

MEDICINAL PLANTS USED BY THE MALAYALI TRIBE OF SERVARAYAN HILLS, YERCAD, SALEM DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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The Servarayan hill range (11°48'N & 78°11'E) located near Yercad of Salem district in Tamil Nadu rise to an altitude ranging from 1200-1500m. The maximum temperature ranges between 25°C and 30°C and minimum between 13°C and 16°C. The average annual rainfall is around 1750mm. The soil is deep and non-calcareous. The topmost hill area is characterised by clay loamy soil whereas the bottom of the valley is distinguished by alluvial and clay loam soil. The forest types range from evergreen to moist deciduous (Champion & Seth, 1968). On the western side of the hills, contrast sholas still exist, though a great portion of the plateau is cleared.

Ethnic studies conducted by several ethno-botanists have been published earlier (Jain, 1991; Maheswari, 2003). The tribals belonging to the minor communities are socially, economically and among the least advanced. But they harbour a lot of knowledge on medicinal plants. The vanishing forest has had a cascading effect on the tribal population that dwindles rapidly and along with this the knowledge they hold.

Malayali (lit. *malai* = hill, *alu* = person) is one of the 36 scheduled tribes of Tamil Nadu and the population of Malayali tribe forms around 54% of the total scheduled tribe population of Tamil Nadu. The Malayali tribe is spread along the contiguous hill ranges of Javadhu, Kolli, Yercad, Pacha malai and so on. In fact there are several contiguous habitations in these hill ranges, which are predominantly inhabited by the Malayali. They basically depend on agricultural and forest resources for their survival (Jayasree, 2002).

The information gathered is based on a plant exploration work conducted at the Servarayan hills. Mr. Jayaraman, a Malayali tribal and folk practitioner showed and explained the medicinal uses of the plants. Each plant was botanically identified at the spot itself and representative samples were collected as voucher specimens. They were compared with the specimens housed at Calicut University Herbarium (CALI), Calicut. The voucher specimens have been deposited in the Herbarium of CMPR, Kottakkal.

Enumeration

In the following enumeration 30 plant species, which are commonly used by the Malayali tribes are dealt with. The species are presented alphabetically according to their

botanical names, followed by the family names, local names, voucher specimen number and details of uses.

Abrus precatorius L. (Fabaceae) 'Gundumani'. Twining herb. 0208. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 5g of ground leaves is taken internally twice a day for five days for prickly heat.

Acalypha indica L. (Euphorbiaceae) 'Kuppaimaeni'. Herb. 0211. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Leaf juice mixed with salt applied externally for scorpion bite.

Achyranthes aspera L. (Amaranthaceae) 'Naayuruvi'. Herb. 0220. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Leaf juice is applied externally for scorpion bite.

Andrographis paniculata (Burm. f.) Wallich ex Nees (Acanthaceae) 'Chiriyangai'. Herb. 0230. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Whole plant juice is applied externally against snakebite.

Arisaema barnesii C. Fischer (Araceae) 'Kaattu-chenai'. Herb. 0209. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Dried tuber of this plant and whole plant paste of *Andrographis paniculata* 'Chiriyangai' in equal quantities applied over the wounds twice a day for snakebite.

Aristolochia bracteolata Lam. (Aristolochiaceae) 'Aaduthinnappalai, Aaduthoda palai'. Spreading Herb. 0222. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 1ml of whole plant juice applied through nose thrice a day for two days for head-ache, cold and fever.

Asparagus racemosus Willd. (Liliaceae) 'Thannervittan kilangu'. Climber. 0228. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Fresh tubers are taken internally for thirst.

Curculigo orchoides Gaertner (Hypoxidaceae) 'Nilappanai'. Herb. 0207. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 10g of dried tuber mixed with one cup of milk is taken internally twice a day for one week against leucorrhoea.

Cycas circinalis L. (Cycadaceae) 'Easanga'. Dioecious tree. 0219. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Dried broken seeds soaked in water overnight and filtered ground seeds mixed with one cup of milk are taken internally for 10 days for leucorrhoea.

Cynodon dactylon (L.) Pers. (Poaceae) 'Arugam pullu'. Herb. 0213. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 10ml of leaf juice mixed with five seeds of *Syzygium cumini* ('Nagamaram') is taken internally once a day for three months for diabetes.

Datura stramonium L. (Solanaceae) 'Simaiyumattai'. Undershrub. 0206. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 2ml of leaf juice is taken internally once a day for two days for dysentery.

