

---

**A STUDY OF MEDICAL REFERENCES FOUND IN TAMIL PROVERBS**

**Mrs:Parameswary Sangkaran and Dr. ManonmaniDevi D/O M.A.R Annamalai**  
Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjung Malim, Malaysia.

**ABSTRACT**

The study is a review of the medical references found in the Tamil proverbs of Cenani (1996) in the text entitled, *Tamilnāṭṭuppaḷamoḷikal* 2000. It is a small attempt, to reveal the medical references practiced among the ancient Tamil people, and to exhibit them in a simple and clear way to the contemporary people. The ancestors of Tamils inscribed the medical references in Siddar songs and in palm leaf manuscript. In the ancient days, people used the proverbs as a tool to solve the medical related problems. Since, the proverbs were short, simple and understandable by all; it was a great help for the laity people. Though the proverbs have a tiny structure, the concepts have in-depth connotation. They are applicable for all the people including male, female, children and adults. Due to the importance of medical references found in Proverbs, several studies have been conducted by both local and foreign researchers. Nevertheless, the study of proverbs in medicine is a new undertaking by researchers. This study aims to look at the medical references in Tamil proverbs. The study was conducted based on three objectives such as to identify the medical references in Tamil proverbs, to analyze the categories and to improve the medical wisdom of the Tamil community in Tamil proverbs. This study is approached on descriptive and qualitative methods based on Relevant theory. The uniqueness of the Tamil proverbs is supposed to be used as a medical device, because the medical content in Tamil proverbs means explicit and implicit. Medical proverbs is a guide to the Tamil community of Malaysia to live a prosperous life. Such a study will ensure Malaysians, especially Indians, Tamil to retain the use of medical Tamil proverbs in their daily lives. Moreover, this study also will pave the way for new researchers in this field.

**Key Words:** Tamil proverbs, Medical references, Indians, Tamil.

**INTRODUCTION**

Growth includes a number of disciplines depending not only a particular sector but various regions too. For example, the human race is a well-developed, and getting more advanced in the field of science, medicine, ecology, literature, and sciences. Despite our race, religion, language, country, humans are competing with each other in establishing their role and position in each and every field. Human is leading a lifestyle where they don't mind or don't get time to recognize good and evil in the changes happening around them.

How many of us know the side effects of this rapid lifestyle and vast development? We are away from natural life and evolved in a modern life. Our ancestors lived with the principle of 'food is medicine for life.' (Ilakkiyaṅkaḷkāṭṭumunaṅvumurai, 2011; 380). We forgot that too. Hence, we Malaysian Tamil people are suffering from several health problems.



this modern era. Hence, to fill this gap, the researcher tried to do a research on the title "Medical references found in Tamil proverbs". The researcher also plans to use Tamil *nāṭṭuppaḷamoḷikaḷ* 2000, written by Cenani(1996) as a main reference in this research. The researcher is very confident that this study will be useful to the Malaysian Tamils and started the research work.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on proverbs and siddha ayurvedic medicines are found in this section.

Mathivanan K. wrote an article entitled 'Our herbal Medicine mentioned in Proverbs' and presented it at the First World Tamil Conference (1990) in Malaysia. In this study, explanations and evidences of Indian traditional medicines and herbs which are found in the proverbs are included.

Furthermore, Fialkova, L. (2010) conducted a study on 'The Proverbs and Medicine: The problem of applied Folklore'. In this study, the researcher explained the medical references found in the proverbs. At the same time, the researcher has explained the usage of the medicinal proverbs.

Govintharaaj, S. (2009) created a review on the topic of Herbal medicine in Tamil literature. In his study he wrote explanations about herbal medicine and its use Tamil Literature.

Sivapalan, G. from Universiti Malaya created a review on the topic of herbal medicine prescription in prayer rites (2017). In his study he wrote explanations about usage of herbal medicine in prayer rites.

Thiruvalluvan M. has presented a study on 'Herbal medicine in folklore proverbs' in the year 2005. The researcher has described about the medical herbs found in proverbs and its usages.

