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

P.S. Udayan, Satheesh George, K.V. Tushar and Indira Balachandran

Centre for Medicinal Plants Research (CMPR), Arya Vaidya Sala, Changuvetty, Kottakkal, Malappuram District, Kerala 676503, India
E-mail: psudayan@rediffmail.com; avscmpr@sify.com; avscmpr@yahoo.co.in

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.


*Andrographis paniculata* (Burm. f.) Wallich ex Nees (Acanthaceae) ‘Chiriya nangai’. 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* ‘Chiriya nangai’ in equal quantities applied over the wounds twice a day for snakebite.


*Cicuta daucifolia* L. (Solanaceae) ‘Maathi’. Undershrub. 0213. P.S. Udayan et al. 10ml of leaf juice mixed with five seeds of *Cyperus plicatus* (‘Nagamaram’) is taken internally once a day for three months for diabetes.

*Cypris coccinea* L. (Cactaceae) ‘Simaiyumattai’. Clumper. 0225. P.S. Udayan et al. 2ml of leaf juice is taken internally once a day for three months for diabetes.

*Dioscorea oppositifolia* L. (Dioscoreaceae) ‘Vallikilangu’. Clumper. 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) ‘Karsalamikkanni’. Herb. 0218. P.S. Udayan et al. 10g whole plant paste along with 5g...
each leaf paste of Phyllanthus amarus (‘Keelarnelli’) and Ricinus communis (‘Aamanakkku’) is taken internally on empty stomach for two weeks for treating jaundice.


Grewia tilifolia 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.


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.


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.


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) ‘Molavannakodi’. Woody climber. 0225. P.S. Udayan et al. 50g of whole plant paste is given internally to cows twice a day for three days for dysentery.

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


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.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors are thankful to the authorities of Arya Vaidya Sala (AVS), Kottakkal and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Mumbai for financial support, Dr. P.N. Ravindran, Visiting Scientist, CMPR, for his constant encouragement and guidance, the authorities of Tamil Nadu Forest Department and to Mr. U. Ravindran I.F.S., District Forest Officer, Salem for granting permission and arranging forest staffs for field visit. Thanks are also due to Mr. N.K. Janardhanan, Herbal Garden staff, for assisting during exploration. We express our gratitude to Mr. C. Jayaraman, Malayali tribal, Yercad, for help and information.