

FLOWERS IN *KURINCHIPATTU* AND THEIR SIDDHA MEDICINAL VALUES

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1.0 Introduction

Attention of scientists all over the world is focused towards the alternative systems of medicine in recent past. The reason being, none but for the currently practiced medical system is not complete for all the ailments encountered till date. Since time immemorial, Siddha Medicine, the heritage of the family practice of South India of medicine system has a significant role in medicine world (Eugene Wilson, 2007: 678). *Siddhars*, who developed the *Tamil* medical system and have written lot of literatures in medicine, alchemy, astrology, life style, and dietetics (S.K.Theiva Nayagam,1998: 50). Besides that, with the help of their *astanga siddhi* power and spiritual efficacy *siddhars* had developed single and compound medicinal products from herbs, metals and minerals (C.Ratna Velanar,2001:36).

1.1 Objectives of the research.

The main objective of this paper is to understand the Siddha medicine and the medicine values of some flowers that mentioned in *Kurincipattu* a poetic work belonging to classical Tamil literature. By doing this research one could understand the important of flowers as medicine in Tamils life, especially the ancient Tamils.

1.2 Introduction of Siddha Medicine.

Even though Ayurveda and Siddha are ancient Indian medicine sciences dating back to five thousand years but Siddha system of medicine is the oldest documented medical system in the world (K.Visvanatham, 1953:5). This system of medicine dates back to over 2000 years before Christ. There are some people who claim that Ayurveda is the oldest medical system, but from the research done with the help of available historical data's, it is evident that Siddha system of medicine is much older and has more history than even Ayurveda(Spencer Jones, 2007:4). Not only is this medical system the oldest, this is a medical system with lots of specialties far outweigh the Ayurvedic medicine. Significantly, one of the definitions of Siddha medicine is conquest of death or which ensures preventive against mortality.¹ (Bv. Subbarayappa, 1997: 1841).

The ancient spiritual saints who lived in South India, known by the name *siddhars*², (M.Rajentheran, K.Sivabalan, k.Sillaley. 2009:17) are said to be the founders of this medical system. According to the age-old literatures, *siddhars* were the supernatural humans (M.V.Aravinthan,1987: vi). The word '*siddha*' come from word '*siddhi*', which mean perfection of heavenly bliss. *Siddhi* is nothing but enlighten. The persons who

¹ According to Tamil tradition, Siddha medicine is associated with 18 *siddhars*, with Agastiyar, Tirumoolar and Bhogar being the most important. (Bv. Subbarayappa. 1997. *Siddha Medicine*: Banglore: Indian Institute of World Culture).

² The word *siddha* has been interpreted in many ways. If the root of the word is *siddhi*, then its means the accomplished person who has attained the eightfold supernatural powers as a result of his regular spiritual and physical exercises (S.N.Kanthasamy. 2003:4).

attained this were called *siddhars* (K.Narayanan,1990: 35-37)³. They wrote in Tamil language for all branches of science (C.Rathina Velanar,2001:13).

The basic of Siddha science is understanding that earth, air, water, fire, space which is known as 5 *Boothas*⁴ (elements) and ether correspond to five senses of human body are fundamentals to all living things (K.Suppaiyah, 2008:10). All created or evolved matters in the world whether it is animal or vegetable or mineral, they all fall under these categories. The human anatomy and physiology, causative factors of diseases, materials for the treatment and cure of the disease, also fall in the five elemental categories. This knowledge has been passed from one generation to another through written medium mostly in palm leaf parchments. M.P.Somasundram reveals that the presence of *siddhars* can be found in *Sangam* literature as well (1988;87-88).

Siddha is a way of life, which lays emphasis on positive health, a harmonious blending of social, moral, spiritual, physical and mental welfare of an individual (Spencer Jones 2007:5). *Siddha Vaidya* classifies disease and disorders into 4448 types by *siddhars* in their age-old books and literatures (Eugene Wilson, 2007: 678). Each of these diseases and disorders are believed to have 64 commonly prescribed types of remedies. They utilized absolutely everything on earth namely – plants, animals, metals and minerals. Altogether there are more than 350,000 herbal formulas used in Siddha system. Around 4000 plants are used commonly and another 2000 on rare situation. *Siddhars* deal with 11 metals, 64 *pashanam* (mercurial & non-mercurial), and 120 *purisms* (salts and other minerals) products in preparing medicines (K.Suppaiyah, 2008:11).

