

## OPINION

# MENTAL HEALTH: CONCEPTS AND TREATMENT IN THE SIDDHA (TAMIL) SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

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### Abstract

**Objective:** Modern mental health profession is little acquainted with the traditional systems prevalent in India namely the Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani systems. Almost no information is available with regard to the Siddha (Tamil) system. An attempt is made in this paper to make a beginning. **Methods:** The System is taught to students in an organized manner only for the past few decades. The few textbooks used with this purpose are available in Tamil language. The relevant information available from these sources was discussed in person with teachers and physicians with vast experience in this field. **Results:** Sage Agathiyar's treatises on mental illnesses and Yoogi's Chintamani-800 are two important works of this System, which have been collated and presented in the paper. **Conclusion:** The encouragement given for the treatment and research into this area until recent times all goes well for the future. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 16 (2): July - December 2015: XX XX.*

**Keywords:** Psychiatry, Siddha, Tamil Medicine

### Introduction

Tamil is one of the ancient languages of the world and has been accorded the status of "classical language of Antiquity" (second century BC to second century AD). Medical knowledge, with special reference to psychiatry is extant from very early times in the form of the Siddha system of medicine. But little known amongst the Indian psychiatrists due to obvious reasons. Most of the Tamil medical literature is available to very few medical practitioners and that too only in Tamil, unlike the Sanskrit medical literature which is easily available in translated versions. Most of the Indian psychiatrists, with a few exceptions like LP Varma [1], Deb Sikdar [2], Venkoba Rao [3], Shiv Gautam [4] and a few others, are not familiar with Tamil medical literature.

A very early reference to a wandering lunatic is to be found in the Buddhist Tamil epic, *Manimegalai* (circa second century AD). The heroine Manimegalai encounters a severely

disturbed individual. The song unfolds describing her encounter with a mad man on the way to the flower garden of Kaveripoompattinam, the famous east coast harbour of the early Cholas, which traded with Greece and Rome in the West, and the kingdoms of South-East Asia, including China [5].

*Shoulders adorned with a garland of pink 'alari'*\*

*Neck adorned with a garland of bad-odoured 'erukkam'*\* flowers

*Twigs of the mighty tree has he gathered to hold together*

*Tatters on this person, his entire body smeared with white paste of ash and sandal*

*Talks he with others in a senseless blabber, he cries, he falls, he blurts, he shouts*

*He worships, he bellows, he gets up, he twists, he circles,*

*He runs, he moves to a corner and lies down, he shouts*

*And picks up a quarrel with his shadow  
And wearily behind the mad young man,  
who is hapless to functionless  
The people stand around and gape at this  
tragedy.*

*\*flower used as an offering to the  
deities, †calotropis*

The present-day criteria for schizophrenia fit very well to this description. It is interesting to note the views of two famous English psychiatrists, Nolan Lewis and Edward Hare. Lewis believed in the existence of schizophrenia from the earliest times, while Hare denied it [6.7].

Another historical reference for the treatment of the mentally ill during the Chola period of Tamil history is to be found in the epigraph of King Veera Rajendra Deva (1063-69 AD) at the temple-hospital of Thirumukkudal near the sacred town of Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu [8].

Tamil culture, with an ancient past of three thousand years or more, is replete with descriptions of mental illness. In this article, we shall see the theories, classification, and treatment of mental illnesses in the Siddha medical tradition.

### ***Siddha system of medicine***

The Siddha system of medicine is a contribution to the Dravidian culture and was practiced widely in South India in ancient times. The origin of Siddha is shrouded in mythology and religion. Tradition has it that the knowledge of Siddha was transferred from Lord Shiva to his consort Goddess Parvathi, who bestowed it upon Nandideva. He passed on the divine healing knowledge to the masters of this system, who were known as the *siddhargal* (mystics, saints, yogis) [9].

The *siddhargal* were interested in rejuvenation and longevity (*kayakalpam*). They used herbs, metals, poisons, and other esoteric materials to prepare medications. They were masters in *Yoga* and meditation. Sage Agathiyar was the chief of the Siddha school. One important treatise given by him regarding mental disorders and their treatment was the *Manidhakkirugai nool – 64*. (Agathiyar, date unknown). Bogar was a Chinese philosopher

who came to South India to learn medicine. His works were in the areas of pharmacognosy, *yoga*, and alchemy. He also compiled a medical glossary. Teraiyar, probably a Buddhist monk, wrote the books *The Materia Medica*, *The Examination of Urine for Clinical Investigation*, and *Preventive Medicine*. Tirumoolar, in his *Tirumantiram*, described *yoga* and meditation in the treatment of human illnesses.

