Hope you have heard about the Siddha system in India!

“Andathil Ullathe Pindam

Pindathilullathe andam.”

These are some padals by Chattaimuni in Chattaimuni Gnana Vilakkam about the connection between the physical body and the cosmos.

Like Chattaimuni or Koothambai, the 18 Siddhars have sung about the intimate connection or equivalence of the microCOsm and the macroCOsm, or the super consciousness and the self. There are a lot of interpretations about these padals.

Here I’m trying to connect the idea with metallic perspective. One interesting way to look at this is to consider our own heartbeats. The beating of the heart is a reflection of our breathing process. It is meant to send blood with oxygen throughout the body. Do you know why our heart beat? It tries to pump the blood. If we look more into the molecular level, we will find that the heart is pumping our hemoglobin molecules. The molecular form of blood is Hema B. If we look again into the atomic level of Hema-B molecule, its core is an iron atom or ferrous core. As we know, this iron in the universe has been forged in the explosion of stars and collision of galaxies. So, we have this grand cosmic metal circulating in our body reminding us of our metallic nature with every heartbeat. So the connection of our heart with the cosmos is a metal connection.

The siddha sampradayam was very clear about this.

The Siddha Sampradayam was Shiva Sampradayam earlier. We have Agasthya and the 18 Siddhars as famous group. But there are also other 64 recognized Siddhars, and 9 Navanath Siddhas. They were not merely Rishis or Sanyasis or Spiritual beings. They were also scientists, alchemists, metallurgists, physicians, surgeons, yogis and so on. They created a wealth of knowledge for the society and disseminated it through Paadals or songs.

When we talk about metallurgy and Siddhas, the immediate curiosity is about the alchemy of creating gold. Everyone asks, can we create gold?

Like in the rest of the world, there was tremendous research and attempts to make gold. There is an interesting story about Karuvurar Siddhar, the architect of the great Tanjavur Brihadeshwara temple.

A king had asked his team of goldsmiths to create a Nataraja idol at Chidambaram based on a vision he had under water. He wanted it to be made in 41 days. Craftsmen thought it was going to be a simple task. He gave them pure gold to do it. For 40 days they struggled, but the mould never settled and idol couldn’t be completed. On the 40th day, Karuvurar Siddhar, the disciple of Bhogar came to the Kingdom. Hearing about the struggle, he asked them to step outside and wait for an hour. After one hour, he presented the completed idol to them. They were stunned. King arrived at dawn of the 41st day and saw the idol. He was happy, but he wanted to test the purity of the gold. Finding that there was some copper added, he arrested Karuvurar and puts him in jail. Then Bhogar and other Siddhar appeared and told the king about the mistake of arrest. They convince him about the mystical powers of Karuvurar. When the king goes to the prison, he cannot see Karuvurar who has made himself invisible. Convinced of the holiness of the Siddhar, king apologised. Karuvurar then told the king that gold was of no interest to him. To demonstrate, he asked them to bring silver. With one pinch of special Sindhooram, he converted the molten silver into pure gold. This story demonstrates the need for alloying gold as well as the mystical interest in transmutation of metals to gold. Now with all the technology advances today, we can indeed convert through nuclear processes with neutron smashing. Only that it is not a financially viable way to make gold.

One of the prominent Siddhars is Pambatti Siddhar. He sings,

“Uttakuruthi Uyir Marunkam

Unmaikuzalum uraitha chempu.”

Iron is the basic composition of blood, and copper for hair. Is there something missing in this sentence?

This clearly describes the identification of metals within the human body. These are found in salt form. The imbalance of metals was identified as the cause of many diseases. So the treatment was to rebalance. And that had to be done through consumable forms of the metals. This was the major research Siddhas undertook.

How can iron be converted to digestible format to treat blood related issues? Even today we have iron supplements. They created medicines with metals in a much-purified form.

The Siddhas are supposed to possess the Ashtama Siddhis like Anima, Garima, Prapthi, Prakashyam, etc.

It is wrong to interpret these as physical powers, such as the transformation of the body into minuteness or huge size, or from huge size to small size, as we had seen Hanuman becoming big and small in the serials. It is better to look at these as mental abilities to investigate across different scales of our world. They could study the tiny nano scales as well as local cosmic scale.

I have personal experience producing mercury at home from Chayilyam and other drugs through special preparations using large pots and a systematic process. This is called 'balarasam.' It is subsequently used in various medicines after processing and preservation, such as Siddhamakaradwajam. Commonly used metals were gold, silver, mercury, iron and zinc.

A medicine based on metal is readied through a four stage process. First there is the raw material. From it we derive the basic principle, then there is purification and final medical preparation.

The raw material can be of plant origin called moolika vakupu. There are 11 subdivisions of moolikas based on the part of the plant that is used like root, bark, flower, etc.

Tattu vakupu are metal based. There are 220 varieties based on 11 metals. Metals are referred to as 'loham' or 'ulogam.' Kara-rasams are salts, and 'patanam' refers to metal salts. There are 120 types of 'uparasams.

Using the metals they used to make Chendooras, Parpams, Choornam and Mezhuku. In Siddha medicine, the process involves Neettu, Vaattu and Kettu. Neettu is ash production or sublimation. Vaattu is distillation. Kettu is transforming it to target form. Longer shelf life and easier absorption by the body were the main criteria.

Rasamani is solidified mercury in normal temperature and said to have healing mystical powers. It’s always a wonder that in the siddha treatment system the siddhas travelled extensively to get pure mercury from different sources.

There is an interesting story about Siddhar Bogar traveling to Rome or Romarajya, and bringing back mercury from there. It was supposed to be very effective so was guarded by demons. He waits for the change of guards and steals the mercury but gets caught. He convinces them of the mystical powers by stopping the waves. Seeing this, they let him go.

Animal origins are called Seevam vakupu like Puli nakham, porcupine thorns, hen, goat, etc.

Aluminum was known long back. It was called Thuvarimannu in the sulphate form. Charaka and Susrutha Samhita used gold, silver, mercury, iron, copper, lead and tin. Mercury was called parada. They were also particular about which metals to use for making different surgical instruments. Charaka specifies Jihvaneer lekhana yantram to be made of gold. Nabhikartana yantra was to cut the umbilical cord. Similarly Vasti pots and eye treatment had specified metals. So it was deep and rich research into these metals.

Some of the recent controversies are about the metal consumption, kidney issues, poisoning effect, etc. We have to keep in mind that couple of centuries back this was the only treatment system in Tamil Nadu. The entire population would have disappeared if it had such a bad effect. The minute quantities that were used become significant. It is not just about administering the metal blindly.

In Kalari, we have a saying “Amrita Nila Arindhavane Aashanavu” which means only those can understand the physical changes in an individual’s vital capacity based on moon’s cycles can become a real expert. So our treatment systems were highly individualized and customized. The medicines were not meant to be standardized, mass-produced and put on shelves of medical stores for use of anyone. Understanding the patient was crucial, so when that gets compromised, the treatment can backfire.

The Siddhar paadals offer tremendous potential for further research into these hidden and forgotten knowledge systems. At the IKS Center for Kalaripayatt and Siddhar tradition, we have begun humble attempts to find out more from this vast ocean of knowledge that Siddhars created and left for us.