

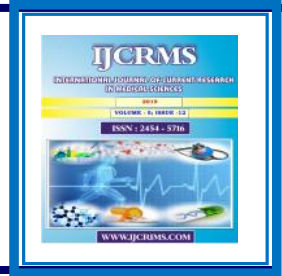


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Vatham – Thega elakanam and diet - A Review

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Abstract

The Siddha system of medicine mainly practiced in the southern part of India is one of the most primitive traditional medicine systems in the world and deals with physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of an individual. It consists of fundamental classical literature that stress on the importance of tri-humoral makeup of individuals. Analysis of body constitution has been in practice in most complementary and alternative systems of medicine. Guidance has been given in the classics for identifying specific types of body constitution, various dietary recommendations and disease susceptibility. In validating such important traditional fundamental aspects, analytical systematic literature framework is the first step. In this review article the *thega elakanam* (body constituent) and diet for *Vatham* are discussed.

Keywords: Siddha system, *Vatham*, *thega elakanam*.

Introduction

The Siddha system of medicine mainly practised in the southern part of India is one of the most primitive traditional medicine systems in the world and deals with physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of an individual.

Each individual is born with an inherent constitution that has a predominant influence of any one of the three *thodams*. This remains constant for the entire lifetime of the individual. *Thodams* are not visible nor are their abstract and can be sensed and felt. The three *Thodams* are in constant motion and in an ever shifting dynamic balance with one another and are required for life

to happen. They are the bio regulating principles and are called *Vatham*, *Pitham* and *Kabham*. Health, in an individual, can be defined according to the harmonious and balanced functioning of these three *Thodams*.

Physical body as well as our mental constitution are touched by the influence of the three *Gunas* (*Sathuvam*, *Raso*, *Thamo*) through the food we eat. Food plays a vital role in determining our daily health and state of mind. Since it is an external factor, it allows us the possibility of consciously changing and choosing our diet to influence ourselves. Diet can be designed to enhance the natural healing process within the body and mind.

Vali/ Vatham (Bio-energy movement):

One of the three humours/ principles of functional constitution of the body represent the elements (*Panchabootham*) air and space; where space, by being an ideal field of non-resistance provides, the perfect occasion for the free movement of the air element. *Vatham* is the principle kinetic energy in the body and it is responsible for motor and sensory activities. *Vatham* predominates in the region below umbilicus. A characteristic of *Vatham* includes, quick movements, mobility and a fleeting nature that tends to leave behind a kind of emptiness; a typical energy spending attribute. It also strengthens the five sensory organs, regulates respiration, maintain the functions of *Udalhathukkal* (physical constituents) and 14 *Vekengal* (physiological reflexes). It is eliminated from the body through defecation.

Vatham enables the expression of the other two *thodams* (*Pitham and Kabham*). It governs functions like breathing, blinking of eyelids, movements of muscles and tissues, pulsation of the heart, all motions of expansions and contraction and the movement of every single impulse in the nerve cells. Psychologically, it governs feelings and emotions of freshness, nervousness, fear, anxiety, pain, tremors and spasms. And its most important function is to carry the movements of body, mind and speech.

Based on its function it is classified into ten types. They are *Pranan, Abanan, Viyanan, Samanan, Udhanan, Naagan, Koorman, Kirugaran, Devathathan* and *Thananjeyan*.

Pranan (Uyirvali- Life energy):

It originates from *moolatharam*. It is responsible for respiration and digestion.

Abanan (Keelnokkukaal– Downward energy):

Component of *Vatham* responsible for all downward/ caudal movements in the body like peristalsis. Responsible for absorption and assimilation of the essence, excretion of the urine and faeces, ejection of semen and expulsion of contents of the uterus, contracts and relaxes the sphincters.

Viyanan (Paravukaal– Centrifugal energy):

Component of *Vatham* that disseminates all over the body through 72,000 vessels and nerves causing voluntary and involuntary functions. It takes the nutrients to all parts of the body.

Udhanan (Maelnokkukaal– Upward energy):

Component of *Vatham* responsible for all upward or cephalic movements such as vomiting, hiccough, belching and cough. It is responsible for speech and stations the nutrients at appropriate region of the body. Thus helps in the digestion and assimilation of food.