There are internal medicines⁵ and external medicines⁶. Though, there are many herbs earmarked for arthritis, Siddha system takes in to account the availability of a particular herb, its properties, its action and adapted unique therapies both internally and externally (Eugene Wilson, 2007: 679). Beside that, there are number of pharmaceuticals, which are common for both Siddha and Ayurveda. The specialty of *siddhars* is metallic preparation, which becomes alkaline, waxy preparation and preparations, which are impervious in water and flame. *Siddhars* also developed the

³ K.Narayanan explain the term of *siddhar* from explanation from few indian scholar such like T.P. Meenachi Sundaranar, M.Arunasalam, Manikkavasagam and so on. (K.Narayanan, 1990: 3).

⁴ All the existing things in this world and universe around it are made up by the five basic elements, namely earth, water, fire, air and space, which are called the fundamental *Boothas* (Elements). The origin of the five elements and the formation of different substances in the universe by various combinations of the elements are clearly described in Siddha Medicine. These elements constituting the human body and other worldly substances are explained as *Pancheekarana* (Mutual Intra Inclusion). Anyone of these elements cannot act independently by themselves. They can act only in co-ordination of the other four elements. The living creatures and the non-living things are made up of these five elements. (K.S.Suppaiya, 2008:10).

⁵ The internal medicines are thirty two in number. They include medicines with short life period to medicines which could be used even for hundreds of years. The metallic preparations that could be preserved and used for longer duration are considered as higher medicines and they act even in very small quantity and are capable of curing chronic illness. The internal medications are namely *Surasam, Charu, Kudineer, Karkam, Utkalee, Adai, Choornam, Pittu, Vadagam, Vennai, Manappagu, Nei, Rasayanam, Ilagham, Ennai, Mathirai, Kadughu, Pakkuvam, Thenural, Theeneer, Mezhu, Kuzhambu, Pathangam, Chenduram, Neer Kattu Urukku, Kalanghu, Chunnam, Karpam, Chatthu, and Gurukuligai*. (<http://www.siddhaphysician.com/medicine.html>).

⁶ Thirty-two types of external applications and manipulations are mentioned in Siddha text and most of them are in practice even today. The external medications are namely *Kattu, Patru, Ottradam, Poochu, Vedhu, Pottanam, Thokkanam, Pugai, Mai, Podi thimirdhal, Kallikam, Nasiya, Oodhal, Nasiga paranam, Kazhimbu, Seelai, Neer, Varthi, Suttigai, Sallagai, Pasai, Kazhi, Podi, Murichal, Keeral, Karam, Attai-vidal, Aruvai, Kombu kattal, Urinjal, Kuridhi Vangal, and Peechu*. Please refer, <http://www.siddhaphysician.com/medicine.html>

knowledge of bringing inorganic substances into atomic and ionic form that can be easily absorbed by the body when grounded with herbal juices and burned in fire with a calculated number of cow dung (<http://www.siddhaphysician.com/medicine.html>).⁷

In Siddha medicine system herbs are widely used as a first drug of choice for any ailment (G.Sentilvel, 2007:7). The usage of herbs in siddha system are *Charu* (Juice), *Surasam* (Concoction), *Chooranam* (Powder), *Kudineer* (Decoction), *Mathirai* (Pill / Tablet), *Legiyam* (Stirring *Chooranam* with syrup), *Thailam* (Medicated oil), *Theeneer* (Distilled liquid), *Karkam* (Fresh ground herb), and *Manappagu* (Boiling the *kudineer* with palm jaggery). One can find the presence of siddhahars even in classical Tamil Literature as well (C.Rathina Velanar,2001:13). A.Thachanamorthy explain that in *Sangam* age there lived medical experts who discovered medicine for all kind of diseases (1987:360). In this case the flowers that mentioned in *Kurincipattu* a classical literature of Tamil are taken as example to explain on its value as herbs in Siddha medicine.

