

The Siddha Medicinal Significance of the Temple Sacred Trees in the Eight Temples Depicting the Lord's Heroisme

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Introduction:

Temple worship is of great importance to the Tamil populace. The proverbial sayings - 'Gopura Salutations merit a million virtue', 'Reside not in a place of no temple' and 'The best prayer is one in a temple' - all go to emphasise this fact. The temples are the earthly abodes of the almighty, and in these temple grounds selected species of trees exist as the temple trees. These trees are significant in that they possess medicinal properties to become a form of worship. The temple trees of the eight great temples, in which Shiva performed the heroic merciful wonders, stand as testimony of their healing aspects and the desires of the devotees to lead a life without disease.

Although the earthly abodes (temples) of Shiva are many, for the purpose of this essay, only the eight in which He performed heroic merciful wonders are taken, to study the temple trees within and to explain the collected research data. This approach is taken in consideration of the essay length.

This research paper attempts to fulfill the following objectives:

- (i) To identify and study the temple trees of the eight heroic Shiva temples;
- (ii) To study and explain the siddha medicinal properties of the above trees.

The eight Heroic Temples and their Temple Sacred Trees:

Purana has it, that God's compassion was revealed in eight places of the earth when He triumphed over the evil forces thereat. These eight places, called the *veerattam* are sites revealing the annihilative powers of the Great Destroyer. They are collectively named *veerattaanam* and the temples are Thiruvathikai, Thiruvirkodi, Thiruppariyalur, Thirukkurukkai, Thirukkadavur, Thiruvazuvur, Thirukkovalur, and Thirukkandiyur. Belief holds that Shiva resides in these places to bless His devotees.

Most of the temples in the Tamil land do have temple sacred trees and some even have more than one. Even though, beliefs and rituals formed the basis for tree worship, trees were also taken care for environmental reasons. But specifically, the trees were worshipped for their natural curative values. Except for a few, most temple sacred trees have such medicinal properties in them. It could have been that, that these trees were selected as temple sacred trees on the basis of their medicinal value. The following table details the eight temples, the respective compassionate acts of God and the sacred trees:

Table 1: Historical Notes of the Eight Heroic Temples and their respective Sacred Trees.

Temple:	Act of Heroic Compassion:	Sacred Tree:
1. Thiruvathikai	The Burning of the triple asura city	Indian laburnum
2. Thiruvirkodi	Punishing Jalandharan	Basil
3. Thiruppariyalur	Destruction of Takkan's Sacrificial Fire	Bael
4. Thirukkurukkai	The Burning of Kama	Myrobalan
5. Thirukkadavur	Destruction of Yama	Bael
6. Thiruvazuvur	Destruction of Gajasura	Deodar, Indian mesquite
7. Thirukkovalur	Destruction of Anthahasura	Bael
8. Thirukkandiyur	Plucking of one of Brahma's heads	Bael

Siddha Medicine:

"Medicine as diet, and diet as medicine" is Siddha medicine's slogan. Siddha medicine was brought into existence by the siddha sages of the Tamil Land centuries ago. These sages, bestowed with supernatural powers, had done extensive research in handing down to posterity the above system of medicine, which is also known as the Tamil Medicine. Today, it is also practiced as Indigenous Medicine and Granny's Medicine by the Tamils.

The Siddha sages were of the conclusion that diseases occur due to the Nature's five elements and their effects on weather and environment. As a measure to cure these diseases they prescribed the Nature's herbs as the ultimate cure. Such herbs are the basis for the system of Siddha medicine. It is in this respect, the temple trees are seen as medicinal herbs having extraordinary curative powers.