Samanan (Nadukkal– Digestive energy/ Homeostatic energy):

It is one of the components of *Vatham* that balances other components. It is responsible for assimilation and balances six tastes, water, food etc.

Naagan (Intellectual energy):

It is responsible for higher intellectual functions, hearing, thinking, singing, piloerection and also for blinking and opening of the eyelids.

Koorman (Visual energy):

It starts from the mind and it is responsible for blinking of the eyelids, closure and opening of eyes, yawning and closure of the mouth. It gives strength and helps to visualize things and cause lacrimation.

Kirugaran (Secretory energy):

It lies in the tongue and responsible for nasal and salivary secretions. It induces hunger; makes to concentrate on one thing. Sneezing and cough attributes to *Kirugaran*.

Devathathan (Tiresome energy):

Laziness is attributed to *Devadaththan*. Ocular movements and human passions are attributed to this *Vatham*. It resides either at the anus or at urinary orifice.

Thananjeyan (Intracranial energy):

Functions from the nasal cavity and it are responsible for the bloating of the body after death. It leaves the body through the head on the third day of death.

Derangement of Vatham:

Excessive activities or habits such as the ones mentioned below can aggravate the *Vatha* thodam.

- Excessive manual labour
- Excessive sexual indulgence
- Excessive studying
- Speaking in a very high – pitched voice
- Excessive mental stress
- High level fear or anxiety
- Excessive fasting
- Suppressing urination, defecation etc.
- Excessive intake of bitter, pungent, astringent or dry foods substances and/or a continuous use of particular pulses or rice.
- Over exposure to cloudy and stormy days in the early morning and in the evening.

Reduction of *Vatham* causes;

- A shifting pain all over the body
- Depression
- Less receptivity
- Difficulty in putting words together fluently
- Slowing down of all activities
- Lack of creativity
- Difficulty in adapting to new situations.

Thega elakkanam

The nature of the individual including structural, functional characteristics, adaptability, relatively stable and genetically predetermined, which is classified into four main types namely *Vali/ Vatham*, *Azhal/ Pitham*, *Iyya/ Kabhathegi* and *Thonthathegi* and each one has subtypes. The subtypes of *Vali/ Vatham* are described below;

Vali/ Vathathegi:

Persons with *Vali/ Vatha* constitution possess thick eyelids, black / red complexion, reduced sexual desire, excessive gas accumulation, little food intake, fond of pungent food stuffs, loss of semen and gnawing pain all over the body.

Body frame - *Vatha* people tend to be either unusually short or tall with a rather slender and lanky body frame. Their bone structures are either light or rather heavy and often protrude forming prominent joints.

Weight - *Vatha* people rarely gain weight due to high degree of energy spending and the dryness of their constitution promotes a dominant leanness of body. They lose weight easily if they are obese. *Vatha* peoples also experience frequent fluctuations in weight.

Walk - *Vatha* people have a quick walk with swift movements, always in a hurry. Also they show lot of movements while walking. (eg.) Shoulders

Teeth - *Vatha* people are known for their crooked and uneven teeth. Their innate irregularity may also show in their jaw, making it either too small to fit all the teeth or too big and protruding. Some teeth may be significantly larger than the other one.

Digestive power - *Vatha* people have an irregular appetite and their digestive power is never quite steadily or consistent.

Ability to bear hunger – *Vatha* people has an innate ability to bear fluctuating hunger intervals.

Thirst - *Vatha* people show an irregular nature of thirst.

Quantity of food – *Vatha* people have an irregular and inconsistent appetite and consume varying quantities.

Groups of desired tastes – *Vatha* people are inclined towards foods of sweet, salty and sour flavours and nature.

Foods desired – *Vatha* people like warm food.

Bowel movements – *Vatha* people have irregular bowel movements and often suffer constipation.

Perspiration – *Vatha* people seldom perspire implying typical cold bodies and dry constitution.

Sleep – *Vatha* people are light sleepers and often interrupted and little sleep indicative of the erratic trait of their *dosham* but sometimes due to severe exhaustion they could fall into deep sleep and are impossible to awake. Often even after a sleep they could wake up in the morning without a feeling of rest as their minds continue to spend energy even in their sleep.