1.3 The Plant Names in *Kurincipattu*.

Naturalism and romanticism are the distinct qualities of age of *Sangam* literature (M.Varatharasanar, 1957:2). Though ancient Tamil poetry includes lines of deeply philosophic nature, Tamil poets off and on revel in details more natural to scientific treatises on botany or biology. *Kurincipattu* is a Tamil poetic work in anthology of *Pattupattu* belonging to the *Sangam* literature. *Kurincipattu* contains 261 lines of poems which tells the story about the love affair between the hero (*talaivan*) and the heroine (*talaivi*). The poems were written by the poet Kapilar (Kavya, 2010:281). *Kurincipattu* describes the *kurinchi* landscape of the mountainous terrain and mentions about the different plant names. A study of plants mentioned in *Kurincipattu* reveals that the poets has not followed the hoary convection of five regions with their particular association of plants, animal and other animate and inanimate objects (P.L.Samy, 1972:19). This can be explained by the theory of *Tinaimayakkam*⁸ which justify the indiscriminate mixing of flora and fauna and other objects among the regions (S.Kumaran.1990:2). A number of plants mentioned in *Kurincipattu* of Kapilar's reads like a glossary of ninety-nine plants which cannot be seen in any other literature (M.Pasumalaiyarasu, 1998:63)⁹. The plant list in *Kurincipattu* starts with *cengkantal* from line 61 and end with *vengkai* to line 96 in *Kurincipattu*.

⁷ In the Siddha system, diagnosis of disease involves identifying its causes, which is done through examination of pulse, urine, eyes, study of voice, color of body, tongue and status of digestive system of body. The system emphasizes not only on the medical treatment of the diseases but also the patient's environment, meteorological consideration, age, sex, race, habits, mental frame, habitat, diet, appetite, physical condition, physiological constitution etc. The Siddha system is said to be effective in treating chronic cases of liver, skin diseases, rheumatic problems anemia, prostate enlargement, bleeding piles and peptic ulcer. <http://www.siddhaphysician.com/medicine.html>).

⁸ A deep and detailed study of the *Sangam* anthologies reveals that plants, animals and birds described and ascribed to the five landscapes are ecologically true to nature with a few exceptions here and there. The five landscape are known as *Kurinci*, *Mullai*, *Marutam*, *Neytal* and *Palai*. A study of these regions will be helpful in understanding this regional fusion in the correct perspective (K.Suppaiyah, 2008:62).

⁹ There are 91 plants mentioned in *Kurincipattu* such like *cenkantal*, *ampal*, *aniccam*, *kuvalam*, *kurinci*, *kuvalai*, *vetci*, *cenkotuveri*, *kuviram*, *vatavanam*, *vakai*, *vatacam*, *eruvai*, *ceruvalai*, *payini*, *vani*, *pacumpiti*, *vakulam*, *kaya*, *avirai*, *cural*, *kurippulai*, *kurunarunkanni*, *kurukilai*, *marutam*, *konkam*, *ponkam*, *tilakam*, *patiri*, *cerunti*, *atirai*, *sanpakam*, *karantai*, *kulavi*, *kalima*, *palai*, *mullai*, *kullai*, *sirumarotam*, *valai*, *valli*, *neytal*, *talai*, *talavam*, *tamarai*, *nalai*, *mauval*, *kokuti*, *cetal*, *cenkurali*, *kaitai*, *kanci*, *neytal*, *pankar*, *maram*, *tanakkam*, *inkai*, *ilavam*, *konrai*.

1.3.1 *Kantal* (காந்தள்)



The first plant mentioned is *kantal* which is identified as the well-known *Gloriosa superba*. The Glory lily is described in passage as possessing shining petals and praised for its beauty in Tamil literature (Arul Selvan, 2011:111). Even though it has been held that there are two varieties of Glory lily, one with red flowers (*cenkantal*) and other with white flowers (*venkantal*), but in nature there is no white variety (P.L.Samy:1972,78). The *venkantl* is mentioned in *Kalitokai* (7-15, 121-13) *Akananuru* (4:15, 18:15, 78:8, 108:15, 132:11, 138:17, 152:17, 238:16, 312:5, 338;7,368:8) and *Kuruntokai* (62:1,107:1, 1:4, 284:3, 185:6, 239:2-3, 84:3-4, 259:1-3, 373:6-7, 361:3-6). According to scholar T.Muthu Kannappan, *kantal* refer to *talai* which grows in rows as a fence along sea-shore (1978:43).