The Siddha system was similar to the then prevalent system of medicine in North India, *Ayurveda*, in its concepts of etiopathogenesis [10]. Concepts of health, and diseases were based on the concept of *Panchabootha* and the *Tridosha theory*. The *Panchabootha* was the five elements constituting the world of nature as well as the human body, namely, earth (*prithvi*), fire (*agni*), water (*jala*), air (*vayu*), and ether (*akasha*). The *Tridosha theory* stated that there are three humors within the body (known as the *mukutturangal*) which comprised of *vali* (air), *anal* (heat), and *eeram* (moisture). The three humors represented creation, protection, and destruction, which can be correlated as anabolism, metabolism, and catabolism. Harmonious equilibrium of this three meant health and disruption of this balance led to disease.

Symptoms of excess *vali*: tremors, insomnia, physical and mental tension, fear, giddiness, incoherent talk. Symptoms of excess *anal*: excessive hunger, burning sensation all over the body, insomnia. Symptoms of excess *eeram*: loss of initiative, excessive salivation, chills, obesity, hypersomnia. *Naadi paritchai* (examination of the pulse) was used to assess the functions of these three humors and to diagnose diseases. This theory has also been mentioned by the ancient Tamil poet *Tiruvalluvar* in his *Tirukkural* [11].

*Every one of the three humorurs described  
by sages, beginning with the windy one,  
would cause disease whenever they go to  
either extreme.*

Verse 941

### ***Physique and temperament in the Siddha System***

The text *Dega Ilakkanam* (Classification of Constitution of Body) classifies the

temperament of human beings into three major categories, characterized by the prominence of one of the three humors:

1. *Vali udal*. Tall and slender body; dark complexion; thick eyelids; sunken eyes; muddy conjunctiva; dull look; dry hair or bald; tendency to overeat; liking for sour, salty or warm foods; inconsistent in diet, speech, and emotions; inadequate sexual feelings; hostile; unsympathetic; below average intelligence.
2. *Anal udal*. Moderate build; reddish face; fair complexion; sparse brown hair; impressive look; excessive thirst and hunger; liking for sweet and cold foods; heroic; aggressive; talkative; sympathetic; modest; intelligent; respects morality.
3. *Eera udal*. Obese; long upper extremities; broad forehead and chest; dark dense eyelashes; lustrous eyes; shiny skin; It enjoys eating excessively; good strength and endurance; constructive; tolerant of hunger, thirst, heat, and fear; sexually potent; highly modest and sociable; profound knowledge of things and persons; skilful; inquisitive; good memory; lasting friendships.

### Typologies mentioned by the *Siddhars*

Siddha 'psychiatry' (*kirugai maruthuvam*) had a scientific approach to understanding mental diseases. It discarded the theory of demonology with which the West was plagued for several centuries. It saw that the possible predisposition to mental illness was due to constitutional make-up, age, sex, diet habits, seasonal variation, and other variables. The 18 disorders mentioned in Sage Agathiyar's *Manidhakkirugai nool – 64* have amazing resemblance to current nosological entities:-

1. *Anal kirigai (flaming insanity)*
2. *Pittha kirigai (bilious insanity)*
3. *Ecchil kirigai (spitting insanity)*
4. *Vaatha kirigai (windy insanity)*
5. *Silerpana kirigai (shivering insanity)*
6. *Naadhavindhu kirigai (masturbatory insanity)*
7. *Bootha kirigai (demoniacal insanity)*
8. *Jala kirigai (water insanity)*

9. *Mogini kirigai (erotic insanity)*
10. *Kalleri kirigai (stone throwing insanity)*
11. *Kumbidu kirigai (obeisant insanity)*
12. *Munangu kirigai (murmuring insanity)*
13. *Alar kirigai (screaming insanity)*
14. *Maruttu kirigai (menacing insanity)*
15. *Moodu kirigai (perplexity)*
16. *Valippu kirigai (convulsive insanity)*
17. *Neer kirigai (water drinking insanity)*
18. *Peypidi kirigai (possession insanity)*

The descriptions of these conditions do not correspond exactly with the terminologies mentioned, but the symptoms can be found in present day chronic mental illnesses like schizophrenia. More details could be seen in the reference appended here [12]. Similar classificatory system was given by Sage Yoogi in his *Yoogi Chintamani – 800*:

1. *Veri anal noy and Dhamantha anal noy* (Catatonic withdrawal)
2. *Peru iya noy* (Catatonic excitement)
3. *Mottu pittham* (Chronic Schizophrenia)
4. *Anal pittham, Odu pittham, Markeya pittham* and *Veri iyam* (Manic excitement). Dancing, jumping, grandiosity, excessive sexual play, wandering, aggression, etc.
5. *Kara pittham* (Depressive psychosis). Sitting alone, not talking to others, loss of energy, courage and appetite, etc.
6. *Nanju vali* (Toxic psychosis). Perceptual disturbances, fear, restlessness, belching, frequent change of posture, sleeplessness, bewilderment, etc.
7. *Thimir vali* (Neurosis-Hysteria)
8. *Manovali* (Neurosis-Depression)
9. *Theera pittham* (Neurosis-Anxiety-Hypochondriasis). Headaches, joint pains, dry mouth, trembling, palpitation, sweating, diarrhea, choking sensation in chest, etc.