The Siddha Medicinal Significance of the Temple Sacred Trees in the Eight Heroic Temples:

i. Bael (*Vilvam*):

The botanical name of bael is *Aegle marmelos*. It belongs to Rutaceae family. It is a tree. Its parts usually used are fruit (both ripe and unripe), root bark, leaves rind of the ripe fruits and flowers. Its nature and uses are as ripe fruit is sweet, aromatic, cooling, alterative and nutritive. Unripe fruit is astringent, digestive,

stomachic and little constipative. Pulp is stimulant, antipyretic and antiscorbutic. Fresh juice is bitter and pungent. Leaves, flowers tender fruit, fruit and root of this tree exhibit medicinal properties. Tender leaves are roasted and applied to cure eye diseases and redness of the eyes. This also cures all kinds of venereal diseases. Flowers give relief in indigestion.

Tender fruits are made into a paste and two grams of its is mixed in buffalo's curd and consumed to cure colic, dyspepsia and dysentery. Fruit is made into a paste in milk and applied on the head before having a bath. This gives relief in internal heat and burning of the eyes. This also refreshes the eyes. Fruit mixed with ginger and fennel seeds are bruised and made into a decoction to cure piles.

An oil is made from the pulp of the ripened fruit. This is refrigerant. Juice of the fruit checks menorrhagia, diarrhoea and dysentery. Sharbat made out of this fruit reduces body heat and checks diarrhoea. Infusion of the root along with honey checks vomiting. Infusion of the leaves give relief in colic and flatulency due to venereal diseases. Juice of the leaves mixed with pepper cures anaemia and jaundice. Juice of the leaves along with honey gives relief from catarrh of the nose and fever. Roasted leaves are used in the preparation of infusion. 100 ml of this if consumed twice daily for 21 days cures all kinds of bilious disorders.

ii. **Indian Mesquite (*Vanni*):**

The botanical name of Indian mesquite is *Prosopis spicigera*. It belongs to Mimosaceae family. It is a tree. Its parts usually used are leaves, bark and fruit. Its nature and uses are as demulcent, stimulant, emmenagogues, anti-rheumatic and emollient.

The leaves of this plant is similar to tamarind leaves. Leaves and bark is widely used in tannery. Leaf juice cures flatulance in uterus, rheumatism, phlegmatic disorders and bilious disorders. Bark decoction acts as tonic. Juice of the bark is used to calcinate salt. This salt is useful in curing indigestion, diarrhea etc. If bark ash is used on skin it gives lusture to the skin. Leaves, fruit and bark is made into a powder and mixed with honey. This mixture is an antidote for snake bites.

iii. **Indian Laburnum (*Sarakkonrai*):**

The botanical name of Indian laburnum is *Cassia fistula*. It belongs to Caesalpiniaceae family. It is a tree. Its parts usually used are pulp of the fruit, root-bark, flowers, pods leaves and root. Its nature and uses are as demulcent, laxative, vermifuge, expectorant anti-pruritic and purgative. The legume resemble drum stick nearly 2 ft. in length with numerous cells. Leaves ground in water is used for ringworm and other cutaneous affections. Tender shoots are used as laxative. Decoction made out of its flower is febrifuge and also used in colic and nausea. Bark and leaves rubbed up and mixed with oil are applied to pustules, itches, etc. The juice of the leaves applied externally reduces swelling.

The root bark decoction is given in fever and heart affections. The bark of the plant and root of *Solanum trilobatum* in equal quantity is powdered. If the powder is consumed with honey and cow's milk, it cures asthma, phlegm and difficulty in breathing. The leaves and flowers are used as an external application for the eyes to cure eye disorders. Piles and other similar disorder could be treated with the leaf extract and sugar. The mucilaginous pulp surrounding the seeds is known as tamarind as it resembles its pulp. It is dark, fragrant, and bitter and is a laxative. This could be given to children and pregnant ladies to remove constipation. It is mixed with tamarind and given in biliousness and in diabetes. Mixed with senna, it removes phlegm and taken with tara leaves, pepper, water and Indian endive it cleans the bowels.

iv. **Basil (*Tulasi*):**

The botanical name of basil is *Ocimum sanctum*. It belongs to Labiatae family. It is a Herb. There are various types of basil. The most used one are, the white variety called *Rama tulasi* and the dark variety called *Krishna tulasi*. Its parts usually used are leaves, seeds and root.

