



Thandaga Vatham (Lumbar spondylosis) in Siddha medicine: integrative review on Ulogothama Chendhuram and Arrgasheeradhi Thailam

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Abstract

Lumbar spondylosis, a degenerative spinal disorder, is one of the leading causes of chronic low back pain globally, significantly impairing quality of life and work productivity. In Siddha medicine, this condition is described as *Thandaga Vatham*, one among the 80 *Vatha* diseases, characterized by pain, stiffness, neurological manifestations, and restricted mobility. Conventional modern treatments often provide symptomatic relief but are associated with recurrence and adverse effects. Siddha formulations such as *Ulogothama Chendhuram* (internal medicine) and *Arrgasheeradhi Thailam* administered via *Puravalayam* (external therapy) have been traditionally used for their anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and restorative properties. Recent pharmacological evidence supports their bioactive potential. This review integrates classical Siddha perspectives with contemporary biomedical understanding of lumbar spondylosis, emphasizing the therapeutic relevance of these formulations. It also discusses future research directions in standardization, safety validation, and integrative management to establish evidence-based practices for sustainable and holistic care.

Keywords: Thandaga Vatham, Lumbar spondylosis, Siddha medicine, Ulogothama Chendhuram, Arrgasheeradhi Thailam.

Introduction

Low back pain (LBP) is one of the most prevalent musculoskeletal disorders and a major cause of disability worldwide. It is estimated that over 80% of adults experience at least one episode of back pain during their lifetime (Hartvigsen et al., 2018). Among its etiologies, lumbar spondylosis a degenerative condition of the vertebral column is a frequent cause of chronic pain, neurological complications, and functional disability (Kreiner et al., 2020).

In the Siddha system, lumbar spondylosis is identified as *Thandaga Vatham*, one of the 80 types of *Vatha* diseases described by Siddhars (Shanmugavelu, 2017). Siddha medicine, one of the oldest traditional systems of India, attributes disease causation to imbalance of the three vital humors—*Vatham*, *Pitham*, and *Kabam* (Thiyagarajan, 2019). *Vatham*, associated with movement and nerve functions, when deranged, manifests as pain, stiffness, restricted mobility, and systemic disturbances.

Classical texts such as *Yugi Vaithiya Chinthamani* and *Agasthiyar Vaithiya Kaaviyam* describe *Thandaga Vatham* as presenting with pain radiating from the lower back, numbness, sweating, constipation, and difficulty in walking (Sambasivam Pillai, 1998). Aggravating factors include excessive exertion, faulty dietary habits, day sleep, improper yogic practices, and exposure to adverse climatic conditions. This description bears close resemblance to modern lumbar spondylosis, which involves disc degeneration, osteophyte formation, and nerve compression.

Management in Siddha focuses on balancing aggravated *Vatham* through internal medicines, external therapies, dietary regulation, and lifestyle modification. Internal remedies include herbo-mineral preparations such as *Chendhuram*, *Parpam*, and *Kuzhambu*, while external therapies involve *Thailam*, *Pattu*, *Podi*, and specialized methods like *Puravalayam* (oil pooling). Among these, *Ulogothama Chendhuram* and *Arrgasheeradhi Thailam* are documented for efficacy in *Vatha* disorders, particularly *Thandaga Vatham* (Thiyagarajan, 2019; Shanmugavelu, 2017).

Recent Siddha research emphasizes standardization of drug preparation, pharmacological validation, and clinical studies to support safety and efficacy. Studies on *Ulogothama Chendhuram* have highlighted its anti-inflammatory and analgesic potential when properly purified and administered (Kumar et al., 2021). Similarly, *Arrgasheeradhi Thailam*, enriched with botanicals like *Curcuma longa*, *Piper nigrum*, and *Calotropis gigantea*, has been reported to improve mobility and reduce pain when applied through *Puravalayam* (Subramanian et al., 2020).