Gloriosa superba is also known as the national flower of Zimbabwe (Hamer, 2004). Glory lily is among some of the modern medicine's most important plants actually facing local extinction (Dhushara, 2004). *Gloriosa superba* derives its name *Gloriosa* from the word 'glorious', which means handsome and *superba* from the word 'superb' means splendid or majestic kind (<http://www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/glori>). The most common English names are flame lily, fire lily, gloriosa lily, glory lily, superb lily, climbing lily, and creeping lily (C.Albert Smith, 1979:141). They are tender, tuberous rooted deciduous perennials, adapted to summer rainfall with a dormant dry season. This plant has been a source of medicine right from the ancient time. (M.Pasumalaiyarasu, 1998:93).

Siddha Medicinal Values of *Kantal* :

- i. All parts of the plant contain colchicine and related alkaloids and are therefore dangerously toxic if ingested, and contact with the stems and leaves can cause skin irritation. Various preparations of the plant are used in traditional medicines for a variety of complaints in both Africa and India.
- ii. The tuber of plant is well known due to its pungent, bitter, acrid, heating, anthelmintic, laxative, alexiteric and abortifacient nature. It is widely used in the treatment of ulcers, leprosy, piles, inflammations, abdominal pains, intestinal worms, thirst, bruises, infertility and skin problem. However, ingestion of all parts of the plants is extremely poisonous and can be fatal.
- iii. The sap from the leaf tip is used for pimples and skin eruptions.
- iv. Tribal of Patalkot apply the powder of rhizome with coconut oil in skin eruptions and related diseases for 5 days. This combination is said to be effective in snake and scorpion bites too. Beside that the tribal crush roots of the plant in water and apply on head for curing baldness.

(<http://medplants.blogspot.com/search/label/Gloriosa%20superba>)

atumpu, atti, avarai, pakanrai, palacam, pinti, vanci, pittikam, cintuvaram, tumpai, tulay, tonri, nanti, naravam, punnakam, param, kurukkatti, aram, kalvi, punnai, narantam, nakam, nallirumari, irunkuuntu, venkai, and pulaku. (Pls refer *Kurincipattu* from line 61-99 and Bakyamary. 2011: 109-110).

1.3.2 Ampal (ஆம்பல்)



The *ampal* is the water-lily, also known as *alli* in Tamil, has a special place in Tamil poetics (M.Pasumalaiyarasu, 1998:92). It is considered symbolic of the grief of separation; it is considered to evoke imagery of the sunset, the seashore and the shark of *Sangam* landscape (P.L.Samy, 1972:78). In *Sangam* literature this flowers mentioned in many places like in *Paripatal* (12-78, 1-38), *Kalitokai* (12-13, 91-1), *Ahananuru* (6:1, 36:3, 56:4, 78:18, 96:5, 156:9, 175:14, 176:14, 196:5, 256:7, 316:2, 356:18), *Narrinai* (230:3, 6:1, 230:280,, 345:1-4, 6:1-2, 300:1-4, 230:3-4) and *Purananuru* (248-5, 250-5, 280-13, 33-17, 13-38).

Ampal is the water lily belonging to *Nymphaea* species and can be specially identified as *Nymphaea lotus* which bears large, double-whorled, white flowers. Water lilies live in freshwater areas in temperate and tropical climates around the world. Water lilies are rooted in soil in bodies of water, with leaves and flowers floating on the water surface. The *Nymphaeaceae* are aquatic, rhizomatous herbs. (<http://www.efloras.org>). The roots which contains a large quantity of starch are usually boiled though sometimes eaten as raw. The stems are cooked in curries; the unripe fruit is eaten as vegetable and the seeds are parched before eaten (Kumaran, 1990:90).

Siddha Medicinal Uses of Ampal.

