nāmirukku Miṭattē

உண்பதிருபொழுதொழியமூன்றுபொழுதுண்ணோம்  
உறங்குவதிராவொழியப்பகலுறக்கஞ்செய்யோம்  
பெண்கடமைத்திங்களுக்கோர்காலன்றிமருவோம்  
பெருந்தாகமெடுத்திடினும்பெயர்த்துநீருந்தோம்  
மண்பரவுகிழங்குகளிற்கருணையின்றிப்புசியோம்  
வாழையிளம்பிஞ்சொழியக்கனியருந்தல்செய்யோம்  
நண்புபெறவுண்டபின்புகுறுநடையுங்கொள்வோம்  
நமனார்க்கிங்கேதுகவைநாமிருக்குமிடத்தே

Uṅpatirua Pozutoziya Mūnṛupozu Tuṅṅōm  
Uṛāṅkuvati Rāvōziyap Pakaluṛakkañ Ceyyōm  
Peṅkaṭamait Tiṅkaḷukkōr Kālaṅṛi Maruvōm  
Peruntāka Meṭuttiṭiṅuam Peyarttunī Raruntōm  
Maṅparavu Kizaṅkukaḷiṛ Karuṅaiyiṅṛip Puciyōm  
Vāzaiyilam Piṅcoziyak Kaṅiyaruntal Ceyyōm  
Naṅpupeṛa Vuṅṭapiṅpu Kuṛuṅaiyūñ Koḷvōm  
Namaṅārkkīñ Kētukavai Nāmirukkua Miṭattē

ஆறுதிங்கட்கொருதடவைவமனமருந்தயில்வோம்  
அடர்நான்குமதிக்கொருகாற்பேதியுறைநுகர்வோம்  
தேறுமதியொன்றரைக்கோர்தரநசியம்பெறுவோம்  
திங்களரைக்கிரண்டுதரஞ்சவரவிருப்புறுவோம்  
வீறுசதுர்நாட்கொருகால்நெய்முழுக்கைத்தவிரோம்  
விழிகளுக்கஞ்சனமூன்றுநாட்கொருகாலிடுவோம்  
நாறுகந்தம்புட்பமிவைநடுநிசியின்முகரோம்  
நமனார்க்கிங்கேதுகவைநாமிருக்குமிடத்தே

Āruatiṅkaṭ Koruṭaṭavai Vamaṅamarun Tayilvōm



Aṭarnāṅku Matikkorukāṛ Pētiyurāi Nukarvōm  
Tērumati Yoṅṛaraikkōṛ Taranaciyam Peṛuvōm  
Tiṅkaḷaraik Kiraṅṭutarañ Cavaravirup Puṛuvōm  
Vīrucatur Nāṭkorukāl Neymuzukkait Tavirōm  
Vizikaḷukkañ Caṅamūṅru Nāṭkorukā Liṭuvōm  
Nārukantam Puṭpamivai Naṭuniciyiṅ Mukarōm  
Namaṅārkkīṅ Kētukavai Nāmirukku Miṭattē

பகத்தொழுக்குமாதரசங்கரந்துடைப்பமிவைதூட்  
படநெருங்கோம்தீபமைந்தர்மரநிழலில்வசியோம்  
சுகப்புணர்ச்சியசனபசனத்தருணஞ்செய்யோம்  
துஞ்சலுணவிருமலஞ்சையோகமழுக்காடை  
வகுப்பெடுக்கிற்சிந்துகசமிவைமாலைவிரும்போம்  
வற்சலந்தெய்வம்பிதுர்சற்குருவைவிடமாட்டோம்  
நகச்சலமுமுளைச்சலமுந்தெறிக்குமிடமணுகோம்  
நமனார்க்கிங்கேதுகவைநாமிருக்குமிடத்தே”

Pakattozukku Mātaracañ Karantuṭaiṅpa Mivaitūṭ  
Paṭaneruṅkōm Tīpamaintar Maraniṅalil Vaciyōm  
Cukappuṅarcci Yacaṅapaca Nattaruṅaṅ Ceyyōm  
Tuñcaluṅa Virumalañcai Yōkamazuk Kāṭai  
Vakuppeṭukkiṅ Cintukaca Mivaimālai Virumpōm  
Varcalantey Vampiturcaṅ Kuruvaiviṭa Māṭṭōm  
Nakaccalamua Muḷaicalamun Terikkumiṭa Maṅukōm  
Namaṅārkkīṅ Kētukavai Nāmirukku Miṭattē

There are preventive measures such as the habit of sleep during day time. This will increase the phlegm as well as after fat metabolism in the body due to gross alteration in endocrine functions in the metabolic activities of the body, More over the sleeping time, the posture of the body should be such that the head rests on the left hand, so that the Cardiac function will not be affected. Consumption of roots, tubers and rhizomes would alter normal levels of blood glucose.

