



## Research paper

## Documentation of traditional Siddha medicines for skin diseases from Katpadi taluk, Vellore District, Tamil Nadu, India



Sudharsana Sundarrajan, Mohanapriya Arumugam\*

Department of Biotechnology, School of Biosciences and Technology, Vellore Institute of Technology University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu 632014, India

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Traditional Indian system of Siddha medicine practised over thousands of years has recently gained worldwide attention. Siddha medicine is the native medicinal system of Tamil Nadu. The present study aimed to document the various practises and medications followed by Siddha practitioners in treating various skin diseases from Katpadi taluk in the Vellore district of Tamil Nadu, India.

**Methods:** A qualitative and quantitative ethnopharmacological survey was carried out among 22 Siddha practitioners about herbal remedies and *sastric* (traditional) formulations prescribed by them for various skin diseases. Successive free listing method was utilized for documenting the healers' knowledge on medicinal plants and Siddha formulations. The data were analyzed using Informant Consensus factor ( $F_{ic}$ ), use value (UV) and Informant Agreement Ratio (IAR).

**Results:** The healers prescribed a wide range of herbal remedies along with mineral based formulations. The study documented around 102 plant species and 23 *sastric* formulations for the treatment of 19 skin diseases. Based on the quantitative metrics fungal infections had high  $F_{ic}$  value (0.98) followed by Acne vulgaris (0.96).

**Conclusion:** The study emphasizes the usage of numerous plant and mineral based medications for major skin illness by many Siddha healers of the region. Further, in-depth scientific analysis on these herbal and herbo-mineral formulations is required in order to validate their usage. In addition, the validations not only highlight the significance of Siddha medicine in treating the diseases but also highlight its importance and uniqueness.

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional systems of medicine have existed for many centuries worldwide and many are still being practised. These medicinal systems are related to the cultural aspects of the people in various countries such as China, Japan, Taiwan, India and Africa [1]. There has been a continuing demand for traditional medicine worldwide. In countries such as China, Vietnam, South Korea and India the traditional medicine is integrated with the health care system [2]. Three Traditional medicinal systems predominate in India. Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani. Ayurveda is prevalent in the northern part of India and Kerala, Siddha is practised in the southern part of the country while Unani is practised all over the country [3].

Siddha is essentially a Tamil medicine and its gaining recognition as complementary or an alternative medicine. Siddha

medicine can be classified into three major divisions – plant based (*moola vargam*), mineral based (*thaathu vargam*) and animal product based (*jeeva vargam*) [4]. Siddha medicine is offered mainly by traditionally trained practitioners and doctors who have studied Siddha medicine course offered by the Government of India. Large numbers of formulations are passed traditionally among the family members of the practitioners and still they remain closed within their family members. These formulations are not well documented and they are passed orally to the next generations [5].

In recent years ethnobotanical studies are emerging as a powerful tool for documenting and analyzing the traditional medicines. These quantitative documentations list medicinal plants based on the cultural homogeneity and their usage in treating and curing various diseases [6]. Many studies are carried out to document the usage and distribution of medicinal plants in Tamil Nadu using ethnopharmacological and ethnobotanical survey procedures [7,8].

The aim of the present work was to document the knowledge of traditional Siddha practitioners from Katpadi taluk of Vellore

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [mohanapriya@vit.ac.in](mailto:mohanapriya@vit.ac.in), [vinamp30@gmail.com](mailto:vinamp30@gmail.com) (M. Arumugam).

district, Tamil Nadu. The documentation focused on collecting various formulations and single herbal remedies used in treating various skin disorders prevalent in the locality. The current work is the first report to document Siddha medicines prescribed for various skin anomalies by the Siddha practitioners located around Katpadi region.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Study area

The survey area is located in the northern part of Vellore district (Fig. 1). The town forms the northern boundary of Vellore district. The town has a fairly flat terrain with gentle slope towards the southern direction. The total area of Katpadi taluk is 21128 ha with 387922 inhabitants. The male-female ratio of the area of study is 1:1 with the literacy rate of 82% of male and 65% of female (<http://www.vellore.tn.nic.in/>).

### 2.2. Data collection

A total of 30 field visits were carried out to interview the Siddha practitioners. The surveys were carried out between March–December 2014. Prior permission was obtained from the VIT University, the village heads and healers before carrying out the survey. The inclusion criterion for the survey included; traditional practitioners who were practising for more than two generations and doctors with recognized degree in Siddha medicine. The purpose of the visit and nature of the study was explained to all practitioners in their native language. A written consent was obtained from each practitioner to establish their willingness to share their knowledge.

The study area, Katpadi taluk enclosed 88 villages. Each village was visited in person to gather details of the Siddha healers. The

remote areas of the survey region were accessed by foot with the guidance from local people. A total of 36 healers were identified, however only 22 informants gave their willingness to share their knowledge and experiences with us and 14 practitioners were excluded from the survey as they did not fall under the inclusion criteria.