- i. Mashed green water lily roots were used as poultice for swollen limbs; the roots for problems of the womb, digestive problems, a rinse for mouth sores; leaves and flowers as cooling compresses.
- ii. The water lily roots of the white pond lily were used as medicine for a sore mouth.
- iii. Water lily root is poultice and applied to swellings, inflammations, cuts.
- iv. Alkaloids in the root are reportedly hypotensive, antispasmodic, cardiac, tonic and vasoconstrictor.
- v. A tea made from the roots is used in the treatment of TB, chronic bronchial complaints, diarrhea, dysentery, gastrointestinal inflammation, gonorrhea, vaginal discharge, inflamed glands, mouth sores and to stop bleeding.

(<http://www.online-family-doctor.com/vegetables/water-lily.html>)

1.3.3 *Cenkotuveri* (செங்கோதுவரி)



Cenkotuveri is well known as Siddha and Ayurvedic medical plant. Its known as *cekkikotuveri*, *kodimuli*, *rose-colored lead-wort*, *shitrapuni*, *sivappu cittramulam*, and *yerra-chitramulam*.

(http://www.holisticonline.com/herbalmed/herbs/h_plumbago-rosea.htm).

The red-flowered variety is called *Cenkotuveri* refers to the red flowers as well as blistering nature of its root sap on human body. This plant only mentioned in *Kuruncipattu* and *Chilapatikaram* and not mentioned in any other *Sangam* poems (P.L.Samy, 1972:81).

Plumbago rosea is a species of flowering plant in the family Plumbaginaceae, growing to 2 m tall by 1 m wide. *Plumbago Rosea* which also known as laurel in common English, is an erect or spreading, more or less branched, herbaceous or half-woody plant. Leaves are ovate to oblong-ovate, 8 to 13 centimeters long, smooth, slightly drooping, with entire, undulate or wavy margins, with a pointed or blunt tip and a pointed base. (<http://www.stuartxchange.org/Laurel.html>). It has a pretty subsucculent perennial shrub with semi-woody striate stems and flexible branches. The flowers are bright red and in long terminal spikes. Beside that the root contains Plumbagin which contain sitosterol glycoside which had been used in Siddha medicine. (<http://ayurvedicmedicinalplants.com>).

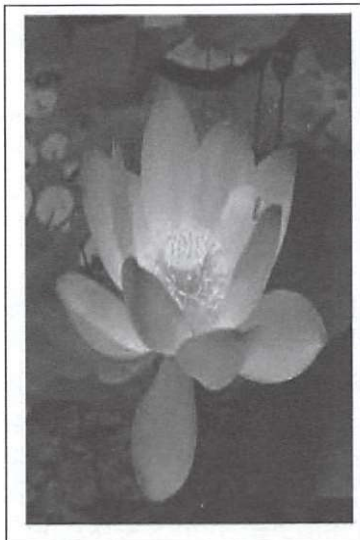
Siddha Medicinal Uses of *Cenkotuveri* :

- i. Alterative, gastric stimulant and appetizer; in large doses it is agro-narcotic poison. Locally it is vesicant. It has a specific action on the uterus.
- ii. Root is said to increase the digestive power and promote appetite. Plumbagin stimulates the central nervous system in small doses, while with larger doses paralysis sets in leading ultimately to death. The blood pressure shows a slight fall.
- iii. Plumbagin is a powerful irritant and has well marked antiseptic properties. In small doses, the drug is a sudorific; large doses cause death from respiratory failure. It is suggested that the action is probably due to the direct effect of the drug on the muscles.
- iv. A liniment made from bruised root mixed with a little bland oil is used as a rubefacient in rheumatism, paralytic affections, in enlarged glands, buboes etc.

- v. This herb cures certain cases of leucoderma. It is also useful for other skin diseases and for scorpion-sting.
- vi. Scraped root is introduced into the mouth of the womb to procure illegal abortion. It will expel the fetus from the womb whether dead or alive.
- vii. A tincture of the root is used in secondary syphilis, in leprosy, and also in dyspepsia, piles, flatulence, loss of appetite and other digestive complaints. It is a good remedy to check post-partum hemorrhage.

(http://www.holisticonline.com/herbal-med/herbs/h_plumbago-rosea.htm).

