



Varmakalai For Bharatanatyam Practitioners

¹K. Dilna, ²Dr.A. Saravanan,

¹Ph.D., Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor,

Department of Music,

Annamalai University, Chidambaram, India

Abstract: This study explores whether varma points are activated when dancers practice the adavus (steps) and mukha bhavam (facial expressions). Suppose any of the Varmakalai techniques were applied to treat injuries or cramps during dance practice and performance in ancient times. Are there any techniques of Varmakalai that were widely accepted and practiced by the Dancers to enhance their stamina and well-being? If so, do those techniques are still in use? Or if there is any means to revive those techniques and make them accessible to the present generation of Bharatanatyam performers.

Keywords: -Bharatanatyam, Varmakalai, Non- invasive diagnostics

1. INTRODUCTION

India (Bharat) has been known for its rich cultural and art heritage for several centuries, in particular, the Southern Indian region was popular among the rest of the world for its traditional medicinal systems, vibrant art forms, architecture, and cultural etiquettes. Especially, Tamilagam (Tamil Nadu) is the home to the ancient medicinal system called 'Siddha Maruthuvam' and the homeland of the classical dance form of 'Sathirattam', from which 'Bharatanatyam' has evolved. It is evident from the thousands of ancient Temples in Tamilnadu that Siddha Medicine and the art form of Bharatanatyam have been co-existent for centuries together, it is elaborately detailed in the inscriptions and sculptures in the temples that the courtesans and the Siddha medicinal practitioners otherwise known as 'Vaithiyars' are vital part of the Temple Institutions.

Courtesans in the temples are known to be Devaradiyars or Devadasis, who dedicated their lives to the service of the deity in the temple. They were used to perform music and dance in the temple during every ritual being performed in the temple on a daily routine. Occasionally they also perform in front of the procession of the deity in Madaveedhis (Main streets around the temple, where the decorated temple chariots aboded with the idols of the deity used to be taken on procession during special occasions). These are the only times where the Devadasis comes into public and interacts with the commoners. They are in general confined to the temples and their social interaction is limited to the people inside the temple.

Being a dancer I always had a few questions, how would I take care if I got injured during practice and performance, I have choices now with modern medicine as there are advanced diagnostic technologies available and accessible, what would the Bharatanatyam dancers have done in the ancient times, how would have they tackled mishaps during their performances, what were the techniques available for them to diagnose with no advance scanning equipment on those days. These questions spiked my interest in exploring ancient medicinal practices, then I came across the Siddha Medicinal System and Varmakalai, a branch of Siddha Medicine, which was said to have non-invasive diagnostic techniques and prognosis widely practiced by the masters (Asaan or Vaithiyars) to treat various kinds of health issues including internal injuries related to muscles, bones, nerves, tissues, etc.,

Thus, this piece of research exploring the connections between Bharatanatyam and Varmakalai is groomed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Varmakalai:

Siddha medicine is one of the indigenous, codified medicines of India. The system is based on the findings of Siddhas, who are eminent philosophical, spiritual, and medicinal scientists given their contributions to medicine formulations, rasavadham (alchemy), kayakarpan (rejuvenation), yogam, varmam, medical astrology, panjapatchi sastram, saram, etc., The Siddha medicinal system has rendered service to humanity for more than five thousand years in combating diseases and in maintaining physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. Varmam is the special branch of Siddha Medicine. Though it gained popularity as a martial art, its immense medical benefits for many ailments are still ignored. The term Varmam was derived from the Tamil word 'Marmam', meaning hidden. Marma is a vital point or vulnerable spot where Sira (veins), Snayu (nerves), Sandhi (joints), Mamsa (muscles), Asthi (bones) and Kandara (ligament) crosses or connects, which explains Marmas as important connection centres or crossroads in the physical body (Sharira). According to the scripts, there are 108 Marma spots in human body. Marma or Varmam spots: a set of vulnerable loci of the body which, when afflicted—by physical trauma for instance—cause severe health problems and may lead to death. Such spots are central to siddha therapeutic and martial practices, which together are called varmakalai, literally the “art of the vital spots.” Varmam applies to combative activities and possesses therapeutic value. Most varmam practitioners live in the southernmost part of India, in Kanyakumari district, where they are known as varma ācāṅs. They are primarily hereditary practitioners, knowledgeable of Varmam spots. Practitioners learn to protect their own and to target an opponent's loci in a practice called varma atī, literally: “hitting the vital spots.” Medical treatments, or varma maruttuvam, “vital spot medicine,” include massages, setting of fractures, and emergency revival methods. Practitioners perform both medical and martial aspects of varmam side by side, which, rather than contradict each other, mutually enhance physical exploration and experiences of the body and lead to an in-depth understanding of vital loci.

