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## TITLE

**Indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants and  
perception of managing disease among the Yanadi Tribe  
of Veyi Lingala Kona**

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## TITLE

**Indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants and perception of managing disease among the Yanadi Tribe of Veyi Lingala Kona****ABSTRACT**

**BACKGROUND:** In spite of advances of medical sciences and availability of treatment options in remote places of India, there are few inaccessible places which are devoid of the basic healthcare facilities. One among them is the Yanadi tribe of Veyi Lingala Kona who are still reliant on traditional medicinal knowledge till date.

**AIM:** To understand how the Yanadis cope with some common illnesses given the geographical isolation and conviction of dependence on the traditional knowledge.

**MATERIALS & METHODS:** The study was conducted over a period of 28 days and recorded actual healing procedures of different health problems suffered by the Yanadi people during this period. Most of the ethno-botanical studies in India use 'recall method' (retrieval of information from the past or experience or repository of oral knowledge). Real life observation of treatment procedures is chance determined and hence studies adopt 'quick' techniques. The study was specifically conducted to observe and record the actual incidences of health problems suffered and actual treatment procedures administered by the Yanadi during the period of the study. The chief methods used were interview and observation. The interviewees were interacted to gain information on the nature of health problem, decisions on choosing a specific plant and mode of treatment of administering plant medicine.

Yanadi medical practitioners, patients and elderly people were interviewed to elicit data on the use of plant species in curing common illnesses. **RESULTS:** The study was conducted in an inaccessible place devoid of communication facilities and health care services. Fourteen individuals were found to be suffering from various illness or crippled health conditions during the study period. They were under treatment of using plant medicines. Fourteen plants were identified with the help of key informants. Data was also collected on the method of usage of plants. Some crucial issues are identified in the nature of ethno-medicine of the Yanadi and its prospective future. It was observed that the Yanadis of the study area were reluctant to undergo allopathic treatment. Herbal medicine is more comfortable for those ailments about which some etiological knowledge is known. They inherit this knowledge from their ancestors and transmit this to the successive generations. **CONCLUSION:** The traditional knowledge is closely interlinked with bio resources. Medicinal plants for health care are derived by continuous access to and observation of the natural resources. They have rich indigenous traditional knowledge on medicinal plants to cure various diseases by using various plants parts.

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Knowledge, Medicinal plants, Yanadi Tribe*

**Introduction**

Health care practices form an important aspect of health seeking behaviour among human beings. Every human community has developed characteristic health care system. Health care and medical systems encompasses a variety of practices. These are often tended to be branded as nostrum in the modern scientific domains. While modern medical sciences, popularly categorised as allopathic or scientific medicine, have relatively recent origins, the traditional system of medicine have existed since the remote past. However the recent upsurge in the validation studies are unfolding the 'secrets' of tribal herbal medicines.

Ethno-medicine is of particular significance because of its ubiquity among rural and tribal communities and its chief components of using plants in the health care and treatment of various health problems.

Simply stated it refers to the knowledge, interpretation and practices of ethnic groups concerning health care and treatment of illness. This is also known as traditional medicine defined by WHO as "Sum total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement of treatment of physical and mental illness." [1]

The substantive domain of ethno-medicine is indigenously conceived, nurtured, transmitted, perpetuated (mostly endogenously) and/or acculturated. An intimate interaction with the local physical environment blended with cosmological and supernatural elements and entities is the hallmark of this system.

Further, ethno-medicine is socially mediated and constructed. These practices are very much a common place and integrated into the socio-cultural edifice strengthened by various anecdotes and whole range of folklore. [2] The tribal people have practiced the age old traditional health knowledge to cure various illnesses and protected it by not revealing it to others but only to the kith and kin. Further they also extracted plant material carefully without causing extinction. They have used their knowledge among themselves but also for the wellbeing of mankind. [3] In India, it is reported that traditional healers use 2500 plant species of which some 100 species serve as regular sources of medicine. [4] The mother of all indigenous medicines is the tribal medicine practiced by the ethnic community. [5] The village folk, especially the tribal people are still using the natural resource available in their surroundings to treat many diseases and accidental hazards. [6] The present study is envisaged from this background to throw light on indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants among the Yanadi of Veyilingala Kona in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh.

