



# A Study of the Traditional Health Care Practices in Ancient Tamil Nadu – An Assessment

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**Abstract:** India is known around the world for its diverse civilizations and mystical rituals. Scholars and philosophers of the time formed a century-old tradition in the depths of this culture. Despite a long history of being viewed as unscientific, scientists and doctors are now aware of the benefits of traditional Indian health care. Many investigations on traditional medicine and its apparently magical qualities in the treatment of terminal diseases are currently being done. Home remedies are used all around the world, but they are recognized as science in India only. Two traditional Indian medicinal traditions: Ayurveda and Siddha are progressively gaining traction in the global healthcare business. In this article, some of India's most odd and effective medicinal practices, as well as the benefits of each therapy will be reviewed. Throughout history, traditional medicines were the only source of primary healthcare, and they made a substantial contribution. Knowledge of how to use medicinal plants to treat various ailments was highly valued by ancient cultures. Until the mid-nineteenth century, plants were the principal therapeutic agents used by humans, and they continue to play an important role in pharmaceutical formulations. Traditional medicine is used by around 80 percent of people in undeveloped countries for their primary health care needs because of its low prices, effectiveness, frequently restricted availability of modern medicine, and cultural and religious preferences. Plant research in the traditional system of medicine is becoming increasingly significant in the development of global healthcare and conservation efforts. Traditional medicine systems are being used to uncover biologically active chemicals that are useful to the pharmaceutical industry. To this end, as much information possible is presented about these areas in this article. There are a number of geographically specific traditional health behaviors and are well reviewed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Ayurveda and Siddha, Herbal Medicine, Homeopathy, Traditional Indian Health Care, Unani.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In India, the history of healthcare systems can be traced back to 5000 B.C., as evidenced by ancient texts such as the 'Rig-Veda' and 'Atharva-Veda.' Later literatures, such as the 'Charak Samhita' and 'Sushruta Samhita' (about 10th century BC), emphasised the use of plants in healthcare systems. In India, a variety of ethnic groups with varied cultural origins practise their own form of traditional medicine. For their healthcare, 80 percent of Indians use non-allopathic (Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and Homeopathy) herbal-based medicines acquired from cultivated and wild resources. Siddha medicinal system is a traditional medical system used by Tamil people since prehistoric times, and it is now being recognised as a supplemental or alternative medicine. In Siddha medicine, plant-based (moola vargam), mineral-based (thaathu vargam), and animal-based (jeeva vargam) medical methods were used. There has been a significant growth in the documenting of medicinal plants utilised by diverse indigenous peoples throughout India during last few centuries [1]-[3].

The Ayurveda system, which deals with mental, spiritual, and physical well-being, and the Unani herbal medical practise are the two main forms of traditional medicine practised. Ayurvedic practitioners are known as vaidyas, whereas Unani or Greek practitioners are known as hakims. These are often traditional vocations. Specialization in indigenous practice of medicine is offered by a number of institutes. In this regard, health cannot be viewed as an unreachable target for exploitation unless the other factors affecting health, whether positively or negatively are also addressed concurrently and effectively. Traditional medicine encompasses health practises, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs that include plant, animal, and mineral-based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques, and exercises, which are used individually or in combination to treat, diagnose, and prevent illnesses, as well as to maintain well-being. Traditional practitioners have always freely shared their knowledge and experience, defining the phrase "open-access" long before it was coined. Modern medicine, on the other hand, has strict intellectual property rules and a sophisticated patenting system in place to safeguard knowledge about pharmaceuticals and medical practises [4]-[6].

Herbal medicine, also known as botanical medicine or phytomedicine, refers to the medical use of a plant's seeds, berries, roots, leaves, bark, or flowers. Herbalism has a long history of using traditional medicine's exterior surface. It is appealing in addition to being conservative, since perfection in evaluation and quality controls, as well as advances in scientific study, illustrate the value of herbal medicine in the prevention and treatment of viruses [7]-[10].

## 2 HISTORY OF HERBAL MEDICINE

Before recorded history, people employed plants for healing purposes. Plants' healing properties are described in ancient Chinese and Egyptian papyrus literature. Native American and African cultures used herbs in healing rituals, while other ancient medical systems, including Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine, rely on botanical medicines. Researchers found that people used the same or similar plants for similar purposes all throughout the world.