These hereditary practitioners, varma ācāṅs, generally despise the “book knowledge” (nūlaṅivu) of Siddha colleges, claiming that it provides theoretical but not practical knowledge. Varmam manuscripts, even those in the form of palm-leaf scriptures, insist that accepting a practitioner as one's guru and living in a close, intimate relationship with him are key components of Siddha instruction. This includes living with, observing and assisting a practitioner. Varmam manuscripts stipulate twelve years of instruction, a period described by practitioners as difficult (kaṣṭam) and testing (cōṭaṅai) in retrospection. Indeed, to learn Varmam, some practitioners state, it is necessary to test a student's ability and mindset before he or she commences instruction because of the dangerous nature of their art, which not only can heal but also kill. Therefore, apprentices are carefully selected and rigorously tested to ensure their resistance to aggressiveness. Only if deemed non-aggressive and hence appropriate by an ācāṅ, a student is initiated into the lineage of the practitioner and receives the knowledge of Varmam, both martial and medical.

2.2 Bharatanatyam:

Bharatanatyam is one of the classical dance forms in India. It originated in Tamil Nadu, which has more than 2000 years of history. Bharatanatyam was initially known as Sadhir attam, Dasi attam, and Koothuchinna Melam. Evidenced by Silapathikaram is one of the five great epics of Purana kappiyam (Tamil literature) during sangam period. Tholkappiar wrote Tholkappiam on 5th C.BC. Tholkappiam explained fundamental dance expressions. Great Tamizh epics like Pattupattu and Ettuthogai, Koothanool, Silapathikaram, Tholkapiyam and Panchamarabu provides evidence for the dance, the text Natyasastra written by sage Bharata. Dance grammar texts have been made in Tamizh even before Bharata Sastra. Natyasastra has 36 chapters. The first chapter of Natyasastra narrates the origin of Dance, and mentions that the art came from Hindu god Brahma, taking the essence from the four Vedas_ and creating the fifth veda called Natyaveda. According to the temple worship Agamas rule Nattiyam and Isai lead a vital role in daily pooja in the Hindu temples. Devaradiyar were at the temples who dedicated themselves to the god and lived in temples and they performed in the temple.

Devadasi was well treated and respected in the reign of Chola, Chera, and Pandyas. Rajaraja Chola 1 (985-1014 C.E.) was said to transferred dancing girl from 91 Temples located in 15 different places evident by inscription that 400 dancers along with their gurus and pakkavadhyam (orchestra) were maintained by Brihadeeswarar temple Tanjavur.

At present, students who learn Bharatanatyam are initiated by learning Adavus. The word comes from Adavu which means to reach. Going from one place to another; to reach another place_ is termed as adaithal in Tamizh. Tanjavur brothers namely Chinnayya, Ponnaiyya, Vaivelu, and Shivanandam lived during the 19th century and contributed to developing the Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music. The family of the Tanjavur quartet worked at the royal court of Tanjavur during the Nayaka period and later the Maratha period. Tanjore brothers formulated the Adavus for Bharatanatyam. Also, they formed the structure of Bharatanatyam Margam in particular order. And it is passed from generation to generation with pride. Bharatanatyam taught such methods in both theoretical and practical ways. Dancers used to do warm-up and cooldown exercises before and after the dance practice. Bhava (expression) helps to understand the meaning of a particular dance performance.