The above-mentioned studies can be said to be the closest references to the researcher's current research on the subject of "medical references found in Tamil proverbs" and the references paved the way to conduct the research further.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVERBS

The proverb is derived from the experience and knowledge of human. The proverbs are a part of folklore literature. It is also called oral literature. Moreover, there is also the idea that the proverbs were created for the masses by the laity. In Tamil literature, proverbs and proverb description are found in abundant. They include many life elements such as education, family, marriage, relationships, science, medicine, agriculture, food, public life, and so on. These are found in the book, '*Paḷamoḷivaḷaṅkumpalturaiccintaṅaikaḷ*' (2017; 5).

Pāmaramakkaḷtaṅkaḷpaṭṭaṅṟivīṅkūrmayil, taṅkaḷ  
aṅupavaṅkaḷaik, kaṅṟaṅṟintaṅmaikaḷai, neṅrikaḷai

avvappōtu, kālaṅkālamākavaḷaṅkivarukinṛaṅar.  
Avaikaḷēpaḷamoḷikaḷeṅrunam'māḷaḷaikkappatukinṛaṅa.

'In the sharpness of their experience, the people of the laurels have rovided their experiences, the benefits and the norms from time to time as a greatest message to the people. They are called as proverbs by us.'

The proverbs are used as a great tool to capture the beauty of a society while telling the gentleness of one's faults, and to advise young people to refine their lives without hurting them. Moreover, the proverbs are brief and simple, and understandable by all, and also have been a great deal to the lives of the laity. Though the proverbs are in a brief setting its concepts are in depth. They are applicable for all the people including male, female, children, adults and are given as:

*Norūnkattiṅṛālnūruvayatu*

'Eat by chewing ensures hundred years of life'

*Nōyarravālvēkuraivarracelvam*

'Life without illness is the most expensive gift of life'

These are the proverbs that are tailor-made for today's youths and tomorrow's descendants.

## MEDICAL REFERENCES IN TAMIL PROVERBS

Although the living aspects in the Tamil proverbs are strong and pertinent, the medical proverbs have been widely accepted among the laity. This is due to the absence of modern medical facilities at that time and they solely depend on the Siddha physicians. There are also many evidences show that medicine in those days are based on the medical proposal offered by Siddha physicians. For instance, the proverb,

*Āyiramvēraikkonṛavaṅaraivaittiyaṅ*

'Man whom understood the glory of thousand herbs enable to achieve the half notion of Siddha physician''

signifies that Siddha medicine can be remedial using herbal plants and their roots. Hence, the only one who knows the use of thousand roots can reach the status of half physician. This is mentioned in the book 'Nalmaruntu' (2017; 14), 'Each plant has a clinical character. It is astonishing that our forefathers have found that this plant will cure this disease''.

Moreover, the proverb,

*Pattumiḷakuiruntālpakaivaṅvīṭṭilumuṅṅalām*

'Man who is aware of the worth of pepper could eat even at his enemy's home.'

*Nāṅkumiḷakumoruvettilaiyumiruntālpakaivaṇvīṭṭilkūṭaṇavaruntalām*

‘Man who has pepper and betel with him, could eat even at his enemy’s home.’

symbolizes that pepper and betel are easy herbal remedy in all homes. Our forefathers have learned that these are powerful herbs that could break any danger viruses. Therefore, it is advisable for one to take along or eat pepper and betel if goes to the homes of enemies. Hence, offering *Tampulama* after meals is a culture among Tamils.

Furthermore, the proverb,

*ḷaittavaṇukkueḷḷaikoṭu; koḷuttavaṇukkukolḷaikoṭu*

‘A sesame for a scraggy; a horse gram for a stout.’

explains that Sesame and horse gram are categorized as grains. Sesame is a small seed that used to make good oil. It is customary to give sesame oil to new born babies in order to ensure their better health. Likewise, horse gram helps one to lose weight and maintain the beauty of body. Hence, the proverb suggests that sesame is good for skinny people to gain weight while, horse gram is good for those who are obese.

Moreover, our ancestors plant banyan trees and neem trees in front of the house. The roots of these trees are strong and capable of destroying buildings. There is a big medical story behind this. This can be related to the proverb,

*Ālumvēlumpallukkuruti*

‘Aerial roots of banyan tree and neem stick will ensure the health of teeth.’