## Materials & Methods

### Methods of Study

The present study is carried out in two villages namely, Abbapatlapalli and Vedam ST colony in Veyilingala Kona hill area of Chittoor district. These two villages are predominantly inhabited by the Yanadi a scheduled tribe and a few castes like Mala. The first village contained 83 households and the second one had 58 households. The villages are relatively isolated and have no basic amenities like anganwadi centre or schools, etc.

House to house visits were made enquiring incidences of any health problems. Those reporting incidences were further asked for details which included name of the health problem; mode of treatment; involvement of medicine person; details of the plant used in treatment; prognosis/improvement etc.

The data were collected mainly from the village medicine men, elderly persons of the villages who have good knowledge about indigenous medicine and also feedback from the patients by using the anthropological tools and techniques such as observation, interview and case study methods. An in depth anthropological field work was conducted in these two villages to understand indigenous knowledge on various medicinal plants, preparation of medicines and methods of using them for curing their various diseases. During this study the information on 14 medicinal plants used as different ailments was gathered.

## Observations

### Area of Study

Veyilingala Kona-literally means 'The Valley of Thousand Linga's (the stone representation of Lord Shiva) – (at intersection of the latitude of N 13° 41' 28.24", longitude of E 79° 42' 14.93" and mean sea level of 140 meters) which is nestled in the hilly area forming part of the Eastern Ghats. It is 8 KM away from the famous Lord Shiva temple town of Sri Kalahasti in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, India. The Veyilingala Kona is listed as a sacred grove by CPREEC. [7]

### The Yanadi

Yanadi are one of the major scheduled tribes of Andhra Pradesh. The people were natives of Sriharikota Island located in Nellore district. Unlike many tribes who inhabit mountainous forests in Andhra Pradesh, the Yanadis inhabit plain areas. They are seen inhabited in nearby caste villages in separate colonies, water bodies like ponds, lakes or small streams and adjacent to forest areas. Though living in plain areas most of the Yanadis are fond of forest resources particularly small animals, birds and fish. They are also habituated to eat farm rats which are considered a delicacy. [8] Yanadis are found in the districts of Nellore, Chittoor, Guntur, Krishna, YSR Kadapa and Prakasham. Their population according to 2011 Census reports is 5, 33,746. [9] A study concluded that "the Yanadis have the following bodily features: dark skin, black curly hair, long and prognathous skull, broad and concave nose, narrow chest and are short statured people. Ecology plays an important role in shaping the life of Yanadi people. [10] The Yanadis are known for their medicinal knowledge and are experts in treating snake and scorpion bites and various diseases like bone-setting, arthritis, child diseases, skin allergies etc. It is also learnt that the Yanadis depend upon their own therapeutic practices in managing various ailments. They use several plants parts to treat various diseases.

There are two medicine men and two medicine women, one in each village. These persons are experts in administering herbal medicines. The women are mid-wife cum medicine women. People exhibit proclivity to seek treatment for various illnesses. During the period of the study, 14 individuals were found to be suffering from various health problems. These can be divided into those causing pain (scorpion bite, tooth ache, kidney stones, ear ache, bone fracture, burns), debilitating the body (vomiting, fever, diabetic, white discharge, asthma) and loss of vitality, impotency and infertility. Excluding kidney stones and diabetes, other problems were identified by means of perceivable symptoms.

Each symptom was closely examined to find out the probable reason behind the ailment. The diagnosis includes improper food and water taken before the occurrence of the incidence, time and duration of the incidence, influence of evil eye or omens, etc. Illnesses are attributed to incompatibility of body nature (*dinusu*) and certain food items, water, and air. For e.g. vomiting was usually attributed to eating wrong food which is incompatible with the body nature. Skin diseases are attributed to coming in contact with certain wild plants. Bone fractures, scorpion or snake bites and burns are believed to be due to bad omen, evil eye or wrong time. Some disorders like white discharge are believed due to breach of conduct.

