Traditional treatment of skin diseases in South Travancore, southern peninsular India

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The paper deals with some medicinal plants used in the treatment of skin diseases in South Travancore, southern peninsular India. Thirty plant species belonging to 29 genera and 22 families of angiosperms reported along with dosage rate and mode of administration have been enumerated.

Keywords: Medicinal plants, Skin disease, South Travancore, Peninsular India, Ethnomedicine

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South Travancore (77°05′–77°36′E and 8°03′–8°35′N), because of its geographical location, stable geological history, equable climate, heavy rainfall, and good soil condition supports a variety of tropical forest ecosystems1. It harbours a prosperous and distinctive flora including many species of medicinal plants, which may be a source for gainful exploitation of natural resources. The area occupies 1672 sq km and is inhabited by 16,69,763 people. Topographically this district may be broadly classified as coastal, middle and mountainous region. The climate of the district is favourable, agroclimatic, rainfall varies from 103–310 cm and elevation from sea level to 1829 m asl2. Ethnobotanically, the area remains unexplored and no comprehensive account of local tradition is available. Some researchers have studied the medicinal plants of this area with limited objectives3,4. In view of this, the present work was carried out. An extensive survey of the medicinal plants, which are used for the treatment of skin diseases, was recorded.

Methodology
An ethnobotanical survey of South Travancore (Kanyakumari district) was conducted during 2003–2004. During the study trips information was gathered by making repeated queries time to time through interviewing the aged people of the area. The medicinal property of each species was accepted as valid if at least 4 or 5 separate informants had a similar positive answer in their reply. Plant specimens were identified with the help of regional and local floras5,6,7. The voucher specimens were deposited in the Herbarium of Botany Department (SCH), Scott Christian College, Nagercoil.

Enumeration
Plant species, which are used in traditional medicine, are enumerated with their botanical and vernacular (Tamil) names, family and use of the plant parts in the various treatments.

*Acorus calamus* Linn. (Araceae); *Vasampu*
Uses: Pounded rhizomes along with *Curcuma aromatic* rhizomes and *Azadirachta indica* leaves are applied on the affected parts to cure eczema twice a day for one week.

*Aegle marmelos* (Linn.) Corr. (Rutaceae); *Vilvam*
Uses: Fruits crushed with seeds of *Strychnos nux-vomica* and *Pongamia pinnata*, boiled with coconut oil is applied on the affected parts to cure scabies and other kinds of skin diseases twice a day till the recovery occur.

*Anacardium occidentale* Linn. (Anacardiaceae); *Kollamaram*
Uses: Powdered bark mixed with honey is taken orally for leprosy continuously for 6 months.
Andrographis paniculata Nees. (Acanthaceae); Nilavembu
Uses: Leaf juice is mixed with cow milk and taken orally for tinea cruris (Dosage: Twice a day for 6 to 8 days).

Argemone mexicana Linn. (Papaveraceae); Premathandu
Uses: Pounded seeds along with the rhizomes of Curcuma aromatica and Acorus calamus made into paste are applied on all types of skin diseases.

Asparagus racemosus Willd. (Liliaceae); Thannervittankizhangu
Uses: Tubers along with the leaves of Plumbago indica made into paste is applied on various skin diseases.

Azadirachta indica A. Juss. (Meliaceae); Vembu
Uses: Flowers are boiled in gingili oil (Sesamum indicum) and applied on the head against dandruff.

Cassia alata Linn. (Fabaceae); Seemai Agathi
Uses: Pounded leaves along with coconut oil and bee wax are made into a paste and applied on the affected parts to cure tinea versicularis, once a day in the night for 4 days.

Cassia auriculata Linn. (Caesalpiniaaceae); Avarai
Uses: Paste of dried leaves with vinegar is applied on various skin diseases.

Clerodendron inerme Gaertn. (Verbenaceae); Changukuppy
Uses: Paste of leaf juice mixed with bee wax, resins of Vateria indica and Nigella sativa seeds kept in hot water bath, cooled are applied on various skin diseases.

Clitoria ternatea Linn. (Fabaceae); Shankupuspham
Uses: Leaf juice is given orally twice a day for 6 days for scabies.