1.3.4 Tamarai (தாமரை)



Tamarai is well known as lotus is frequently mentioned in *Sangam* poems (P.L.Samy, 1972:88). It grows in *Marutam tinai*. The poet Kapilar compares the love between great people to honey of the lotus (*Narrinai* 1:3-5). In *Sangam* literature, lotus mentioned in many places like in *Paripatal* (3 and 7), *Perumpanaddurapai* (401-405), *Narrinai* (310:1-2, 260:1-4, 300:1-4,) *Ahanamuru* (6:16, 16:1, 46:5, 91;15, 106:1, 116:1, 176:7, 176:7, 186:3, 361;1) and *Kalitokai* (73:1-5, 72:1-8). The poet Marutampatiya Ilankatunko, compare lotus with comparison. He says the blossoms of lotuses are like smiling faces, buds like sharp-painted spears, the leaves like the ears of elephants, the rounded tubular stems like bamboo sticks and mature roots that enter deep into the ground causing cleft therein (*akam*:176:2-12)

Nelumbo nucifera known by a number of names including Indian lotus, sacred lotus, bean of India, or simply lotus, is a plant in the monotypic family of *Nelumbonaceae*. It can be found in two colors: one with red and other with white in color. They flower all the year round (Kumaran, 1990:93). This plant is an aquatic perennial which under favorable circumstances its seeds may remain viable for many years. Lotus are found in white and pink in general and they grow in shallow and murky weather. The floating leaves and flowers have long stem, which contain air spaces to maintain the buoyancy. The plant has its roots firmly in the mud and send out long stem to which their leaves are attached. The leaves and flowers always raised above the water surface

(<http://www.theflowerexpert.com/content/aboutflowers/exoticflowers/lotus>). It is also the national flower of India and Vietnam. From ancient times the lotus has been a divine symbol in Asian traditions particularly in Indian traditions.¹⁰ (M.Pasumalaiyarasu, 1998:96). Nearly every part of the plant like tender, shoot of the roots between the joints and the seeds are eaten raw, or cooked. The leaves are used to eat off instead of plates (Kumaran, 1990:93). Both flowers and rhizome are used for medicine purpose (Ministry of Health and Welfare India, 2009: 189).

¹⁰ Hindus revere lotus with the divinities. Lord *Vishnu* and *Lakshmi* often portrayed on a pink lotus in iconography. Goddess *Saraswati* is portrayed on a white-colored lotus. Beside that lotus often used as an example of divine beauty, *Vishnu* is often described as the 'Lotus-Eyed One'. Its unfolding petals suggest the expansion of the soul. The growth of its pure beauty from the mud of its origin holds a benign spiritual promise. In Hindu iconography, other deities, like *Ganga* and *Ganesh* are often depicted with lotus flowers as their seats (M.Pasumalaiyarasu, 1998:96).

Siddha Medicinal Values of *Tamarai* :

- i. For burning sensation of body lotus flower can be ground as a paste and applied over the externally. The rhizome paste along with milk can be given internally for increased body heat and burning micturition.
- ii. For toxic snake bites the Lotus flower can be ground well and given along with water internally at regular intervals.
- iii. The juice of the flower can be administered for diarrhea. It is good for heart too.
- iv. The decoction of the flower is good for fever due to *pitham*. It also acts as a cardiac tonic.
- v. The *manapagu* prepared from Lotus flower can be given for cough, bleeding piles, bloody diarrhoea etc.
- vi. *Venthamarai poo choornam* a Siddha Medicine is very effective for management of hypertension and given in the dose of 1 – 2 grams with milk before food twice a day.

(<http://siddham.in/lotus-or-nelumbo-nucifera-a-natural-remedy-for-cardiac-ailments>).

Conclusion

Flora, particularly flowers plays very important role in ancient Tamil life and it's has significant role in *Sangam* literature as well. This can be seen as Tamils like to name their children with flowers name (M.Pasumalaiyarasu, 1998:61). Siddha medicine basically uses herbs, so we can see a good relationship between the *Sangam* literature and Siddha medicine. Beside the flowers that mention above, there are still many other flowers that mentioned in *Kurincipattu* have Siddha medicinal value. Siddha is a medical system that is passed on from generation to generation through the ancient system of Guru – Shishya. It flourished among the Dravidians especially among south Indians. According to Spencer Jones, if it had just been a medical system, it wouldn't have been able to continue its saga of success in human life (2007:5).

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