In the early 19th century, when chemical analysis was made possible for the first time in human history, science started extracting and altering active chemicals from plants. Herbal medicines didn't start to lose favour until later, when chemists started synthesising their own plant compounds. According to recent estimates from the World Health Organization, 80 percent of people use herbal medicines as a component of their primary healthcare. Between 60 and 70 percent of commercially accessible plant-based medications are prescribed by German doctors. Due to public discontent with the high expense of pharmaceuticals and a desire to return to natural or organic treatments, herbal therapy has become more and more popular in the United States in recent years [11].

### 2.1 Advantages of Traditional Herbal Medicines

Asthma, eczema, menopausal symptoms, rheumatoid arthritis, migraines, and irritable bowel syndrome are just a few of the various conditions it is used to treat. Only use herbal supplements under the direction of a licenced medical professional. Make sure to speak with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any herbs. The following are some common herbs and their uses. Heart disease, cancer, and diabetes may all be prevented and managed with the use of herbs. Additionally, it exhibits anti-inflammatory and anti-tumor properties that could help prevent blood clots. Studies have shown that garlic, linseed, fenugreek, and lemongrass can reduce cholesterol levels, though more research is required [12]-[15].

Traditional medicine is a type of healthcare that combines physical treatments, exercises, spiritual therapies, and drugs derived from plants, animals, and minerals. Ginkgo biloba (*Ginkgo biloba*) has been used in traditional medicine as a memory enhancer and a circulatory disease treatment. According to several studies, ginkgo may be especially helpful in treating dementia (including Alzheimer's disease) and intermittent claudication (poor circulation in the legs). Additionally, it has been demonstrated to help older people with their memory.

Additionally, Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is said to promote relaxation and a sense of well-being while also boosting mood, wellbeing, and contentment. It has been determined via numerous studies that kava may be helpful in treating anxiety, insomnia, and nerve-related issues [16]. Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), a well-liked substitute for frequently given sleeping pills, is regarded as moderate and safe. Despite the fact that valerian has not always been beneficial, certain studies have shown it to be so. Compared to many prescription sleeping pills, it might have fewer side effects, like morning drowsiness.

It has been demonstrated that echinacea preparations (*Purpurea* and other echinacea species) increase the body's natural immunity. One of the most popular herbal remedies is echinacea, but there has been conflicting evidence regarding its potential to treat or prevent colds. A meta-analysis of 14 clinical studies that evaluated the impact of echinacea on the occurrence and duration of the common cold found that supplementing with the herb cut the likelihood of getting sick by 58 percent. Additionally, it decreased the duration of a cold's recovery by 1.4 days.

## 3 TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN TAMIL LITERATURE

Tamilians have a lengthy history of culture, civilisation, and life. They were educated in every discipline. Similarly, they excelled in the medical area. They were aware of the types of medical treatment available for various diseases prevalent at the time. In Tamil literature, the Sangam period was regarded as a glorious period. Health-care practise is regarded as both a natural science and a cultural legacy. Those Tamils who lived in the past used medicinal treatment even in their meals. Milk, curd, greens, vegetables, fruits, and dhal were added to their daily diets, all of which have curative properties. They possessed immune strength in their bodies as a result of this intake.

Medical practitioners made medications out of natural herbs and were able to cure even fatal ailments. Siddha doctors have treated all types of illnesses. They used leaves, fruits, roots, tree bark, and country medicines. Siddhars were able to know the therapeutic standards and purity of herbals thanks to God's mercy and extensive knowledge. They incorporate palm leaves with the medicinal worth of herbs printed on them. In Tamil literature, there are only a few notes about herbal remedies. Especially during the Sangam period [17]-[18]. This article encompasses a number of different topics, including:

- Tamil literature and medicine
- A system of the human body
- Human disease causes
- Identification and diagnosis of diseases
- Disease detection sites in the human body.
- Treatment for diseases

### Tamil literature and medicine

Tholkoppiam's five-element policy, categories of diseases, according to Tholkoppiam, bio-medicine, history of medicine, medicine in sculpture and diagnosing diseases by pulse are among the topics that are covered in the study of medicine in Tamil literature.

### A system of the human body

As a consequence, the human body has been categorised into various categories. Ten types of air have been identified in the human body, according to the Tamil literature. On a classified into twelve categories the diseases that affect the human body and life.



