



Original Article

A STUDY OF THE HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SIDDHA VARMAM BASED ON INSCRIPTIONS (KALVETTUGAL) AND PALM-LEAF MANUSCRIPTS (OLAI CHUVADIGAL)- A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Varmam, a vital component of the Siddha medicine, has been practiced for centuries, emphasizing its therapeutic significance. Scientific exploration of its origin and historical evidence through Kalvettugal (inscriptions) and Olai Chuvadigal (palm-leaf manuscripts) is essential to validate its relevance in modern medicine. To explore and document the history and origin of Varmam through evidence from Kalvettugal (inscriptions) and Olai Chuvadigal (palm-leaf manuscripts). This study was conducted as a qualitative literature review. Relevant data on Varmam were collected from classical Siddha texts, Kalvettugal (inscriptions) and Olai Chuvadigal (palm-leaf manuscripts). Sources were identified through libraries, archives and authenticated digital repositories. The collected information was critically analyzed and compared to trace the historical origin, evolution, and documented references of Varmam. The review highlights that Varmam has a deep-rooted history within the Siddha system, with significant references found in Kalvettugal and Olai Chuvadigal. These traditional sources provide valuable evidence of its origin, evolution, and therapeutic importance. The findings emphasize the need for further scientific validation to strengthen its acceptance and integration into modern medical practice.

Keywords: Siddha, Varmam therapy, Kalvettugal, Olai Chuvadigal.

INTRODUCTION

Varmam is a specialized branch of the Siddha system of medicine that deals with vital energy points in the human body, playing a crucial role in both diagnosis and therapeutic interventions. It has been practiced for centuries in South India and is closely associated with traditional healing methods, martial arts, and holistic health principles. The knowledge of Varmam has been preserved and transmitted through ancient sources such as Kalvettugal (stone inscriptions) and Olai Chuvadigal (palm-leaf manuscripts), which serve as important historical records.[1]

Despite its long-standing practice and therapeutic potential, the scientific community requires documented historical evidence to better understand and validate its origin and development. Therefore, a systematic exploration of these traditional sources is essential to trace the evolution of Varmam and to establish its significance within the broader context of traditional and modern medicine.

METHODOLOGY:

VARMAM AND KALARI:

Historical studies indicate that *Kalari* was one of the prominent martial arts practiced by ancient Tamilians, highlighting their expertise in combat techniques. Varmam, closely associated with martial traditions, was also widely practiced by the Tamil people. Practitioners skilled in Varmam held significant positions in warfare, often serving as commanders due to their specialized knowledge. This information has been preserved through the oral traditions of the descendants of Varmam experts who once served in military forces, many of whom continue to reside in and around Kanyakumari.[1]

ATHANGOTTU AASAN:

The methods used to treat and heal “varma kayam” are known as “varma parigaara murai” and “varma maruthuva murai.” Practitioners skilled in these techniques are referred to as “Varmani” or “Aasan.” The term “Aasan” is also mentioned in classical Tamil literature such as *Silappathikaram* and *Paripadal*. [2]

“Āsāṇ Perunkaṇi aruntīraḷ amaiccar
Tālaṭ talaivar tammoṭu kūḷi”

-*Silappatikāram* 26:3–4.

“Kēḷviyuḷ ciṟanta āsāṇ uraiyum”

-*Paripāṭal*.

The *Tholkappiyam* makes reference to Athangottu Aasan:

“Araṅkarai nāvin nāṇmarai mūrriya
Aṭaṅkōṭṭu ācārkkku arilṭapaṭ terintuMayaṅkā
marapin eḷuttumurai kāṭṭiMalkunīr
varaippin Aintiram nīṟainta Tolkāppiyaṇ.”

- Tolkāppiyam.

These lines suggest that an Aasan existed during the time of Tholkappiar.

VARMAM IN KALVETTUGAL[6]

Kalvettugal contain references to Varmam associated with the names of kings. These records suggest that rulers were knowledgeable and skilled in Varmam, and that they played a key role in preserving and promoting this knowledge for future generations. (Image No.1)

Name of the kings in kalvettugal	Historical year
Gokkaru Nandhadakkan	A.D 857 – 885
Senbaga Adittha vanmar	A.D 1460
Marthanda varmar	A.D 1410
Udhaya Marthandam vanmar	A.D 1532
Sri Ravi vanmar	A.D 1536
Boodhala veera Rama varmar	A.D 1546
Maravarman sri vallaba Devar	A.D 1149
Adittchan varman	A.D 10 to 11 century
Sri veera Rama varmar	A.D 1196

Gokkaru Nandhadakkan[7]

An ancient *seppedu* (copper plate inscription) documented in the *Travancore Archaeological Series* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–14) was identified through historical research at Parthibagesapuram near Munchirai in Kanyakumari district. This inscription refers to Gokkaru Nandhadakkan, a ruler of the Aay kingdom. It records that he established a town named Parthibagesapuram, where he constructed a temple and an educational institution. The institution is noted to have provided instruction in Siddha medicine and Varmam, contributing to the growth and continued practice of Varmam in the Kanyakumari. The presence of numerous related manuscripts in this area further supports this tradition. These findings highlight the antiquity and significance of Siddha medicine and Varmam.