When people are sick, they usually seek the assistance of the medicine man/woman in the community or self-medicate. Some individuals take no treatment at all. Many individuals, however, self-medicate due to various reasons like far away location of PHC, long waiting times feeling of estrangement at PHC, cost of travel boarding and medicines, and a feeling that the ailment is minor.

The use of herbal medicines at the community level has been shown to be influenced by people's beliefs about their efficacy and safety, social environment and confidence on medicine man/woman.

A general discussion with the medicine men and women had revealed that there were several herbal medicines used to treat for various diseases. Some studies in Veyilingala Kona had recorded 72 medicinal plants. [11] This study used recall method to develop an inventory of medicinal plants. On the other hand, the present study had recorded plants actually used to cure different illnesses which inflicted people at the time of the study. The authors have actually seen how herbal medicines are prepared and administered and followed the prognosis / improvement.

In the present study the Yanadi practitioners possessed the knowledge of 14 medicinal plants to treat different ailments. The medicinal data was collected and a brief discussion was made in the local language. The herbalists prepare most of their medicines in fresh form like juice, paste, decoctions, dried root bulbs, seeds and powders. Table.1 shows the different medicinal plants and their uses.

Most of the Yanadi in the villages knew about the above plants. The preliminary enquiry revealed that plant medicines can be divided into those used for common illnesses and those for some chronic, fatal illnesses and morbidities. However, the herbs are administered by

cognoscenti Yanadi who is known as Vydhigudu (medicine man) or Vydhigulu (medicine woman). They have specialised knowledge of treating one specific illness/deadliness such as snake bite or acute maternal morbidities or a group of illnesses. The patients avoid self-medication. The reasons are that the herbs work effectively if they are administered by experts. The experts also know about the contra-indications and prognosis of the treatment. They also know how to select a specific plant and are bestowed with supernatural powers. The experts also possess the skill in divination and can correctly diagnose the causes behind illness. Invariably the herbal treatment is accompanied by a small prayer invoking the blessings of the ancestors or deities.

Further the Yanadis are reserved in revealing medicinal herbs. They believe that such unrestrained revelations have negative effects and the power of herbs get weakened. Knowledge is transmitted to a selective few who are disciplined and committed to an austere life. The Yanadis say that becoming herbalist/medicine man/woman is ordained by ancestors. Such persons are prone to possession and trance due to ancestral or supernatural being's influence.

Yanadi women are also adept in treating illnesses of children, infertility, gynaecological disorders like PCOD, maternal morbidities etc. In the studied villages there are two women who claim expertise in midwifery.

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## Discussion

The researchers had approached and discussed with five local elderly Yanadi respondents and patients regarding medicinal plants usage and their view.

The opinion expressed were,

**Male Respondent (1)** stated that most of the local tribal people are using medicinal plants for their survival and to control their diseases. He has strong belief towards medicinal plant leaves and roots, which can control the diseases. He expressed that the usage of medicinal plants is a part and parcel of their culture. He being a *gaddecheppavadu* (one who performs *rangam*= divination), believes that the benevolence of deities and ancestors is essential for the effective curative power of the herbs used in illness treatment.

**Female Respondent (2)** expressed that they are living in remote area and they don't have any alternative. Usage of medicinal plants is a psychological aspect in terms of beliefs and dogmas. She stated that the provision of medicinal