Dioscorea oppositifolia L. (Dioscoreaceae) 'Vallikilangu'. Climber. 0221. P.S. Udayan *et al.* The cooked tuber of the plant is taken internally for increasing the body vigour.

Eclipta prostrata (L.) L. (Asteraceae) 'Karsalamkkanni'. Herb. 0218. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 10g whole plant paste along with 5g

each leaf paste of *Phyllanthus amarus* ('Keelarnelli') and *Ricinus communis* ('Aamanakku') is taken internally on empty stomach for two weeks for treating jaundice.

***Gloriosa superba* L.** (Colchicaceae) 'Kalappaikkilangu'. Climber. 0205. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Flower juice applied over eyelids against eye infections.

***Grewia tiliifolia* Vahl** (Tiliaceae) 'Unu'. Small Tree. 0223. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 100g of leaf paste is given internally for easy removal of placenta in cows.

***Gymnema sylvestre* (Retz.) R. Br. ex Schulters** (Asclepiadaceae) 'Shirukurinja'. Climber. 0229. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 5ml of leaf decoction mixed with one cup of milk is taken internally once a day for three months against diabetes.

***Heracleum ringens* Wallich ex DC.** (Apiaceae) Herb. 0231. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 10g of dried tuber mixed with 5g of *Centella asiatica* ('Vallarai') paste is taken once a day for one month against ulcer.

***Indigofera cassioides* Rottl. ex DC.** (Fabaceae) 'Narina'. Undershrub. 0204. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 20 ground flowers mixed with one cup goat milk is taken internally once a day for one week for body vigour.

***Lantana camara* L.** (Verbenaceae) 'Unni'. Shrub. 0227. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Leaf juice mixed with lime is applied externally for cuts and wounds.

***Leucas indica* (L.) R. Br. ex Vatke** (Lamiaceae) 'Mosappullu'. Herb. 0217. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Whole plant paste is applied externally for headache.

***Mimosa pudica* L.** (Mimosaceae) 'Thotalvadi'. Herb. 0203. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 10g of whole plant paste is taken internally twice a day for five days against dysentery.

***Naravelia zeylanica* (L.) DC.** (Ranunculaceae) 'Koranda'. Climber. 0212. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Root paste is applied externally for headache and back pain.

***Piper betel* L.** (Piperaceae) 'Vettilai'. Climber. 0224. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Leaf juice is applied externally for scorpion bite.

***Rubia cordifolia* L.** (Rubiaceae) 'Manjiti, Modakettan kodi'. Climber. 0214. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Root paste is applied externally for back pain.

***Solanum americanum* Mill.** (Solanaceae) 'Manathakkali'. Herb. 0202. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 10g of dried fruits mixed with one cup of milk is taken internally on empty stomach for two months for ulcer.

***Solanum viarum* Dunal** (Solanaceae) 'Manja Chunda'. Undershrub. 0226. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Dried charred fruits are applied externally for toothache.

***Syzygium cumini* (L.) Skeels** (Myrtaceae) 'Naaval'. Tree. 0216. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 20g of ground seeds mixed with 20ml of *Momordica charantia* (bitter gourd) juice and 10 ground flowers of *Cassia auriculata* ('Aavaaram') is prepared into a paste and taken internally once a day for three months against diabetes.

***Toddalia asiatica* (L.) Lam.** (Rutaceae) 'Molavarnakodi'. Woody climber. 0225. P.S. Udayan *et al.* 50 g of whole plant paste is given internally to cows twice a day for three days for dysentery.

***Vitex negundo* L.** (Verbenaceae) 'Nochi'. Shrub. 0201. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Stem cuttings are placed below the pillow to get rid of intermittent fever.

***Withania somnifera* (L.) Dunal** (Solanaceae) 'Amukkira'. Shrub. 0215. P.S. Udayan *et al.* Dried leaves and root paste are applied externally for knee and joint pain.

DISCUSSION

There is an urgent need to inventorise and record all the ethnobotanical information among the diverse ethnic communities before such knowledge is completely lost or manipulate, as the tribals hardly understand the intricacies of the so called intellectual property rights and their implications (Rao, 1996).

Traditional information collected can be strategically used for providing health care to the masses. The extensive knowledge existing among the tribals can be tapped for bioprospecting, scientific scrutiny validation and utilisation for posterity. Immediate proper documentation is the only way to save their vast knowledge from being lost for ever.

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