Given the global burden of lumbar spondylosis and limitations of modern pharmacotherapy, Siddha approaches offer valuable integrative possibilities. This review consolidates Siddha literature, discusses drug preparation, pharmacological insights, and therapeutic practices for *Thandaga Vatham*, highlighting the role of *Ulogothama Chendhuram* and *Arrgasheeradhi Thailam* in holistic care.

Siddha concept of Thandaga vatham

In Siddha medicine, health is maintained through the balance of the three vital humors (*Mukutram*): *Vatham*, *Pitham*, and *Kabam*. Among them, *Vatham* is regarded as the prime force that governs all physiological movements, nerve conduction,

respiration, circulation, and excretion. Derangement of *Vatham* leads to a group of 80 disorders collectively known as *Vatha Noi* (*Vatha Rogangal*). *Thandaga Vatham* is one among these, specifically affecting the lower back and spinal region (Shanmugavelu, 2017).

Classical Siddha texts describe *Thandaga Vatham* with distinct signs and symptoms. In *Yugi Vaidhya Chinthamani*, it is mentioned:

**“தண்டக வாதம் தோன்றின் தாழ்வரை
முதுகெலும்பு
வண்டலின் போல் வலியுறும்
வாதமுனி கூறினான்”**

(*Yugi Vaidhya Chinthamani*, Verse 869)

This verse indicates that when *Thandaga Vatham* manifests, pain arises in the lower spinal region, resembling the intensity of a cartwheel rolling over the back.

Similarly, *Agasthiyar Vaidhya Kaaviyam* elaborates:

**“முதுகு வலியும், நடைக்கடுமையும்,
காலில் சுளுக்கமும், சிறுநீரின்
குறையும்,
பிடிப்பு வலியும் புணர்ச்சியின்மை,
இவைதான் தண்டக வாதத்தின்
இயல்பு”**

(*Agasthiyar Vaidhya Kaaviyam*, 1500)

This highlights key symptoms: severe backache, difficulty in walking, stiffness of lower limbs, urinary disturbances, and loss of sexual vigor. These closely resemble the clinical features of lumbar spondylosis described in modern medicine, such as pain, stiffness, nerve compression, and neurological deficits.

In *Theraiyar Vaidhya Kaaviyam*, the role of dietary and lifestyle factors in aggravating *Thandaga Vatham* is emphasized:

**“அரிசி மிக உண்டு, அமிலம் கூடி,
பழுப்பு கருவாடு, படுக்கை துயிலும்,
வலிப்பு தோன்றும் வாதம் பிறக்கும்”**

(*Theraiyar Vaidhya Kaaviyam*, 1250)

Excessive intake of rice, sour foods, and dried fish, combined with irregular sleep postures, is believed in Siddha medicine to aggravate Vatham, thereby contributing to the development of spinal disorders. From a Siddha pathophysiological perspective, the deranged Vatham tends to accumulate in the Thanda Kaal, or lumbar region, which obstructs normal nerve conduction and musculoskeletal functions. This imbalance manifests clinically in multiple ways. Patients often experience back pain that may be dull, radiating, or throbbing in nature. They also face restricted mobility, making bending, walking, or performing routine movements difficult. Neurological features such as tingling sensations, numbness, and weakness are commonly observed, reflecting the impact on nerve pathways. Additionally, systemic disturbances including constipation, urinary changes, and generalized fatigue may occur, indicating that the disorder affects both local spinal structures and overall physiological balance.

Shanmugavelu (2017), in *Siddha Maruthuvam Sirappu*, emphasizes that improper dietary habits (Anubana Seivithal), over-exertion (Adhiga Uzhaippu), exposure to cold (Kulir Katru), and faulty yoga practices are key factors that aggravate Vatham. These traditional aggravating factors closely resonate with modern risk factors for lumbar spondylosis, such as obesity, poor posture, occupational strain, and a sedentary lifestyle. The Siddha therapeutic approach focuses on correcting the deranged Vatha kutram through a multi-pronged strategy. Internal medicines, including Ulogothama Chendhuram, Parpam, and Kuzhambu, are used to pacify the imbalanced Vatham and restore systemic equilibrium. External therapies, such as Arrgasheeradhi Thailam application, Puravalayam, and Podi Thimirthal, aim to relieve pain and improve mobility.

