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Traditional knowledge of folklore medicine among the people in and around Nagamalai hills of Madurai Dist in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

In and around of Nagamalai, people are well used to the medicinal plants to remediate them from diseases. Explorative field trips on finding diseases around the selected villages and to know about the whereabouts of the herbs/shrubs/plants were made to survey the medicinal quality of the plants and to collect the information from the villagers about them and their curative purposes. From this study, 28 species of valuable medicinal plants belonging to 21 families were recorded and their ethnomedicinal values were collected from the village people. This study focuses on the importance, preparation and utilization of the medicinal plants among the people of the select villages.

Keywords: Ethnobotany, herbs/shrubs/plants, folklore medicine, Nagamalai hills

Introduction

Over the centuries, India had a fascination and respect for the natural heritage; traditional plant ethics and herbal medicine have become a part of our culture. This wealth of traditional herbal knowledge is diminishing with the advancement of modern medicine (allopathy) and due to rapid industrialization and deforestation. However, these traditional practices are still followed in interior tribal areas of India. Medicinal.

Plants still play an important role in the primary health care of about 80% of the World population in developing countries. The use of medicinal plants in India and many other developing countries can be considered a living tradition. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the primary healthcare needs of approximately 80 per cent of the developing world's population are met by traditional medicine. The traditional systems of medicine largely depend on natural resources for their medicines, out of which plants form the bulk of the medicine. The Natural Products Alert (Napralert) databases at the University of Illinois document the ethnomedicinal uses for more than 9,000 species (Farnsworth and Soejarto, 1991) [1].

The All India Ethnobiology Survey carried out by the Ministry of Environment and Forests estimates that over 7,500 species of plants are estimated to be used by 4,635 ethnic communities for human and veterinary health care across the country. The annual turnover of the Indian herbal medicinal industry is about Rs. 2,300 Crores as against the pharmaceutical industry's turnover of Rs. 14,500 Crores with a growth rate of 15 percent. (Krishnan 1998) [5]. Ayurvedic and other traditional systems of Indian medicine fully depend on wild plants for the preparation of drugs (Sangeetha Udgaonkar 2002 and Pamplona Roger 2000) [4, 3]. Nearly, 74 plant species belonging to 34 families were identified and documented in and around the Nagamalai hills of Madurai Dist Tamil Nadu, India. (Ganesan 2014). The Nagamalai is situated on the North-Western side of Madurai and it nearly stretches 18 km from to Chozhavanthan. The variety of medicinal plants which are growing on the hill is due to the favourable climatic and soil conditions. The famous Siva temple (Naga Theertham) is placed near Pulloothu behind the Nagamalai.

Methodology

The methodology applied for the study is field work and descriptive method. The traditional medicine experts of Nagamalai have practical knowledge of herbal plants, medicine making and its curative tendencies. They were 34 members belonging to 15 families; their traditional knowledge of medicinal plants and their quality and curative properties were interviewed.

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The ancestral traditional knowledge of people including reliable traditional healers, physicians of the native plants and their preparation of drugs and methods of their administration along with doses were recorded and collected through questionnaires as well as informal personal interviews during field trips were carried out in the study area.

This process was conducted in and around the five villages of Nagamalai hills such as Nagamalai, Oothupatti, Rajamadai, Vadapalanji and Karadipatti. The researchers have selected people from four families with traditional knowledge of folklore medicine in each village to conduct the survey. The questionnaire contains the socio-economic status of the people and their knowledge of herbal medicine and its usage for ailments. The villages are technically advanced; they prepare medicine and market the products which are collected from the Nagamalai hills.

Result

1. *Abutilon indicum* L., (Malvaceae)

Tamil name – Thuthi: The fried leaves have to be eaten with rice for four months without adding spice, tamarind and non-vegetarian items in the diet to cure the fistula. It is found that 10 ml of the leaf extract mixed with 10 ml of Ghee has to be eaten in the morning and evening to cure dysentery.

2. *Ervatamia divaricata* L., (Apocynaceae)

Tamil name – Nandhya vattam: The fresh roots are collected and dried in the shade for six days and after decantation of water, the powdered root is used to cure toothache.

The raw flowers are collected and boiled for some time in freshwater. This preparation is put into a white cloth and tied. It is applied gently on the eyelashes to cure irritation of the eyes.