REASON BEHIND “VANMAR, VARMAR”[2]

In ancient times, Varmam was practiced as a martial art by the Tamil people, and those skilled in it served as soldiers and commanders in warfare. Over time, kings also mastered Varmakalai, and those who were highly proficient were honored with titles such as “Varmar,” “Vanmar,” or “Varma.” These honorific titles began to appear in royal names particularly after the period of Gokkaru Nandhadakkan, suggesting that they were conferred in recognition of expertise in Varmam. Notably, such titles are predominantly found in the Kanyakumari region and are rarely seen in other parts of Tamil Nadu. This pattern points to Kanyakumari as a significant center for the origin and development of Varmam.

A WAR WITH THE HELP OF 108 AASANS[3]

Anandha Padmanaban, born in Thachanvilai near Verkilambi in Kanyakumari district (AD 1698–1750), played a crucial role in supporting King Marthanda Varma in ascending the throne and consolidating his rule. He served as the chief

commander of the king's army. In 1741, during the Battle of Colachel, Marthanda Varma defeated the Dutch forces and captured their commander, Delanoy. This victory was achieved with the support of 108 Aasans under the leadership of Anandha Padmanaban. In recognition of his service and loyalty in safeguarding the kingdom, the king rewarded him with lands and agricultural estates. These historical details are documented in several *seppedugal*

VANMAM INTO VARMAM[4]

Historical and linguistic studies suggest that “Vanmam” is the original pure Tamil term, which later evolved into “Varmam” over time. This transformation reflects common phonetic changes in language, where certain sounds shift during usage and adaptation. It is a common phonological change in which the 'ṇa' and 'ra' consonants transform into the 'ra' consonant. For example, words like *Vannam* changed to *Varnam*, and *Thunmarkkam* to *Thurmarkkam*, illustrating similar patterns of linguistic evolution.

Vanmam Vidhi

“Ceppuru tacaiyēṇṇu ciṇṇu narampu cantu
Tappuru nāṭiyāṇṇu taṇkum iṭam vanmam āmē”

-Vaṇma Vidhi

Numerous Varmam texts were authored by Siddhars such as Agathiyar, Bogar, and Therar. These works describe the application of Varmam techniques for purposes like anesthesia and controlling bleeding during surgical procedures. Over time, the knowledge from these various texts was compiled and systematized into a consolidated work known as *Vanma Vidhi*.

VANMAM IN TAMIL BIBLE

Caka Kiṇṇistavarai paṇṇi nām ēṭāvatu kuṇṇaccāṭṭaiyō mōcamāṇa vicayattaiyō kēlvippattāl Piṇekōsaip piṇpaṇṇuvatu evvaḷavu nāṇamāṇa kāriyam! Nam cakōṭarar mītu vaṇmam koḷvatailiruntu allatu avaraip paṇṇi tavarākap pēcuvatailiruntu vivēkam nammai aṇai pōṭṭu taṭukkum.

-nīti.19:11

VARMA OLAI CHUVADIGAL[5]

A large number of palm-leaf manuscripts related to Varmam have been found predominantly in Kanyakumari, the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu, where they are still carefully preserved. These manuscripts are written entirely in Tamil, and the language used reflects the local dialect of the Kanyakumari region. Notably, this style of expression continues to be used by the local population in their daily lives. This linguistic and geographical evidence suggests that these Olai Chuvadigal likely originated in the Kanyakumari district. (Image No.2)

Pathai – a term used to denote broth.

“Kārappā atu koṇṭāl kuṇṭattai kēlu
Kaṇṇṇaṭaikkum palvāyppūṇṭu pāṭaiyum taḷḷum”

-Ceṇṇi Varmam, *Varma Nitāṇam*–500

Pani – used to denote a mild fever.

“Iruṭṭiyē piṭarikkutti paṇi kuḷirum
Iṭarāki caṇṇi varum oṇṇatum”

-Cīṇṇaṇṇu Varmam, *Varma Nitāṇam*–500

Kozhuthu – a term used to denote sprain.