In addition, Pathiyam, or dietary and regimen regulation, involves restricting sour, cold, and heavy foods while promoting balanced, easily digestible diets to maintain humoral harmony. Complementing these interventions, yoga and lifestyle modifications help preserve spinal flexibility and overall musculoskeletal health. Together, these approaches illustrate the holistic Siddha conceptualization of Thandaga Vatham, which aligns closely with modern understandings of lumbar spondylosis while emphasizing preventive care and lifestyle-based management strategies.

Modern understanding of *Thandaga vatham*

Thandaga Vatham, corresponding to lumbar spondylosis in modern medicine, refers to age-related degenerative changes in the lumbar spine, involving intervertebral discs, ligaments, and facet joints (Kreiner et al., 2020). The degenerative process typically begins with desiccation of the intervertebral discs, resulting in decreased disc height, disc bulging, and formation of osteophytes. These structural changes can narrow the neural foramina, compress nerve roots, and lead to radiculopathy, contributing to pain and functional limitations. Several risk factors accelerate these degenerative changes. Aging is a primary factor, with prevalence increasing significantly after the age of 40 (Morris et al., 2020).

Genetic predisposition also plays a role, as family history can increase susceptibility. Lifestyle-related factors, such as sedentary behavior, obesity, and occupational strain, further contribute to spinal degeneration, while repetitive mechanical stress or trauma can exacerbate the condition. Clinically, patients often present with chronic low back pain, morning stiffness, numbness, tingling sensations, and restricted mobility. In advanced stages, complications may arise, including spinal stenosis and disc prolapse. Diagnosis is primarily based on clinical evaluation and is supported by imaging techniques such as radiography, MRI, and CT scans. Conventional management typically involves NSAIDs, physiotherapy, and, in severe cases, surgical decompression; however, these approaches have limitations, including recurrence, high treatment costs, and potential long-term complications (Chen et al., 2022).

Ulogothama Chendhuram: internal Siddha medicine

Ulogothama Chendhuram is a traditional herbo-mineral preparation composed of purified arsenic, mercury derivatives, sulphur, and iron. Siddha texts recommend its use for Vatha diseases, chronic ulcers, and various systemic disorders (Shanmugavelu, 2017). Pharmacologically, Ulogothama Chendhuram exhibits multiple therapeutic actions. Its mineral components, particularly sulphur and mercury derivatives, possess anti-inflammatory properties by modulating inflammatory pathways, while the formulation also provides analgesic effects, making it suitable for managing chronic musculoskeletal pain and Vatha disorders. The iron content contributes to

hematopoietic activity, enhancing blood quality, vitality, and overall systemic strength. Additionally, the preparation demonstrates antimicrobial properties, offering systemic protection against infections.

Regarding safety, the toxic metals present in Ulogothama Chendhuram undergo classical purification processes (suddhi) using herbal and natural media, which detoxify the components and ensure therapeutic safety for clinical use (Thiyagarajan, 2019).

Preliminary pharmacological studies suggest dose-dependent anti-inflammatory and analgesic effects of formulations containing arsenic sulphides and mercury derivatives (Kumar et al., 2021). However, systematic clinical validation remains limited.