3. *Commelina benghalensis* L., (Commelinaceae)

Tamil name – Kaana valai: The fresh leaves are collected, washed up with tap water and masticated with turmeric. The paste made is used to cure pimples, wounds and pimples around the breast. This is applied with the help of a bird's feather.

4. *Piper betle* L., (Piperaceae)

Tamil name – Vetrilai: The 5 ml of fresh leaf extract is mixed with honey in equal proportion to make a tonic. This tonic should be consumed in an empty stomach to cure stomach aches, and digestive disorders for children below 5 years.

The root decoction intake will increase the total capacity of the folk singers and also it enhances the singing capacity of the artist.

5. *Canthium parviflorum* L., (Rubiaceae)

Tamil name – Karai: The boiled fresh leaves are eaten to cure stomach purging and diarrhoea. The fruits are washed with tap water and eaten without seed to remove the toxic substances in the lungs and food reservoir and it is also used as a coolant to the entire body.

6. *Sesamum melongena* L. (Solanaceae)

Tamil name – Ellu: The fresh leaves are imbibed in the water for some time; this water can be taken in an empty stomach to cure dysentery, and diarrhoea and the leaf paste are used to reduce inflammation on human skin.

7. *Croton bonplandianus*. B (Euphorbiaceae)

Tamil name – Milagai pounds: The fresh leaves are washed

well and fried with sesame oil and eaten in the morning to reduce constipation also the leaf extract is used to cure general inflammation and inflammation on the nymph. It should be eaten four times a day.

8. *Alternanthera sessilis* L., (Asteraceae)

Tamil name – Ponnankanni: Fresh leaves are roughly eaten in the morning with a cup of milk to cure eye disorders and as a coolant, the leaves are mixed with boiled rice and taken on an empty stomach for a year to cure fistula.

9. *Leucas aspera* L., (Lamiaceae)

Tamil name – Thumbai: The leaves are mixed with Uthamani (*Raorchestes Uthamani*) leaves in equal proportion to make a paste. This paste is dissolved in cow's milk and is to be taken in an empty stomach to control the flow of excessive blood during menstruation in women. The leaves and flowers are boiled with sesame oil and the extract is applied on the head to reduce head ache.

10. *Calotropis gigantea* L., (Asclepiadoideae)

Tamil name – Erukku: The leaf paste is mixed with water and used to reduce the venom of snake bites. The flower dried and mixed with oil is applied to cure ringworm.

11. *Cardiospermum halicacabum* L., (Sapindaceae)

Tamil name – Mudakkathan: The freshly taken leaves is boiled well and made into an extract while taken internally it controls constipation and gastric problem.

12. *Catharanthus roseus* L. (Apocynaceae)

Tamil name – Nithiya Kalyani: Nearly thirty flowers are boiled with one litre of fresh water and advised to drink ¼ litre, four times in a day to cure digestive problems.

13. *Solanum torvum* L., (Solanaceae)

Tamil name – Sundaikai: The fruit is imbibed with salt-containing buttermilk overnight and dried by sunlight is fried with sesame oil. It is given to cure chest sputum (Tuberculosis), Asthma and dysentery.

14. *Pergularia daemia* L., (Asclepiadaceae)

Tamil name – Veliparuthi: The leaf is fried with sesame oil and tied with a white cloth. It is used to cure mild stroke and body pain by applying it with a touch on the body. The extraction of the leaf is also used to cure itching, swelling and insect bites.

15. *Cynodon dactylon* L., (Poaceae)

Tamil name – Arukampul: A hand full of fresh leaves are masticated with turmeric and is applied all over the body before sunrise and washed well to cure itches, skin disease, athlete's foot and heat inflammation.

16. *Cissus quadrangularis* L., (Vitaceae)

Tamil name – Pirandai: The chutney (Gravy) made by Cissus tubes is used to cure indigestion. The stem crushed with salt and tamarind is heated lightly and applied for muscle contraction, blood souring and bone fracture.

17. *Jatropha gossypifolia* L., (Euphorbiaceae)

Tamil name – Kattamanakku: The leaves are fried with castor oil to cure swelling and pain. Daily brushing with the root cures toothache.

18. *Ricinus Communism L.*, (Euphorbiaceae)

Tamil name – Amanakku: An equal proportion of Ricinus leaves grinding with Phyllanthus amarus leaves should be taken as 30 grams per day for three days, then 5ml of castor oil orally taken slowly cures dysentery and jaundice.