3. VARMAKALAI FOR BHARATANATYAM PRACTITIONERS

Bharatanatyam has many adavus, and every adavu has different postures. Dancers used to get injuries often, like sprains, strains, fractures, hip impingement, patellofemoral tendonitis (knee injuries), trigger toe (ankle and foot injuries) slipping or twisting their legs, neck strain, shoulder impingement, falling while dancing, or having body pain. How can they treat themselves? Or with the help of someone? The varma practitioners state that certain kinds of injuries can be treated by stimulating the 108 varma points in the human body. While applying Varma techniques, the varmakalai Asans (Practitioners) follow a specific time duration for the therapy, followed in Nazhikai. A nazhikai is time used in astrology. 1 nazhikai = 24 minutes. 2.5 nazhikai = 1 hour. 1 Nazhikai = 60 vinazhikai.

3.1 Stimulating Varma Points

The Human body has 108 vital points

Part of the human body	Varma point
1) From head to neck	25
2) From head to neck	45
3) From neck to arm	9
4) Arm	14
5) Foot	15
Total	108

Therapeutically the Varmam points are stimulated gently with the fingers. Each varma has a different stimulating and relieving method. The pressure varies from $\frac{1}{4}$ unit, $\frac{1}{2}$ unit, $\frac{3}{4}$ unit to 1 unit (one mathirai is 4 akshara. One unit is one mathirai). Concerning the nature of the illness, and the Body Mass Index of the patient, the application may be of pressing, pacing, lifting, braiding, even and gentle clockwise or anticlockwise rotation, pinching, slipping pinch, tapping, and gentle stroking. The known benefits of activating/stimulating a few Varma vital points are elucidated as follows: -

Asaivu Varmam

ஊமாற்றியதோர் அசைவு வர்மம் குணமேதெனில் வந்ததொரு புசம் விழும் களைப்புண்டாகும் வீற்றியதோர் விதனமுண்டாம் வீக்கங்காணும் வீறாக இரண்டு கைக்கும் குணமிதாமே.ஃ

-Varma bheerangi

பிரமான அசைவுவாம குணமேதென்றால் பிலத்ததொரு புயம் ரண்டும் களைப்புண்டாகும் நிரமான வீக்கமொடு விசனமுண்டாம் நேரான கண்டத்திலும் குணமொன்றாகும் திரமான அடங்கல் முறை செப்பக்கேளு திடம்பெறவே தான் தடவி வலித்திழுத்து பிரமான கையதனை நெட்டி வாங்கி பிலத்த கைக்குழி தன்னில் இளக்கிப் பாடு

- Varma Kannadi

Location: At the area where the scapula bone joins with the humerus and helps in the movement of the bone.

Traumatology: dislocation of the shoulder joint, weakness of the limbs, pain and swelling, shivering of hands, and fever with chills.

Relieving method: Bring both hands of the patient from the top of the head onto the back, keeping one of his palms on the other. Hold both hands, run the palm of the other hand across the scapula bone from top to bottom, and give a gentle lift at the bottom edge of the scapula bone.

Stimulation: Use the thumb at the varmam location and make a left-to-right movement.

Therapeutic benefit: recover the pain in the scapula bone, able to lift the hands, we can move our hands behind the body or to the extremities.

Mudakku Varmam

கள்ளவே முடக்கு வர்மம் வீக்கமுண்டாம் களைப்பிளகி கைகள் தரித்துக்குத்து தள்ளவே தைலமது போட்டு நன்றாய் தடவியுடன் இளக்கிவிடு சாத்தியமாமே

- Varma Bheerangi

போட்டிடவே மண்டலம் நீ செய்தாயானால் பூண்டநோய் தீரும் என்று ஆட்டிடவே முடக்கு வர்மம் கொண்டுதானால் அடவாக வீக்கமொடு களைப்புமாகி வாட்டிடவே கையாலும் தரிப்பு குத்தாம் வளமான தைலமதை இட்டு நன்றாய் மூட்டிடவே தடவித்தான் இறக்கி விட்டால் முறையாக தீருமென்று உரைத்தவாரே.

- Varma Kannaadi

Location: the prominent bone protrusion behind the elbow joint where the forearm bends

Traumatology: radiating pain across the nerves. Swelling of the hands and fatigue.

Relieving method: apply oil and relax the hands in the top to bottom direction.

Stimulation: using the thumb gently press towards the elbow joints.

Therapeutic benefits: helps to cure knee pain and vaatha disorders and is useful in forearm swelling.