Dreams – *Vatha* people mostly dream of flying, jumping, climbing hills, etc.

Personality traits – *Vatha* people innately resist any sort of regularity and thereby respond quickly to changes in environment. They are extremely changeable and sensitive, often high strung and restless as their mind demands continual stimulation. Although they are high in their energy levels, they burn out quickly.

Speech and voice qualities – *Vatha* people talk very fast, often skipping or missing words in their sentences and speak in a rising voice. They often tend to stray from the subject. They are highly talkative and can speak on almost any subject for hours, as talking involves spending a lot of energy. *Vatha* people show an innate inability of keeping anything solid within them. In other words they gain satisfaction only after expulsion.

Energy spending – *Vatha* people have a tendency to overwork due to the stirring nature of the air principle within them.

Performances of activities – *Vatha* people carry out their activities with high initiative and rather quickly. They are fast and nimble in their work.

Excitability – *Vatha* people get excited quickly and easily but lose interest equally speedily implying the natural tendency of spending high amounts of energy.

Grasping power – *Vatha* people are equipped with a naturally fast grasping power.

Memory – *Vatha* people have a very short memory so although they remember easily they tend to forget equally and easily. They may burst out in a sudden surge of anger but it is gone and forgotten soon.

Nature of moods – *Vatha* people shows traits of impulsiveness and erratic behaviour.

Attitude to problems or difficulties their characteristics emotions – *Vatha* people in difficult situations show anxiety and severe worry or display signs of instability or inconsistency mainly because they are unable to digest and assimilate the oncoming situation. But when they do handle, they carry out activities quite creatively and face situations with enthusiasm.

Valiazhal/ Vathapithathegi:

Here the predominant *dosham* is *Vatham* and the secondary influence is *Pitham*. The characteristics of such an individual are of both *Vatha* and *Pitta* such as lean and tall body with dark complexion, a skin that is both dry and sensitive, wavy hair, weak health and the individual is liable to be shaken up easily. Such individuals desire to be truthful yet lean on falsehood, are abnormally prone to fearful anger. They desire frequent sexual indulgences, are highly indecisive in nature and crave sweet and pungent food types.

Since air has the ability to fan the fire, the personality of such an individual can get more irritated and impulsive because of this trait as fire already has an upward nature and the participating air blazes if further upwards.

These people are often seen to suffer diseases related to acid eructation, constipation, headaches and eye disorders.

Vali iyya/Vathakabhathegi:

Coolness is a trait inherent to both *Vatha* and *Kaphadoshams*, if this combination is in balance, the individual is of composed personality, but if

the *Vatha - Kabha* combination suffers imbalance the personality shows signs of highly astringent nature.

The individual has a flabby constitution, is slow in movement and has a rosy/ fair/ red complexion, gait like that of a male elephant, stout and tall, thunder-like voice with a skin type that is generally dry with some oily zones.

The person is inclined to yogic practices and prefers pungent and sour food. A common characteristic of *Vatha - Kabha* personalities is their rigid adherence to obsessive disciplines. Many are time-obsessive and fixated in trying to follow routines to a level of routine-sickness and therefore more than often fail to digest the result of their discipline. Since the *Kabha* force expresses qualities of rigidity belonging to the earth element, the 'cool' nature of the air element further increases it and makes it further rigid resulting in diseases related to the stiffness of joints, frozen shoulders, rheumatism, weak digestion and other circulatory disorders.

Dietary regimen:

Dietary advice for *Vathathegi* (Body constitution):

Grains:

- Wheat
- Boiled rice
- Millets

Cereals:

- Black gram - *Vigna mungo*
- Green gram - *Vigna radiata*
- Sesame - *Sesamum indica*
- Green beans - *Phaseolus vulgaris*
- Brazel nuts - *Bertholletia excelsa*
- Almonds - *Prunus dulcis*
- Walnut - *Juglans regia*
- Hazelnut - *Corylus avellana*
- Lentils - *Lens culinaris*
- Dry oats