19. *Pedaliium murex L.*, (Pedaliaceae)

Tamil name – Anainerunchil: Eat daily 10 grams of the leaf powder with milk and jaggery to cure Knee pain.

20. *Solanum nigrum L.*, (Solanaceae)

Tamil name – Manathakkali: The fried leaves collected in a white cloth are tied on the testis for two days to cure hydrocele. The fruit is dried and the paste is applied to cure ringworm.

21. *Carica papaya L.*, (Caricaceae)

Tamil name – Papali: The milky latex of the fruit is simply applied on the tongue, throat and mouth to cure irritation. Orally intake of 10 to 20 ml of leaf extracts twice a day cures dengue fever.

22. *Cassia auriculata L.*, (Caesalpinioideae)

Tamil name – Avarampu: The cassia leaves, kasturi turmeric and a chilli boiled with sesame oil are applied on the head to cure skin disorders, used as a coolant and to reduce diabetes.

23. *Achyranthes aspera L.*, (Amaranthaceae)

Tamil name – Nayuruvi: The root is used as a toothbrush to cure toothache. The leaf extract is applied on the skin to cure herpes.

24. *Coccinia grandis L.*, (Cucurbitaceae)

Tamil name – Kovaikai: A hand full of coccinia leaves is boiled with 200 ml of water and it is made into 100 ml of extract. It is taken orally twice a day to cure heat, eye irritation, dry cough, urinary infection and small wounds.

25. *Erythrina suberosa* Roob. (Papilionidae)

Tamil name – Kalyana murungai: The fresh leaves of the species are ground with an equal proportion of water and 3ml paste is taken orally on an empty stomach for the children to cure vomiting and gastrointestinal problems.

26. *Adhatoda vasica* Nees, (Acanthaceae)

Tamil name - Adhatoda: The leaves of the adhatoda and *Cardiospermum halicacabum* is crushed and the powder is taken a gram daily to cure vein disorder, bronchitis, cough, fever with sputum and tuberculosis.

27. *Furcraea foetida L.*, (Agavaceae)

Tamil name – Aanai Kattralai: The bulb from the leaves is ground with ragi and be applied to the swelling in low heat to reduce it.

28. *Sesbania grandiflora L.*, (Papilionaceae)

Tamil name – Agathi Keerai: The leaves are boiled and to be drunk in an empty stomach to cure ulcer. The leaves mixed with turmeric are to be applied on the body every day to cure headaches and to reduce eye irritation.

Discussion

Plants are one of the most important sources of medicine. The traditional system of medicine mainly functions through two

distinct streams a) Local or flock or tribal streams and, b) Ayurvedha and c) Siddha respectively. In the study, out of 21 families; 28 species are recorded for their medicinal uses which are abundant in and around Nagamalai hills. The medicines were mostly made and used from four families of species like Solanaceae, Euphorbiaceae, Asclepiadaceae and Papilanoideae. Mostly their leaves and flowers are used for medicine preparation. Medicine plants are also varying in their effectiveness against any kind of cure. For e.g. *Croton bonplandianus* leaves are washed well and fried with oil and eaten in the morning to reduce constipation. The leaf extract is eaten four times in a day to cure common inflammation, inflammation on the nymph. Similarly, the examined medicinal plants have their medicinal qualities in curing minor diseases. But there are numb ways to take it to the world arena to compete with modern medicine.

As similar to ethnobotanical research papers of this, there is continuous erosion in the traditional knowledge of many valuable plants being used for ethnic medicines (Mahesh and Muthuchelian, 2012) [7]. In our study, we have selected the families who are living nearer to the Nagamalai hills. Mostly these people gain the knowledge from their ancestors who are well-known about the medicinal quality of these herbs/shrubs/plants. Normally, these people are based on their local requirements and they prepare medicine for use. They engage with this activity in a need-based manner so they collect medicinal plants two days per week; on the other days, they are engaged with other workers such as agricultural labourers, sellers, vegetable vendors and road workers. In the case of Karadipatti village, mostly the people are they involved in quarry work and they spend two days for medicinal plant collection because of the economic condition of their families. The several endemic medicinal plants of the Nagamalai hill is under threat in their own land because of the over-exploitation and urbanization. Hence, remedial steps ought to be taken to protect such valuable species from becoming extinct in the near future.

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