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THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES & TECHNOLOGY
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ODE TO INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

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SIDDHA

ORIGIN

Rishi Akattiyar (Agastya) is the first of all Siddhars (Tamil physician-saints). He is said to have received the knowledge of health through an evolved meditative state of mind and passed it on through the guru-shishya transmission process to 18 Siddhars who propagated it far and wide.

HISTORY

- The term Siddhar (pronounced Chittar in Tamil) means spiritually evolved being who has achieved some extraordinary competencies (Siddhi).
- Siddha literature is in old Tamil and it is practiced largely in the Tamil speaking parts of India and abroad.
- Siddhars are known to be of different types such as Sanmargasiddhars, Gnanasiddhars and Kayasiddhars.

According to Siddha Cosmology, all matter is composed of two primal forces - matter (Shiva) and energy (Shakti), the principles of existence operating in humans as well as in nature, connecting the microcosm with the macrocosm.

- In medieval times, the Siddha tradition was carried forward by the Kayasiddhars. Their works are dated to 13th and 14th century CE and are attributed to many authors. Akattiyar is credited authoring 96 works and Therayar (late 17thcentury CE) said to have written 12 works on medicine.
- The Kayasiddhars emphasised “perfection of the body” by means of yoga, alchemy, medicine and certain esoteric rituals.

FUNDAMENTALS

- Vatam, Pittam and Kapam, the three basic functional units of the body are responsible for kinetic, metabolic and anabolic aspects respectively.
- Vatam measured in 1 unit, Pittam in ½ units and Kapam in ¼ units is the accepted ratio, the maintenance of which reflects health.
- Siddha and Ayurveda share physiological, diagnostic and therapeutic practices and concepts, and a large part of materia medica. The difference is mostly in detail. Siddha pharmacopoeia includes more mineral products than Ayurveda. This is justified by the fact that metals and minerals that do not perish easily should be used to preserve the body from decomposing.
- Siddha medicine recognizes predominance of Vatam in childhood, Pittam in adulthood and Kapam in old age, whereas in Ayurveda, it is the other way around.

18 Siddhas poster courtesy (© Christian Sebastia)