### **Human disease causes**

In Tamil literature, the causes of human disease are divided into three categories. Paralysis, bile (wind), and phlegm are all types of bile (Kabam). Thirukkural, penned by Thiruvalluvar, made the same point.

### **Identification and diagnosis of diseases**

It is possible to determine the human diseases by calculating the pulse rate, observing the face, observing motion, observing urine, observing the tongue, observing the body and listening to the voice. Sangam Tamil literature contains descriptions of diseases.

### **Disease detection sites in the human body**

The Tamil literature has indicated some of the locations in the human body where diseases and types of ailments can be found. There are areas such as phlegm, skull, wind, and bile that are associated with these feelings. These cause delirium, coughing, paralysis, etc.

### **Treatment for Diseases**

During the classical period, Siddha, Ayurveda, and traditional remedies were available. Three kadugam was the common name for these herbals. It has three herbal ingredients: ginger, pepper, and long pepper (Thippili). Tamil people also employed kadukkai, nelly, and dhanrikai as herbal treatments. The roots of various trees were used to heal the piles. They divided piles into ten categories.

## **4 CHALLENGES TO TRADITIONAL MEDICINE PRACTICE**

In some respects, traditional medicine has been practised. There are challenges as traditional medicine techniques are embraced by new faces.

### **International Diversity**

A wide variety of cultures and places have adopted traditional medicine techniques, but there are no universal standards and no methodologies for evaluating them.

### **Policy and Regulation at the National Level**

In many countries, there are few national regulations governing traditional medicine. Regulating traditional medicine products, practises, and practitioners is difficult since there are discrepancies in how they are defined and classified. A single herbal product may be classified as a food, a dietary supplement, or an herbal medicine depending on the country. This disparity in national laws has an impact on the accessibility and distribution of products globally.

### **Safety, efficacy, and quality are all critical aspects.**

Tests that were performed to evaluate the efficacy and safety of traditional medicine products and practises have produced a paucity of scientific evidence. While research indicates that acupuncture, some herbal remedies, and some manual therapies (like massage) are beneficial for some conditions, additional research into the products and practises is required. It is difficult to meet the requirements for research and evaluation. The quality of finished herbal products, for instance, can be challenging to assess. The safety, efficacy, and quality of finished herbal medicine products are determined by the quality of the raw ingredients (which may include hundreds of natural constituents) and how those ingredients are handled during production processes [19].

### **Sustainability and knowledge**

Ingredients for herbal products can be found in wild plant populations and in therapeutic plants that have been bred in laboratories. Plant overharvesting and damage to the biosphere may result from this. Natural resources and endangered plant species may be lost as a result of improperly managed collection and growing practices. Both plant populations and the knowledge of how to use them for medical purposes must be protected if traditional medicine is to be conserved [20].

### **Patient Safety and Utilization**

Because they are herbal (natural) or traditional, many individuals believe that medications are secure (or carry no risk of harm). On the other hand, if the treatment is of low quality, is administered inappropriately, or is combined with other medications, traditional medicines and practises may cause unpleasant, undesirable effects. The need for improved patient knowledge of safe use, enhanced professional training, collaboration, and communication between practitioners of conventional and complementary medicine is critical [21].

### **Healing yourself naturally with herbs**

Since it matured throughout the first cutting limit of sward on top of a codling earth, herbalism, a therapeutic science, has been extensively used by the thriving centres of civilization. Their use dates back to the beginning of recorded history, as evidenced by the written record. The Papyrus Ebers, one of the earliest medical writings, was written in the second century B.C. and lists a number of ailments as well as herbal remedies such as myrrh, cumin, peppermint, caraway, fennel, olive oil, and others.



Since there was a lot of licorice found in King Tut's tomb, which was excavated about 3000 B.C., it was probably a prized herb. The earliest Chinese treatise on medicinal plants was written about the same time and includes additional herbs in addition to ginseng. The Arabs, Greeks, Persians, Babylonians, and Romans all used herbal medicine.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Through Tamil literature, a variety of drugs were found that were used to treat a variety of ailments. They were well-versed in even the most complex operations. They treated patients directly and indirectly through discipline, hygiene, diet, sleep, and psychology. As a result, it is responsibility to bring the values of those ancient medicines to the attention of the world. As a result, the revision determination is quite beneficial in the direction of carrying out the evaluation of Tamil traditional medicine.

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