“Muṇṇavē muttuvaiyōṭē koḷuttu kuttu
Muṇṇaiyāṇa payamuṇṇē kilēcam kāṇum”

-Pallai Varmam, *Varma Nūlēṇi*–200

Sumai – used to denote cough.

“Valuvāṇa sumaiyūṇṭam kaṇmūṭi pōm
Varum vāyvazhi nīrum matimayaṇkum”

-Sumai Varmam, *Taṭṭu Varma Nitāṇam*–32

Uzhinjai – the other name of Mudakkarutthan plant.

“Naiyyavē naṇṇāri uliṇṇai villai
Nāyakaṇē nāyuruvi karuvi lāṇci”

-Aṭivayiru Varma Kacāyam, *Varma Nūlēṇi*–200

LISTS OF OLAI CHUVADIGAL FOUND IN KANYAKUMARI[5]

Urppatthi Narambarai		Varma kandi-60
Lada choothiram – 300		Varma kaimurai-36
Varma choothiram		Thattu varma Nidhanam-32
Varma beerangi – 100		Varma theerpu -32
Padu varma vivara thathuva kattalai		Varma kaviyam -28

Nalu mathirai urai Varmani choothiram – 100 Odivu murivu kattu choothiram -60 Varma choothiram -50 Beerangi thiravu kol -16 Varma Nooleni -200 Varma mutthirai -200 Varma chootchathi chootcham-100 Varma soodamani Varmakalai kannadi choothiram-200		Varmani -16 Varmaponnoosi Thiravukol Thodu varma thiravukol Ul choothiram -16 Varmaporinadi thiravukol Varma kannadi -500
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Certain Siddha enthusiasts, notably Dr. T. Mohana Raj, President of the Akila Thiruvithancore Siddha Vaidhiya Sangam and Correspondent of A.T.S.V.S Siddha Medical College, Munchirai, have made significant efforts to convert these palm-leaf manuscripts into written literature, now available in book form. He is currently employing modern technology to digitize these valuable documents.

DISCUSSION

The present review highlights that the history of Varmam is deeply rooted in the cultural, literary, martial, and medical traditions of ancient Tamil society. Evidence gathered from classical Tamil literature, stone inscriptions (Kalvettugal), copper plate inscriptions (Seppedugal), and palm-leaf manuscripts (Olai Chuvadigal) suggests that Varmam was not merely a therapeutic practice but also an integral component of warfare, education, and Siddha medicine. These diverse documentary sources collectively indicate that the Kanyakumari region played a pivotal role in the preservation and transmission of Varmam knowledge. [2-6]

The association between Varmam and Kalari demonstrates that knowledge of vital points was originally developed as part of martial traditions and later incorporated into therapeutic practice. Oral traditions preserved among hereditary Varmam practitioners in Kanyakumari further support this relationship, although such accounts require corroboration through systematic historical research.¹ The references to "Aasan" in *Silappathikaram*, *Paripadal*, and *Tolkappiyam* indicate that trained teachers or masters occupied an established position in ancient Tamil society, suggesting that formal systems of knowledge transmission existed during the Sangam and post-Sangam periods. These literary references provide indirect evidence for the antiquity of Varmam education. Among the epigraphical records, the Parthibagesapuram copper plate inscription of Gokkaru Nandhadakkan is particularly significant because it documents the establishment of an educational institution where Siddha medicine and Varmam were reportedly taught. This inscription strengthens the argument that Varmam formed part of structured educational systems rather than remaining solely an oral tradition. Furthermore, the appearance of royal honorifics such as "Varmar" and "Vanmar" in inscriptions suggests that proficiency in Varmam was socially recognized and valued among rulers and military leaders. Historical records describing the role of Anandha Padmanaban and the participation of 108 Aasans during the Battle of Colachel further demonstrate the strategic importance of Varmam in military history. Although these records primarily document political events, they indirectly indicate that Varmam practitioners were organized and held influential positions within the armed forces. Such findings support the close association between martial arts and Siddha medical knowledge in southern India. Linguistic evidence also contributes to understanding the evolution of the terminology. Classical texts such as *Vanma Vidhi* employ the term "Vanmam," whereas the modern form "Varmam" appears to have developed through phonetic transformation over time, similar to several other Tamil lexical changes. The occurrence of the word "Vanmam" in the Tamil Bible in an entirely different semantic context further demonstrates that the original Tamil word existed independently before becoming associated specifically with the Siddha therapeutic discipline. The predominance of Varmam palm-leaf manuscripts in Kanyakumari provides additional evidence supporting the region as an important centre for the preservation of this knowledge. The manuscripts contain local dialectal expressions that continue to be used in present-day Kanyakumari, indicating linguistic continuity across generations. The large number of manuscripts, together with ongoing efforts to digitize and publish them, represents an important opportunity for preserving traditional knowledge and facilitating future academic research. Nevertheless, most of the available evidence remains historical and literary in nature. Many palm-leaf manuscripts have not yet undergone critical editing, translation, authentication, or scientific validation. Furthermore, several historical claims continue to rely on regional traditions and secondary historical interpretations. Therefore, interdisciplinary collaboration involving historians, epigraphists, linguists, manuscriptologists, Siddha scholars, and biomedical researchers is essential to authenticate these sources and establish a stronger evidence base for the historical development of Varmam.

