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The term dermatoglyphics is derived from the Greek word 'derma' - skin and 'glyphe' - curve. It is the study of epidermal ridges and their configurations and its application to diagnosis. The word dermatoglyphics was first proposed by Cummins and Midlo (1926), the word is literally descriptive of the delicately sculptured skin surface, inclusive of single ridges and their configurational arrangements. Strictly defined, dermatoglyphics does not include the study of creases, wrinkles and cracks beloved of palmists, although these features have subsidiary significance in relation to some dermatoglyphic problems.

Being differentiated in their final form early during the gestation period, these dermal configurations seldom change (except in size), either in structural detail or ridge alignment for the rest of the intrauterine life and thenceforth from birth till death. They, thus enjoy freedom from environmental influences in later part of intrauterine life. However, they mainly serve as sensitive indicators or may be a reflection of subtle changes in early phase of evolution of the foetus.

There is now ample evidence at hand to show that some characteristics of dermatoglyphics are inherited. The closest possible genetic relationship is that of monozygotic twins. In their dermatoglyphics a high degree
of similarity is noticed. There is, on the other hand, a progressive reduction in degree of similarity in comparison involving lessening relationship. There are differential trends exhibited by these dermal configurations among different individuals, races, constitutional types and between two sexes.

New techniques for detection and diagnosis of diseases are developing at an astonishing rate in present day medicine. Many of these techniques involve highly specialized laboratory procedures with which the clinician has not direct involvement. The development of human cytogenetics since 1960 is an apt example. Concomitant with the existing new findings in cytogenetics there has been a less dramatic awareness of the clinical significance of dermatoglyphics. The study of dermatoglyphics, although amenable to quantitative statistical analysis is, in the first instance, a logical extension of routine physical examinations that is, it falls within the province of the practising pediatricians.

Palm prints and finger prints have long had a fascination for man. The study of dermal ridge patterns of the skin pioneered by Galton (1892) followed by Cummins (1936) has aroused considerable interest since the introduction of chromosome techniques. With markedly developed human cytogenetics and the discovery of chromosomal abnormalities in man, the application of dermatoglyphics...
glyphics to clinical medicine has proved helpful. When combined with other clinical features of the particular diseases dermatoglyphics can serve to strengthen the diagnostic impression and may be useful as a screening device to select individuals for additional diagnostic studies. It has become well established as an aid in the diagnosis of chromosomal and genetic disorders. However, it is generally accepted that both inherited and environmental factors seem able to cause abnormalities in these skin patterns. Dermatoglyphics as a physical sign deserves more attention by pediatricians than it has been accorded hitherto.

The association of dermatoglyphics and diseases has opened new and vastly interesting diagnostic avenues. It was considered not long back that most useful findings in the study of dermatoglyphics would be in conditions caused by gross chromosomal aberrations. But now it seems reasonable to speculate that abnormal dermatoglyphic findings are associated with a wide spectrum of disease conditions, all of which have in common the fact that the etiologic factors responsible operate in the very early stages of embryogenesis. Dermatoglyphics may serve as marker of a deleterious intrauterine experience during early gestation. Medical dermatoglyphist scrutinizes palm prints for clues to hereditary diseases as it has been observed that definite diagnostic changes are seen in cases
disorders which have genetics basis. Recently interest has also developed in establishing association of certain pattern with any disease where etiology is obscure but genetic basis is postulated. It has been seen that dermatoglyphics have been extensively studies in a variety of conditions and diseases especially of heredo-familial nature. Dermatoglyphics have many advantages:

1. Dermatoglyphic analysis can be applied readily and easily.

2. Results of analysis are available immediately as a clinical diagnostic tool.

3. Expensive and elaborate pieces of equipments are not required.

4. The procedure is atraumatic.

Bronchial asthma contributes to a leading cause of morbidity in children. Bronchial asthma may be regarded as a diffuse obstructive lung disease with (1) hyperactivity of airways to a variety of stimuli and (2) a high degree of reversibility of the obstructive process, which may occur either spontaneously or as a result of treatment. Hereditary predisposition may be a major factor responsible for the concentration of bronchial asthma in some families. An accurate diagnostic prediction of this predisposition by dermatoglyphics may be of great value.

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The central question here is whether a person afflicted with a disease is distinguished from a non diseased by characteristics of dermatoglyphics. If such a distinction should exist, they are of utmost in the analysis of constitution of disease because they demonstrate that susceptibility to the disease, like to distinction in dermatoglyphics, with which it is correlated, is inborn. Obviously for diagnostic aspect of such diseases, those which has their origin early in foetal life and have resulted in a deviation of normal dermatoglyphic findings are of significance. Besides, the genetic and heredo-familial diseases, diseases of acquired origin, like Rubella Syndrome, where the virus of non genetic origin has exerted its deleterious effect on the embryo early in foetal life when dermal configurations were being differentiated are also of equal significance.

In the light of the past attractive scientific work, and presently continued exploring efforts by numerous investigators all over the world to project the dermatoglyphics as a clinical diagnostic tool for a routine physical examination of pediatric patients of, heredofamilial and acquired disorders, it is being endeavoured,, may be a drop in the ocean, to enter the field of patterned traceries.