Regarding epilepsy, five major categories are described in traditional Siddha medicine:

1. *Kumarakantam*. Unending stomach ache followed by diminution of vision, associated with tongue protrusion, distortion of lower jaw, stiffening of

- the neck, and severe pain around shoulders.
2. *Amarakantam*. Restlessness secondary to nagging pain and itching, associated with excessive sweating, and rapid breathing. In severe cases, patient lies like a corpse, benumbed by pain.
  3. *Brahmakantam*. Flaccid and cold limbs, associated with severe pain, clenching of teeth, and photophobia.
  4. *Kakka vali*. *Kakka* is the crow- the conveyance of the God Saturn (*Sani*). The disease seizes the victim faster than the wind and extinguishes his life-like Yama, the God of Death. Eyes are widely open with a constant upward gaze, associated with bowel and bladder incontinence, excessive chillness spreading throughout the body, stiffness of limbs, collection of phlegm in the throat, slurring of speech, and a delirious state.

5. *Muyal vali*. *Muyalagan* is the demon on whom Lord Shiva performs his dance. This type of seizure is precipitated by hot water, either looking at it or pouring it on the head. Convulsions start in the facial muscles, with frothing at the mouth, and later developing into a generalized condition.

Siddha medicine also recognized alcoholism and drug abuse as disease entities and prescribed suitable medicines, as referenced in the book *Jeeva rasamritham*.

#### **Treatment methods**

The different modalities of treatment in Siddha medicine (which includes different routes of administration of drugs) is well described in the *Manidhakkirugai nool – 64* (Table 1).

**Table 1. Treatment methods**

<b>Tamil term</b>	<b>English term</b>	<b>Materia Medica</b>
<i>Tuvalai</i>	Anointing (external application)	Cotton plant (Sanskrit: <i>karpasa</i> ) root, five-leaved chaste tree (Tamil: <i>nocchi</i> , Sanskrit: <i>sindhuvara</i> ) leaves, and wild jasmine (Tamil: <i>kaattumalligai</i> , Sanskrit: <i>vanamallika</i> ) roots or leaves are ground with buttermilk into paste form and smeared all over the body.
<i>Vatu pittita</i>	Fumigation	Leaves of Indian nettle (Tamil: <i>poonamayakki</i> , <i>kuppaimeni</i> ), blue-flowered rattlepod (Tamil: <i>kannaadi ilai</i> , Sanskrit: <i>ghanta</i> ), and devil's horsewhip (Tamil: <i>nayuruvi</i> , Sanskrit: <i>apamarga</i> ) are put on the fire on charcoals of coconut shell to produce fumes which are inhaled by the patient.
<i>Ullukku kottudal</i>	Oral route	Leaves of indian nettle, blue-flowered rattlepod, devil's horsewhip, and Indian long pepper (Sanskrit and Tamil: <i>pippali</i> ) are pulverized, mixed with water, and administered orally.
<i>Nasiyam</i>	Nasal application	Leaves of five-leaved chaste tree, devil's horsewhip, and garlic are ground with sesame

		oil to a dry consistency and the paste is sniffed through the nose.
<i>Kallikkam</i>	Ocular application	Sweet flag (Tamil: <i>vashambu</i> , Sanskrit: <i>bhutanashini</i> ), sandal (Tamil: <i>chandanam</i> , Sanskrit: <i>chandana</i> ), black pepper (Tamil: <i>karumizhagu</i> , Sanskrit: <i>pippali</i> ), Spanish cherry (Tamil: <i>magizhamboo</i> , Sanskrit: <i>bakula</i> ), and turmeric (Tamil: <i>manjal</i> , Sanskrit: <i>haridra</i> ) are ground, made into pills, sun-dried, mixed with breast milk, and applied on the eyelids.
<i>Mantiram</i>	Psychotherapy	Agathiyar laid emphasis on treating the 'psyche' with this. It includes removing unhealthy thoughts, behaviour and postures, and replacing them with good thoughts ( <i>emayam</i> ), traits ( <i>niyamam</i> ), and postures ( <i>asanam</i> ).

### Conclusion

Thus, we can see that medicines for every clinical variety have been clearly mentioned throughout the Siddha literature. However, proof of the efficacy of these medications is not available. We look hopefully toward the future that extensive scientific research will be conducted, and that the historic and ancient gifts of the *siddhargal* shall be brought within the reach of the common man, especially the villagers.

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