**Table 1: List of medicinal plants and their uses**

S. No	Name of the Illness	Botanical Name	Local Name	Part used	Preparation
1	Toothache	<i>Achyranthus aspera</i>	Uttareni	Root	Root bark decoction is used in diuretics. Root paste applied on the teeth to relieve from tooth ache
2	Skin disease	<i>Strychnos nuxvomica</i>	MushtiGara	Leaves/Bark	Bark powder and leaf juice mixed applied on the skin. Nut roasted, pounded and the paste is applied on the affected part
3	Sexual vigour	<i>Dioscorea spida</i>	Magasingadda	Root	Root boiled in goat/cow milk taken orally for 40 days
4	Scorpion bite	<i>Strychnos potatorum</i>	Chillaginja	Seed	Seed paste applied as antidote in cases of scorpion sting. It removes the poison from the body. Oozes out the poison from the injured part.
5	Vomiting	<i>Annona squamose</i>	Sethapalamu	Leaves/Bark	Juice extracted and internally consumed
6	Dissolve kidney stones	<i>Tribulus terrestris</i>	Pashanaberi	Seed	Seeds are made into powder and taken with milk or water.
7	Asthma	<i>Tylophora asthamatica</i>	Paalatheega	Leaves	Leaf powder is mixed with milk and taken twice a day
8	Ear ache	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Thulasi	Leaves	The leaves boiled in till oil and cooled. Two drops of oil is dropped in ear to cure ear ache
9	Diabetes	<i>Gymnema sylvestris</i>	Podapathri	Leaves	Leaves are directly taken or made in to powder and consumed
10	White discharge	<i>Evolvulus sinoides</i>	Vishnu kantha	Whole plant	The plant is made into paste and taken internally along with milk to stop the white discharge.
11	Bone fractures	<i>Dodonaea viscosa</i>	Banderuchettu	Leaves	Leaf paste is applied on the fractured part and banded with branches
12	Burns	<i>Aganosmalymosum</i>	Peddaganamalli	Stem	Decoction of stem/bark along with small quantity of turmeric and salt warmed and applied on burn spot
13	Fever in Children	<i>Tinospora cardifolia</i>	Tippatheega	Leaves	One tea spoon of the leaf juice is used twice a day to cure the fever in children
14	Impotency Fertility	<i>Ficus bengalensis</i>	Marri	Leaves Sap of stem	Drinking powdered shade dried young leaf with milk daily once for 15 to 20 days. Sap is licked for 7-10 days before the onset of mensus

plants were the gift of local god and goddess. Her feeling is that the most of people are safeguarded by using medicinal plants. She said that herbal medicines are very effective, provided right kind of herbs used. There are multiple plants used for curing a specific illness. An experienced *Vydhigudu* (medicine man) or *Vydhigulu* (medicine woman) is capable of using right kind of herbal treatment.

**Male Respondent (3)** opined that the medicinal plants are available within their jurisdiction with low cost. They are not capable of seeking modern medicine due to the poverty hence they confine to local medicinal plants to safeguard themselves. However, the respondent also disclosed that fetching herbs is becoming difficult due to stringent forest rules. More often they have to face grueling interrogation by the forest officials who suspect them as thieves and smugglers and unlawful trespassers.

**Male Respondent (4)** stated that it is a traditional practice and part of transmission of cultural heritage. In his opinion the tribal people are waiting for helping hand from the Government to provide more facilities in terms of plantation for medicinal herbs and usage of the same in proper method and they want to become plantation owners. If they could grow medicinal herbs, they can make a living as well as avoiding unpleasant encounters with the forest officials.

**Female Respondent (5)** expressed that they are burdened with fear complex and shyness in going to hospitals. The women do not want to consult a doctor for treatment of personal sensitive issues related to reproductive organs and gynaecological disorders. They are very reticent to see a male doctor. Due to these reasons women have simply approach their own kin for treatment of diseases.



## Conclusion

The study reveals that the Yanadis have vast knowledge about medicinal plants which is growing in their vicinity. The tribal inherit a rich traditional knowledge about the flora investigated and apply this knowledge for making herbal medicines to cure different diseases. Now such indigenous knowledge is facing slow and natural decline. The preservation of this indigenous knowledge is very essential for future generations. So it is important to study and record the medicinal plants of Veyilingala Kona hills which are in rich with these plants.

Indeed, the medicinal plants are gift of the nature. Given the extensive deforestation, the medicinal plants face the threat of extinction. Hence special efforts must be initiated to protect these plants by involving tribal people will help in this regard. Plantation patches of medicinal plants are to be encouraged. It is also essential to document the knowledge of tribal people regarding medicinal plants. The tribal people must be involved in all programs concerning the development of medicinal plants. It must be recognised that the existing information on ethno-medicine is only fragmentary and studies covering the entire gamut of ethno-medicine of individual tribes must be recorded.

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