Kaal Vellai Varmam

“நாளான கால் வெள்ளை வர்மம் கொண்டால் நரம்பு வலி இடுப்பு வலி மண்டைக்குத்து பாழான தேகமது நிமிரொட்டாது பாதமது களைப்புளைவு பனிக்கும் தேகம்”

- Varma Bheerangi

“கேள்பா பாதமதில் ஏகும் வர்மம் கெடியாக பெயர் தலமும் குணமும் சொல்வோம் நாளப்பா கால்வெள்ளை வர்மம் கொண்டால் நரம்பு தெற்று வலி இடுப்பு வலியுமாகும் வாளப்பா பாதமதில் களைப்பு உளைச்சல் வளமான தேகமது பனிக்கும் பாரு கேள்பா சரீரமது நிமிரொட்டாமல் குணமில்லா நோய்பலதும் முடுகும் தானே.”

- Varma Kannaadi

- **Location:** corner of the anterior side of the foot.
- **Traumatology:** inability to walk due to foot dilation, neuralgic pain, pain in the hip, pricking sensation in the head, inability to straighten the body, pain in the foot, stiffness in the leg, fever, unconsciousness, stinging pain in the nerve with internal numbness.
- **Relieving method:** stimulate the Uchi varmam by tapping thrice. Apply the leg-relieving method. Stimulate the dip in the anterior of the two prominent bones on the sides of the ankle joint and the posterior tip of the heel. Give an immediate push using the right toe on the center of the right palm.
- **Stimulation:** punch on the varma point with a closed fist from a 6-finger breadth. (Finger breadth _ is the combined breadth formed by 4 fingers = 4 Fb. which is an index, middle, ring, and little. the average of outside and inside combined breadths divided by four is =1 FB

3.2 Possible injuries when practicing the Bharatanatyam Adavus.

While practicing or performing the Bharatanatyam dancers used to get knee injuries, ligament fractures, sprains in different parts, foot pain, ankle twists, shoulder pain, etc. few are - Doing basic adavu i.e., *Tattadavu* can hurt your knee if you're not sitting in proper *Araimandi* and not maintaining the correct position. While doing the *Nattadavu* keeping hands in the *Natyarambham* position, especially in third speed there is a chance to hurt or get pain, sprain, or even muscle twist in the hands or elbow, if there is improper positioning. Similarly, while performing *Kuthithu Mettadavu*, and *Veechal Adavus* there are possibilities of getting a foot sprain or even a fracture. *Mandi Adavu* may lead to injuries in the knees. While doing *Sarikkal Adavu* there is a chance of falling or slipping on the floor, and sometimes the performer may get a sprain in the leg and hip. *Karthari Adavu* may hurt leg finger. While doing *Theermana Adavu* performing *kita thaka tharikita thom* (*sollkattu*) one can get shoulder pain, swelling, hip twist, and neck pain/ strain.

3.3. Varmakalai for Bhartanatyam Practitioners.

Though there is no verifiable evidences available so far to establish the historical connection between Varmakalai and Bharatanatyam, but both were co-existent and the practitioners of both art forms might have had shared their skills and knowledge. Non-invasive techniques of the Varmakalai might have helped the dancers in diagnosing and relieving from their illness. The current exploration opens the door for further scientific studies in application of Varma techniques in treating the injuries and fatigue occurs during performing / practicing Bharatanatyam.

4. CONCLUSION

During this study, it was observed that there are remedies available in Varma medicine for various kinds of injuries to muscles, ligaments, bone fractures etc., and there are many probabilities among dancers to get injured while performing and practicing Bharatanatyam. Varmakalai seems to be beneficial for dancers in relieving their ailments. However, in order to apply the Varma techniques on dancers, a detailed scientific study is required.

References

- 1) History of Tamizh's Dance – Author Dr. S Raghuraman
- 2) P. Subashini, Bharatanatyam A Divine Dance
- 3) Tanjavur through the Ages, the hindu.com, 15th March 2019
- 4) Varmam – an insight into the ancient system of Healing, Author S Ramesh Babu and Veni B Iyer.
- 5) Common dance injuries: causes and prevention- by ReLiva physiotherapy and Rehab

