# Archiving ethnomedicinal knowledge and local health care systems from local health healers in Trivandram district of Kerala state, India

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# **ABSTRACT**

An ethnobotanical survey was undertaken to collect information from traditional healers on the use of medicinal plants in Trivandram district of Kerala state, India. The indigenous knowledge of local traditional healers and the native plants used for medicinal purposes were collected through personal interview. The investigation revealed that, the traditional healers used 34 species of plants belonging to 21 families to treat various diseases. The documented medicinal plants were mostly used to cure psoriasis, poison bites, stomachache, jaundice, dandruff, arthritis, blood pressure, blood purification, daeniasis, ear infection, male sterility, kidney stones, eye problem, leucorrhea, rejuvenation, scabies, piles and body massages. In this study the most dominant family was zingiberaceae and fruit, leaves and tubers of the plants were most frequently used for the treatment of diseases. The particulars of medicinal plant parts used, mode of preparation and administration are given. The plant medicines were arranged alphabetically in order of their botanical name, family, malayalam name, parts used, preparation of medicines, dosage and mode of administration, and ailments.

**Key Words:** Archiving ethno medicinal, Indigenous knowledge, Traditional healers, Practices, Mode of preparation, Mode of administration

## INTRODUCTION

India has a glorious tradition of the arts and science of healing. The origin of Indian medicine is shrouded in 'myths' and 'inspired history'. But, organised medicine, Ayurveda emerged from folk medicine at least 2,000 yrs ago with its well developed recorded system and practices. The maximum numbers of medicinal plants are used by folk (tribal) traditions. The booming global market for herbal drugs, pushed more than 100 medicinal plant species in Kerala to the verge of extinction. India, having

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two out of the 34 biodiversity hotspots of the world, is perhaps the largest producer of medicinal plants in the world. Of the 43000 plant species recorded in India, 3000 are known to possess medicinal properties. The vast resource of medicinal plants has been widely used in various traditional systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Amchi. In Kerala more than 900 medicinal plants are used in both classical and oral health tradition including tribal medicines. Out of these 200 medicinal plants are largely extracted for the preparation of diverse medicinal and food products. It is necessary to document local indigenous knowledge on the use of plants for health care.

## **METHODOLOGY**

#### Description of the study area:

Thiruvananthapuram District is the southernmost district of the Indian state of Kerala. The headquarters is in the city of Thiruvananthapuram(Trivandrum) which is also the capital city of Kerala. The district has an area of 2192 km², the second largest in Kerala. It is divided into four talukas: Thiruvananthapuram, Chirayinkil, Nedumangad, and Neyyattinkara. The urban bodies in the district are the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, Attingal, Neyyattinkara, Varkala and Nedumangad municipalities. Thiruvananthapuram literally means City of Lord Anantha. The district is situated between North latitudes at 8.17° and 8.54° and East longitudes 76.41° and 77.17°. The southern most extremity, Parassala is just 54 km away from the Southern Peninsular tip of India, Cape Comorin(Kanya Kumari). The district stretches 78 km along the shores of the Arabian Sea on the West, Kollam district lies on the North with Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts of Tamil Nadu on the East and South, respectively.

#### Details of ethnomedicinal survery:

The study areas are selected for well known for traditional knowledge of medicinal plants at Trivandaram district of Kerala state. Field trips were consumed in five villages namely Alankodu, Pallimukku, Attingal, Neyattinkara and Mangalapuram of Trivandram district during 2006-07, covering all seasons. The information on ethnomedicinal plants and practices were collected by standard procedures (Jain, 1995 and Jain and Mudgal, 1999) by interacting with ten traditional vaithiyars or herbal practioners and elders of the village those who have the knowledge of herbal medicines. The collected information was cross checked by used survey form. Plant specimens like fresh, dried and medicines such as powder, extract, thailam, paste, kasayam, oil and drops were collected and documented during the survey and herbarium specimens were prepared and identified with the help of the Rabinet Herbarium and Centre for molecular systamatics, Trichy, Tamilnadu, and and local floras (Pulliah and Silar, 1999; Gamble and Fischer, 1997 and Khan, 1953). Dried herbals/medicinal plants were collected and preserved in a pet jars for specimens. The 34 plant species belonging to 21 families used in primary health care are detailed below.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The plant medicines collected were arranged alphabetically in the order of their botanical names, family, vernacular/local names, part used, ailments, preparation of medicines, dosage and mode of administration concerned below.

The present paper provides information about 34 plant species belonging to 21 different families used as herbal remedies in local health care practices by the surrounding villages of Trivandram district, Kerala, India. Different parts of medicinal plants were used as medicine by the local traditional healers. Among the different plant parts, the leaves, fruit and tuber were most frequently used for the treatment of diseases followed by whole plant parts, fruit, stem, root, seed and flower. The methods of preparation fall into nine categories, viz.: plant parts applied as a powder (7), extract (3),

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kasayam (3), thailam (2), drops (1), oil (1) and paste (1). External applications (mostly for skin diseases and wounds) and internal consumption of the preparations were involved in the treatment of diseases. Traditional healers are using these plants to cure diseases related psoriasis, poison bites, stomachache, jaundice, dandruff, arthritis, blood pressure, blood purification, daeniasis, ear infection, male sterility, kidney stones, eye problem, leucorrhea, rejuvenation, scabies, piles and body massages.<sup>6</sup> In this study the most dominant family was zingiberaceae and fruit, leaves and tubers were most frequently used for the treatment of diseases. The plant medicines were arranged alphabetically in order of their botanical name, family, malayalam name, parts used, preparation of medicines, dosage and mode of administration, and ailments (Table 1).

#### **Conclusion:**

The survey indicated that, the study area has plenty of medicinal plants to treat a wide spectrum of human ailments. It is evident from the interviews conducted in different villages. The scientific knowledge of medicinal plants is limited to the traditional healers, herbalists and elderly persons who are living in rural areas. This study also points out that certain species of medicinal plants are being exploited by the local residents who are unaware of the importance of medicinal plants in the ecosystem. Due to lack of interest among the younger generation as well as their tendency to migrate to cities for lucrative jobs, there is a possibility of losing this wealth of knowledge in the near future. It thus becomes necessary to acquire and preserve this traditional system of medicine by proper documentation and identification of specimens.

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