Coralloccarpus epigaeus Hk. f. (Cucurbitaceae); Kurudankixhangu
Uses: Tubers boiled in coconut oil are applied on the affected parts continuously for 6 months to cure leprosy.

Crinum defixum Ker. (Amaryllidaceae); Vishanarayani
Uses: Pounded bulbs mixed with hot water are given orally for curing tinea cruris twice a day for 3 days.

Curcuma aromatica Sal. (Zingiberaceae); Kasturimanjal
Uses: Rhizomes along with the seeds of Terminalia chebula made into paste is applied on the affected parts to cure impetigo twice a day for till the recovery occurs.

Cynodon dactylon (Linn.) Pers. (Poaceae); Arukampullu
Uses: Pounded leaves boiled in coconut oil are applied for various skin diseases.

Datura metel Linn. (Solanaeceae); Ummattai
Uses: Paste of leaf juice mixed with Curcuma aromatica rhizomes is applied on the swellings for quick remedy till the swelling reduces.

Euphorbia hirta Linn. (Euphorbiaceae); Anmanpaccharisi
Uses: Latex is applied against skin parasites twice a day till it is cured.

Glycorrhiza glabra Linn. (Fabaceae); Atimaturam
Uses: Paste of stem along with Withania somnifera roots is applied on the affected parts continuously for one year to cure leucoderma and other skin diseases.

Hygrophila auriculata (Schum.) Heine. (Acanthaceae); Neermulli
Uses: Dried leaf powder mixed with castor oil is applied on the affected parts to cure skin diseases.

Indigofera aspalathoides Vahl. (Fabaceae); Sivanarvembu
Uses: Powdered barks mixed with coconut oil are applied on the affected parts continuously for 6 months to cure leprosy.

Lawsonia inermis Linn. (Lythraceae); Maruthani
Uses: Leaves made into a paste are applied on the affected parts to cure impetigo twice a day till it is cured.

Madhuca longifolia (Koenig) Macbride. (Sapotaceae); Eluppaie
Uses: Pounded seeds mixed with Ocimum tenuiflorum leaf extract are applied on the affected parts to cure skin diseases.

Ocimum tenuiflorum Linn. (Lamiaceae); Tulaci
Uses: Leaves pounded along with Curcuma aromatica rhizomes are applied on the affected parts to cure tinea versicularis once days in the night till it is cured.

Phyla nodiflora (Linn.) Greene. (Verbenaceae); Poduthalai
Uses: Leaf juice mixed and boiled with equal volume of gingili oil is applied twice a week on head to remove dandruff.
Piper betle Linn. (Piperaceae); Vettalai
Uses: Leaves are pounded along with the bulbs of Allium sativum and applied on the affected parts to cure tinea versicolor.

Pongamia pinnata (Linn.) Pierre. (Fabaceae); Punkumaram
Uses: Crushed barks boiled in gingili oil are applied on the affected parts twice a day for 4 days to cure rash.

Saraca asoca (Roxb.) de Wilde. (Caesalpiniaceae); Asogam
Uses: Dried flowers boiled with coconut oil are applied on the affected parts with the help of cock feather thrice a day till it is cured as a remedy for scabies.

Terminalia bellerica (Gaertn.) Roxb. (Combretaceae); Tanrikkai
Uses: Seeds pounded along with seeds of Terminalia chebula and Quercus infectoria and mixed with coconut oil is applied twice a day against rash.

Trichosanthes lobata Roxb. (Cucurbitaceae); Peppudal
Uses: Paste of whole plant is applied on the affected parts continuously for one year to cure leprosy.

Wrightia tinctoria (Roxb.) R. Br. (Apocynaceae); Veppalai
Uses: Pounded leaves mixed with coconut oil are applied for psoriasis.

Results and discussion
Thirty plant species belonging to 22 families and 29 genera used for the treatment of various skin diseases have been recorded. Of these, 12 were tree species, 6 shrubs, 15 herbs and 5 climbers. Fabaceae with 5 species was the dominant family followed by Acanthaceae, Caesalpiniaceae, Cucurbitaceae and Verbenaceae, which had two species each, whereas 17 families were monospecific. The present study has given information on 12 kinds of skin diseases. Nine families were monospecific. The present study has given information on 12 kinds of skin diseases. Nine families were monospecific.

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