The food prepared the previous day should not be consumed even though it is the best food ever tasted because it will have deterioration both in quality and taste, and further toxins would have accumulated and may manifest different types of allergy. Among the tubers, Karunai (Karu, aikki<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>a'ku) alone is suggested and may be consumed everyday as this prevents hemorrhoids and carcinoma. Therayar recommends for a short walk after food for easy digestion.

## Conclusion

Changes in lifestyles of people of both rural and urban areas are seen alter the very structure of our society at a rapid pace today. The shift from traditional to 'modern' foods, changing cooking practices, increased intake of processed and ready-to-eat foods, intensive marketing of junk foods and 'health' beverages have altered human perception of foods as well as their dietary morale. Lack of rationale in consumption of energy-dense foods and those with high calories and salt dominant food pose a serious health risk, especially to children.

An alarming and increasing number of overweight and obese people in the community and the resulting burden of chronic communicable and non-communicable disease and health jeopardy necessitate systematic nutrition plans and awareness programmes on a massive scale. There is a need for warrants, guidelines with strong emphasis on regular physical exercise.

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# Spiritualism and Siddha medicine as portrayed by TV Serial 'Sivamayam'

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## Introduction

Siddha tradition is one of the most ancient's paths among the Tamils (Rajanthan, M at all, 2009, 14). The Siddhas contributed immensely in various aspects including the way to achieve deathless life, alchemy, eight extra powers (*attama sidhi*), yoga, meditation, astronomy, Siddha literature as well as astrology as specially *nadi jothidam* (Sami Sithambaranaar, 2001, 13&14).

There are many words on traditional medicine left behind by Siddhas, hence this system is commonly referred to as Siddha medicine. The Siddhas' works are all to be formed in poetic forms (Rajanthan, M at all, 2012, 49-53). These works are greatly enriched with a lot of in-depth meaning, which can only be understood by one who has knowledge of Siddha tradition and their teachings. Besides that, these works are also highly interwoven by spiritual content. Therefore, one needs to have the knowledge of spirituality too, to understand and interpret the Siddhas' works (Aranga Ramalingam, 2004, 8).

## Objective

At present, mass media has been playing a crucial role in propagating the information of Siddha medicine. This message is disseminated both directly in form of advertisements and indirectly through dramas, TV serials, movies and others (O'Sullivan, 1994, 176). For instance, a TV serial entitled, 'Sivamayam' produced by Radan Media Works, was broadcast by Astro Vaanavil (Malaysia) in the year of 2004-2005 (<http://www.radaan.tv>). The entire drama revolves around the subject of Siddhas' life, teachings and how they reach out to the public and assist them. The serial also includes information about Siddha medicine and its sources in nature. The serial also shows how spiritual aspects are used in collecting herbs for medicinal purposes. This article focuses on the kind of spiritual practices applied in resourcing for herbs in nature by the Siddhas (*Ibid*).

## 'Sivamayam'

'Sivamayam' is a socio-religious TV serial which is constructed based on the theme of how and in which circumstances the Siddhas reach out to help deserving people. The story of 'Sivamayam' revolves around a character called Sunthararajan, a forest officer who unintentionally kills a female snake. Following this incident, he is tormented by the male snake. This episode takes place in the forest of Sivanmalai (the mountain of Shiva), a mountain in Tamil Nadu, India. The Siddhas who dwell around Sivanmalai come to his rescue.

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This incident induces the beginning of the story. Though the story is mainly about Siddhas, for the purpose of highlighting the life of Siddhas, many other sub stories are incorporated. This includes problem faced by Sunthararajan's Family during his absents, the attempt of bogus swamis to attain to extra ordinary powers through the contact of Sivanmalai Siddhas, the life story of those Siddhas dueling in the mountain.

In the mid of all this incidents discussions on various herbs and method of gathering and processing them and related spiritual practices applied are also shown. All this are shown in accordance Siddha medicinal practices.

### **Siddha Medicinal references in Sivamayam**

In one particular episode Sivasamy a Siddha medicine practitioner explains to his assistant about the *Chanthiraganthi* a rare herb. The *Chanthiraganthi* herbs is said to be an unique existence in nature which only shows itself during full moon days. It submerges itself the beneath ground on the rest of the days. Several other rare and unique herbs displays a similar characteristics where the only be found on a full moon day. Hence the full moon day in a month is the most appropriate time to collect these above mentioned herbs. In another episode, Sivasamy the Siddha medicine practitioner gives a herb named *Siriyangai* to his friends and informs them that those who poses this herbs, will not be harmed by any snakes.