Arrgasheeradhi thailam and puravalayam therapy

Arrgasheeradhi Thailam is a polyherbal oil prepared using goat's milk, sesame oil, *Curcuma longa*, *Piper nigrum*, *Calotropis gigantea*, and other botanicals. It is traditionally applied through Puravalayam, or oil pooling therapy, in which warm medicated oil is retained over the lumbar region using a dough dam. This technique is analogous to Kati Vasti in Ayurveda and is specifically designed to target lumbar discomfort and musculoskeletal disorders (Shanmugavelu, 2017). Therapeutically, Arrgasheeradhi Thailam works through multiple mechanisms. The heat and bioactive compounds penetrate the tissues, reducing muscular stiffness and pain. It enhances local circulation and tissue nutrition, promotes joint flexibility, and improves overall functional mobility. Additionally, the oil exerts localized anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, supporting tissue repair and mitigating degenerative changes.

Pharmacological studies of its ingredients highlight their individual contributions. *Curcuma longa* possesses anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and cartilage-protective properties (Gupta et al., 2021), while *Piper nigrum* enhances the bioavailability of active compounds and provides analgesic effects. Goat's milk has antimicrobial, immunomodulatory, and anti-inflammatory actions (Yadav et al., 2022), and *Calotropis gigantea* contains analgesic and anti-inflammatory phytoconstituents. Clinically, Puravalayam therapy with Arrgasheeradhi Thailam has been reported to improve mobility, reduce pain, and enhance quality of life in patients with lumbar

disorders, although systematic randomized controlled trials are still lacking to fully validate its efficacy.

Integrative perspectives

Siddha therapies for lumbar spondylosis provide a unique integrative approach by targeting not only symptomatic relief but also systemic restoration and humoral balance. Formulations such as Ulogothama Chendhuram and Arrgasheeradhi Thailam have traditionally been used for Vatha disorders, and their therapeutic potential lies in their multi-faceted mechanisms. Ulogothama Chendhuram, as an internal herbo-mineral medicine, modulates inflammatory pathways, enhances musculoskeletal strength, and improves systemic vitality. Arrgasheeradhi Thailam, when applied externally via Puravalayam, delivers bioactive compounds directly to the affected lumbar region, reducing muscular stiffness, improving circulation, and alleviating localized pain.

The combination of these internal and external therapies exemplifies a synergistic approach: while Ulogothama Chendhuram addresses systemic imbalances and promotes overall health, Arrgasheeradhi Thailam provides targeted local therapy, improving mobility and quality of life. Integrating these Siddha therapies into conventional care pathways may reduce dependence on long-term NSAIDs and surgical interventions, which are often associated with adverse effects, high costs, and recurrence.

Future research priorities:

Future research on Thandaga Vatham should prioritize rigorous scientific evaluation of Siddha therapies to establish evidence-based practices. Conducting randomized controlled trials is essential to assess the efficacy and safety of formulations such as Ulogothama Chendhuram and Arrgasheeradhi Thailam, while standardized preparation methods following Good Manufacturing Practices will ensure consistency and quality. Comprehensive toxicological studies are needed to evaluate the long-term safety of herbo-mineral medicines. Additionally, integrative models that combine Siddha interventions with physiotherapy and yoga could provide holistic management approaches, and biomarker studies may help elucidate the underlying molecular mechanisms of these treatments. Collectively, these efforts will support the development of safe, effective, and globally acceptable integrative strategies for managing lumbar spondylosis.

Conclusion

Thandaga Vatham (Lumbar spondylosis) remains a global health challenge, significantly impacting quality of life. In Siddha medicine, it is described as *Thandaga Vatham* and managed through internal and external remedies that restore humoral balance. *Ulogothama Chendhuram* and *Arrgasheeradhi Thailam* with *Puravalayam* therapy demonstrate promising analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and restorative effects, supported by pharmacological evidence. While modern treatments provide temporary relief, integrative approaches may offer long-term, holistic benefits. Rigorous scientific validation, clinical trials, and standardization are essential to ensure safety and global acceptance. Bridging Siddha wisdom with modern biomedical insights provides a sustainable pathway for effective management of *Thandaga Vatham*.

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