Vegetables

- Broad bean – *Vicia faba*
- Elephant yam – *Amorphophallus paeoniifolius*
- Bottle guard – *Lagenaria siceraria*
- Radish – *Raphanus raphanistrum subsp. sativus*
- Onion – *Allium cepa*
- Brinjal – *Solanum melongena*
- Tapioca – *Manihot esculenta*
- Carrot – *Daucuscarota subsp. sativus*
- Pumpkin – *Cucurbita pepo*
- Beetroot – *Beta vulgaris*
- Ash gourd – *Benincasa hispida*
- Snake guard – *Trichosanthes cucumerina*
- Garlic – *Allium sativum*
- Lettuce – *Lactuca sativa*
- Sweet potato – *Ipomoea batatas*
- Maca – *Lepidium meyenii*
- Turnip – *Brassica rapa*
- Kohlrabi – *Brassica oleraceagongyloides group*
- Green peas – *Pisum sativum*

Greens:

- Kuppaimeni – *Acalypha indica*
- Manathakkali – *Solanum nigrum*
- Yaanainerunjil – *Pedaliium murex*
- Musumusukai – *Mukia maderaspatana*
- Mukkirattai – *Boerhavia diffusa*
- Vasalai – *Portulaca quadrifida*
- Sirukeerai – *Amaranthus gangeticus*

Spices:

- Dry ginger – *Zingiber officinalis*
- Pepper – *Piper nigrum*
- Long pepper – *Piper longum*
- Fresh green chilli (Little) – *Capsicum annum*
- Mustard – *Brassica nigra*
- Coriander – *Coriandrum sativum*
- Fenugreek – *Trigonellafaenum - graecum*
- Cumin – *Cuminum cyminum*
- Asafoetida – *Ferula asafoetida*
- Cinnamon – *Cinnamomum verum*

Fruits:

- Grapes – *Vitis vinifera*
- Avocado – *Persea americana*
- Coconut – *Cocos nucifera*
- Cashew – *Anacardium occidentale*
- Dates – *Phoenix dactylifera*
- Banana – *Musa paradisiaca*
- Apricot – *Prunus armeniaca*
- Strawberry – *Fragaria ananassa*
- Custard apple – *Annona reticulata*
- Apple – *Malus domestica*
- Guava – *Psidium guajava*
- Pineapple – *Ananas comosus*
- Pomegranate – *Punica granatum*
- Orange – *Citrus sinensis*
- Lemon – *Citrus limon*
- Papaya – *Carica papaya*
- Cherry plum – *Prunus cerasifera*
- Mango ripe – *Mangifera indica*
- Indian gooseberry – *Phyllanthus emblica*
- Peaches – *Prunus persica*
- Blackberries – *Rubus armeniacus*
- Blueberries – *Vaccinium corymbosum*

Oils:

- Sesame oil
- Coconut oil
- Mustard oil

Salt:

- Induppu – Rock salt

Vatral (Salted and dried vegetable):

- Bitterberry (Sundaikaai) – *Solanum torvum*
- Thuthulamkaai – *Solanum trilobatum*
- Indian gooseberry (Nellikaai) – *Phyllanthus emblica*
- Manathakkali – *Solanum nigrum*
- Broad beans (Avvarai) – *Lablab purpureus*
- Piranddai – *Cissus quadrangularis*

Pickles:

- Citron – bitter (Narthankai) – *Citrus aurantifolia*
- Thandrikaai – *Terminalia bellerica*

Milk and Milk products:

- Cow's milk
- Ghee
- Buffalo's milk
- Cream
- Cheese
- Butter
- Curd

Non vegetarian foods:

- Sea food
- Mutton
- Beef
- Chicken
- Pork
- Turkey
- Egg
- Deer meet
- Fowl

Discussion and Conclusion

Diet plays a major role in our everyday activity. It acts as the source of vital nutrients to gain energy and it builds our body. Improper diet habits cause disturbances in equilibrium of the three humours (*Uyirthatthukkal*) and physical constituents (*Udalthatthukkal*) in turn causing several diseases. Food postulation brings out the vast insight of Siddha through this paper. There is a great scope for research on food and thegi (body) in Siddha which is in need of the hour. Evaluating *Udaliyal* besides conventional diagnostics in analysing the current physical, mental state of a person will bear fruits for his/her future course of health and disease prevention. This work is a little step in Siddha to promote a healthy life globally and to pave way for imminent prospective certainly.

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