CONCLUSION

The available literary, epigraphical, and manuscript evidence collectively indicates that Varmam possesses a rich historical foundation closely linked with Siddha medicine, Tamil martial traditions, and the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari. Classical Tamil literature, copper plate inscriptions, stone inscriptions, and numerous palm-leaf manuscripts demonstrate the long-standing existence and systematic transmission of Varmam knowledge. Although these sources strongly support

the historical significance of Varmam, further critical manuscript studies, epigraphical investigations, and interdisciplinary research are necessary to authenticate its chronology and strengthen its documentation. Preservation, digitization, and scientific exploration of these traditional resources will contribute substantially to the recognition and advancement of Varmam within both traditional and contemporary healthcare systems.

த. நா. தொ. ஆய்வுத்துறை		தொடர் எண் : 1968 / 323	
மாஸ்ட்டம் :	கன்னியாகுமரி	ஆட்சி ஆண்டு :	—
வட்டம் :	அகத்தீஸ்வரம்	வரலாற்று ஆண்டு :	கொல்லம் இ. பி 1333
ஸ்தர் :	வடசேரி	இதழ் கவசெட்டு	}
மொழி :	தமிழ்	ஆண்டு அறிக்கை	
எழுத்து :	தமிழ்	முன் பதிப்பு :	இ. தொல். மெ. தொ. VI. பகுதி II பக்கம் 130
அரசு :	திருவிதாங்கூர்	ஊர்க் கவசெட்டு	}
மன்னன் :	உதையமார்த்தாண்டவன்மர்	எண்	

இடம் : தலியில் மஹாதேவர் கோயில் முகமண்டபத்தின் தெற்குப் பக்கச் சுவர்.

குறிப்புரை : செயதுங்க நாட்டு சங்கரநாராயண வென்று மண்கொண்ட பூதலவீர ஸ்ரீ உதையமார்த்தாண்டவன்மர் நாஞ்சி நாட்டு கஜேந்திரத்துக் கொதுகுலச்சுவையாரில் ஆரியன் சொக்கன் பெரிய பெருமான் மார்த்தாண்டப் பிரமாதராயனுக்கு மேற்படி நாட்டு வடசேரியில் உள்ள நானாதிக்கரமுடைய நயினார் கோயில் சிபண்டாரக் கணக்கு எழுதுவதற்கு நியமித்து ஆணைப் பிறப்பித்ததைக் குறிக்கிறது.

கவசெட்டு :

1. பரமஹம்ஸ ஆருஷிச் செயல் கொல்லம் என அது இது கார்த்திகை மீ 10 உ. பூறுவ பகிழ்த்து இறையோதெனியும் நாயனாட்சையும் பெற்ற அக்கவதி
2. நான் செயதுங்க நாட்டு சங்கரநாராயண வென்று மண்கொண்ட பூதலவீர சிறிவீர உதையமார்த்தாண்ட
3. வன்மர் திருப்பாப்பூர் முத்தவராய நாம் நாஞ்சி நாட்டு ஸ்ரீ ஐந்துக் கொதுகுலச் சுவையாரில் ஆரியன்
4. சொக்கன் பெரிய பெருமான் மார்த்தாண்டப் பிரமாதராயனுக்கு நாஞ்சி நாட்டு வடசேரியில் நயினார்
5. தலியில் நானாதிக்கரமுடைய நயினார் கோயிலுக்கு நானது முதலுக்குச் சிபண்டாரக் கணக்கும் எழுதி
6. பழையபடி உடைமையும் நான் ஒன்றுக்குச் சோறு நாழியும் பற்றிக் கொண்டு ஆசந்திரதாரவற் சந்ததிப்பித

1. திருவிதாங்கூர் வெளியீட்டுத் தொகுதியில் கார்த்திகை மீ 10 உ. என்ன படிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது.
(திருப்படி)

Image 1. Tamil Nadu Archeological Department Report.



Image 2. Scanned Image of Palm leaf (Olai Chuvadi)

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