While in another occasion, a girl named Thamayanthi collects *nellikani*s from the forest of Sivanmalai and sells them to the visitors of the mountain. Here the medicinal values of *nellikani*s are explained precisely. In another incident, Thamayanthi applies, an herbs called *Rananivaarani* on her injury. This herb was able to cure her injury immediately. The strength and power of this herb is shown clearly in this episode.

In another context, Sunthararajan's daughter who is constantly affected by epilepsy is treated through Siddha medicine. For this purpose an herb called *Manasakarani* is shown to be used. The herb is shown, and the manner in which it absorbs into the blood stream and heals the epilepsy is explained.

Further, on another episode, an individual who is totally paralyzed is treated according to Siddha medicine tradition. The man is shown to be totally recovered after being treated by using several types of herbs. Apart from this, names of many other herbs such as *Karunthulasi*, *Elakkaai* and others are also mentioned in this TV serial. Every episode oh healing is shown to be geared by spirituality. The spiritual approach plays the fundamental role in these entire aspects of herbal treatments.

### **Siddha Medicine and its relations to spirituality**

In this Sivamayam serial it is shown that one needs to seek permission from these special herbs before committing to collect them. While some needs to be worshiped through some poojas before doing the same such scenes are seen in this serial where 'Sivamayam' goes in search of in the Sivanmalai forest. The local Siddha medicine practitioners who were interviewed do agree to the above mentioned procedure in collecting herbs in nature (Interview with Nallatambi).



These herbs are generally divided into three categories according to their nature as *Thevam*, *Asuram* and *Manitham*. The *Thevam* type of herbs are said to be of great value to our lives. They are said to have the power to heal very critical illnesses such as cancer, leprosy, AIDS and others. These herbs are regarded as very pure and holy. Herbs such as *Kagurapachai*, *Meghasanjeevini*, *Chandraganthi* and others fall in this category. These are also referred to as the Royal Herbs / *Raja Muligaigal* (Interview with Gurudev Mu. Ma. Se).

While the *Asuram* type of herbs have got a different type of nature whereby it can intoxicate one's mind and cause insanity (<http://www.siththarkal.com>). This includes herbs such as Ganja, Tobacco, and so on. The third category is known as *Manitham*, the herb of this category have moderate effect on people. Herbs like Koon fall in this category. It is believed that the curse by certain Siddhas like Korakkar and Brahmamuni caused the evil nature of the herbs in the category of *Asuram*. Since the herbs differ in their nature and effects, it is important to have the knowledge about them precisely before involving in collecting or consuming them (Interview with Gurudev Mu. Ma. Se).

The herbs are said to be very delicate in nature, one need to approach them with a lot of passion and love. This is done to avoid any possible curses that can fall upon people who approach them wrongly. On the other hand if it is done properly, of the herbs will benefit all (the outcomes of the research conducted in the Kolli Hills of South India).

The full moon and the dark moon days are considered to be auspicious days for collecting herbs (<http://www.siththarkal.com>). The 'Sivamayam' serial highlights that certain rare *Thevam* type herbs will only appear on these days. There are also unique behaviors among certain herbs where some of these herbs go into hideout when they are hunted by people with bad intention (<http://www.ujiladevi.in>).

The herbs when used must be approached in a spiritual manner whereby only with the blessing of Siddhas and the nature it can fulfill the needs of the consumer. The herbs should be regarded not just a medicine but *prasatham* (offering of prayer). This is again seen in the 'Sivamayam' TV serial. Sunthararajan, the main character brings a special type of herb called *Sanjeevi* and adds it to the *prasatham* offered to the god. He then distributes this to his family members in order to protect them from any illness and danger. It is also believed to provide longevity.

There are also special herbs which can be only obtained on a very specific day and time which can be determine through astronomical calculation based on Hindu almanac/*panjagam*. This is also shown in the Sivamayam TV serial. According to Siddha tradition the days are divided into two categories base on the dominance of sun and moon. Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Thursday during waning moon are considered to be the days of moon dominance. The rest and Thursday on waxing moon are considered to be the days of sun dominance (Interview with Gurudev Mu. Ma. Se).

During the sun dominance days it is not advisable to collect certain herbs such as Vilvam, Meghasanjeevini, Garudapachai and so on. While during the moon dominance days herbs like aduthodai, Nilavagai and others should not be taken. It is not advisable to approach these herbs during time of death in the family or during

menstruation days. These are referred to as Tiittu (not clean) days (<http://www.shivajothidanilayam.com>).

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the connection between Siddha medicine and spirituality is seen quite clearly in this TV serial. Though there are many exaggerations along the way, the subject matter of this serial is rather important to understand and appreciate the contribution of Siddhas in traditional medicine practices in South India.

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