It refers to the tent, the valve of the banyan tree and the stick of the neem tree. It is a well-known fact that all of us are familiar with the medical concepts that stated in the proverb as mentioned in the book, *Namakkunaamenallamaruthuvar*’ (2015; 15). It is narrated that brushing teeth by using neem stick will prevent teeth fall problem for the rest of life.

Similarly, the proverb,

*Vēlampaṭṭaipittattaippōkkum, ālampaṭṭaimēkattaippōkkum*

‘Acacia tree stem (bar) removes bile illness and banyan tree stem (bar) removes ulcer.’

explains another medical reference. It says, ‘If we smash acacia, boil with water, distill and drink every morning, diseases like bile illness, abdominal pain, gall bladder diseases, scabies and fungous will be cured and also if we do the same with banyan bar, the disease like mouth ulcer, mouth odor, impetigo, etc.

Our ancestors, through someone's eating habits, will tell the cause of his illness and the remedy of solving it. The food habits are the cause of disease. There is a measurement that what amount of food should be taken in the body and what quantity of waste to leave from the body. By practicing this, a healthy life style can be lead and is explained through the proverb:

*Malam tankiñālnalampōcci*

*Malam pōñālpalampōcci*

*'If feces remain in body, one's health will beinfected,  
'feces are disposed, one's health will assured.'*

Diseases such as stomach pain, stomach bloating, headache, constipation and bowel diseases will occur if waste products of foods in body are not disposed consistently. Similarly, the risk of exacerbation is considered as equally danger to health. Thus, one has to practice the habit of disposing body wastes regularly in order to prevent chronic diseases and is mentioned in the book, *namakku name nallamaruttuvar* (2015; 6).

That's why we say, have to control while eating even nectar or else it will be poison. This is advised my the elders as *alavukkuamirtamumnaju* (even limitless nectar is poison) and *alavoduunduvamoduvazh* (eat sufficient and lead a healthy life)

## CONCLUSION

In this way, the proverbs which have medical references can be structured one by one. It's our responsibility and duty to collect, recover and provide all the medical references for our youngsters and current generations. All the proverbs referred in this study are very useful for human. Therefore, if we follow the medical references inculcated in these proverbs, the Malaysian Tamils could live a better life without any illness.

## REFERENCES

Ceñkañi, (1996). *Tamiñnāṭṭuppalamoḷikaḷ* 2000. Chennai: NarmathaaPathippagam

Editors of ParathiManram, (2011). *Ilakkiyañkalkāṭṭumuṇavumuṇai*. Chennai: Santha Publications.

Fialkova, L. (2010). Proverbs and medicine : The problem of applied folklore. Doi: 10.7592/FEJF:46.

Govintharaaj, S. (2009). *Tamiḷilakkiyattilcittamaruttuvam*. Tanjavur: Tamil Universiti.

Jegajoothi, (2016). *Añcaraippeṭṭimaruttuvam*. Chennai: Clasik Publications.

Kothandam, Ko.Ma. (2015). *NamakuNameyNallaMaruthuvar*. Chennai: MunnetraPathippagam.

Mañcaivacantaṅ, 2017. Paḷamoḷivaḷaṅkumpalturaiccintaṅaikaḷ. Chennai : Vijaya Pathippagam.

Mathivanan, K. (1990), Paḷamoḷikaḷkūrumnamnāṭṭumaruttuvam. Kuala Lumpur: First International Tamil Conference.

Michael Jeyaraj, P. (2017) *Nalmaruntu*. Chennai: Vijaya Pathippagam.

Puliyur Kesikan, (2009). *Tolkaappiyam*. Chennai: Paari Nilayam.

Ramachandran, S.B, (2016). *Teraiyarvakatam*. Chennai: Tamarainulakam.

Sami Cidambaranar, (2015). *SittargalkandaVingyanamThathuvam*. Chennai : Naam ThamilarPathippagam.

Sivabalan, G. (2017). *Ālayavaḷipāṭṭilmaruttuvam - ōraṅimukam*. Kuala Lumpur : Universiti Malaya. Jurnal of Peraivu vol6.