The interview was conducted in the native language Tamil using a semi-structured questionnaire designed to document maximum knowledge from the healers. The interview was in the form of simple questionnaires (Table 1). The documentation was divided into two parts. The first part dealt with the demographic details such as name, gender, educational status, experience and occupation. The second part dealt with their medicinal system knowledge. Only the name of the plants and formulations used in treating the particular skin disease were disclosed by the informants. The names of the plant samples were confirmed with the help of regional floras and the names were validated by searching various web sources.

### 2.3. Quantitative indexes

The use value (UV) which reflects the relative significance of commonly known plant species to the informant was computed using the formula:  $UV = \frac{\sum U_i}{N}$ ; where,  $U_i$  is the number of uses reported by each informant for a species and  $N$  is the total number of informants. UV determines the significance of the plant species with the highest use in curing the ailment [9]. The homogeneity of the information shared by the healers was assessed by calculating informant consensus factor ( $F_{ic}$ ). The measure was computed for each illness category using the formula:  $F_{ic} = \frac{(N_{ur} - N_t)}{(N_{ur} - 1)}$ ; where  $N_{ur}$  is the number of use citations in each disease category and  $N_t$  is the number of plant species used [10]. The index of agreement on remedies (IAR) was used to assess the significance of

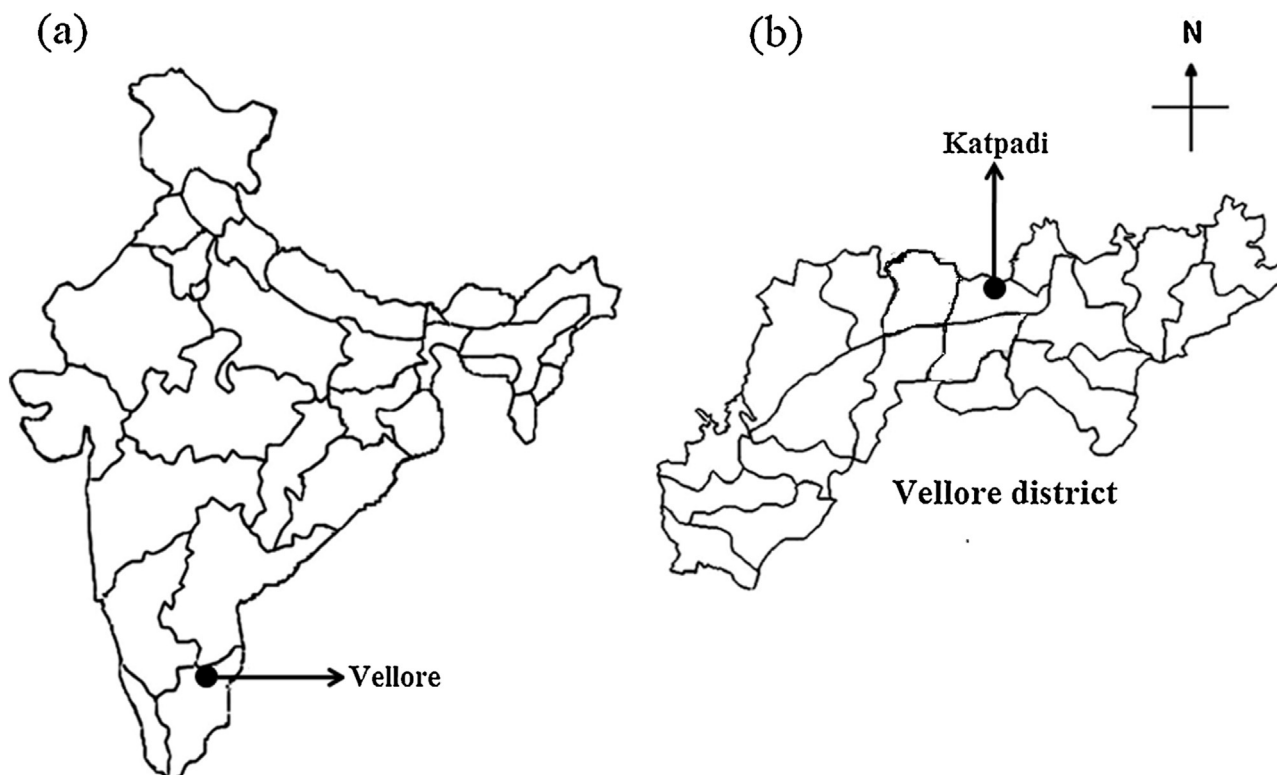


Fig. 1. Location details of the study area Katpadi taluk, Vellore district. (a) Location of Vellore district in India (b) Location of Katpadi taluk in Vellore district.

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