White Basil (*Rama Tulasi*)

Its parts usually used are leaves, seeds and root. Its nature and uses are as demulcent, expectorant and antiperiodic. Root is febrifuge, seeds are mucilaginous and demulcent. Dried plant is stomachic and expectorant. Leaves are anti-catharrhal, expectorant, fragrant and aromatic. The herb is pungent to taste, fragrant to smell and removes cold and eliminates phlegm. It is Stimulant, Diaphoretic and Expectorant. The decoction of this herb is used to cure poisonous fever.

Leaves are dried and powdered and if used as snuff cures cold and eradicates the worms. Juice of the leaves cures chronic fever, phlegm, colic, indigestion, loathing for food and cough in children. Juice of the leaves mixed with lemon juice is applied externally to cure cutaneous affections and ringworm. This if taken internally strengthens the liver and heart and acts as an appetizer. This cures amenorrhoea and promotes the secretion of the milk in women. Leaves if chewed gives relief from toothache. Leaf juice is applied to reduce inflammations. Boiled with gingelly oil if used as ear drops cures otitis. Infusion of root gives relief in fever. Leaves along with the leaves of *Botaical* and *nitex neguda* are cooked. The expressed juice of this if given to children gives relief from indigestion. Leaves along with milk is boiled and if taken regularly acts as an expectorant and aphrodisiac.

Seeds rubbed in water is given for irritating cough, gonorrhoea, labour pain, burning sensation during micturition and dysentery. Seeds rubbed with cow's milk are given for vomiting and diarrhoea. To treat headache leaves are taken internally and the bruised leaves are applied on the forehead. Dried and powdered root if taken twice daily for seven days cures spermorrhoea.

Dark/Black Basil (*Krishna Tulasi*)

Its parts usually used are whole plant. This is more powerful than white variety. This gives relief in cough, wheezing, boils poisonous bites and acts as an anthelmintic. Leaves are dried and powdered if sniffed up acts as parasiticide. To treat scorpion sting, nine leaves are given along with ripened cocoanut. This also cures hoarseness due to phlegm. Seeds rubbed along with cold water if taken internally cures cough and irritating cough and gleet.

v. **Myrobalan (*Kadukkai*):**

The botanical name of myrobalan is *Terminalia chebula*. It belongs to Combretaceae family. It is a tree. Its parts usually used are dried fruits, immature fruits, mature fruits myrobalans and galls. Its nature and uses are as myrobalans are affective, purgative. Fruit is astringent, alterative, laxative, tonic, rejuvenator and purgative.

There is seven varieties in Kadukkai. This is mainly used in the disease of "Thridosha". It is very effective in toothache and chronic ulcers. The white coloured myrobalan is a good medicine in stomatitis. It is an ideal external application for fistula. It could be used as a laxative and aperient. It stops nasal bleeding.

vi. **Deodar (*Thevatharu*):**

The botanical name of deodar is *Pinus deodara*. It belongs to Pinaceae family. It is a tree. Its parts usually used are bark, leaves and wood. Its nature and uses are as Bark is Astringent and Febrifuge. Wood is Carminative. Tender leaves acts as Refrigerant. The wood and the bark is of medicinal use. The tender leaves are refrigerant. The decoction of the bark gives strength. This cures chronic fever cold and reduces body temperature. The powdered bark if used as an external application to ulcers. The wood is made into a paste by milk and this paste is used as poultice, which gives sound sleep.

Conclusion:

'Health is Wealth' is a common adage. Hence, instead of waiting for a disease to strike and then venturing out to find a cure, it is wise, to intake the natural medicinal herbs in our daily diet and prevent ourselves from the maladies of being sick. It is this concept put to practice, that we see in the worship and the growing of medicinal trees as temple trees. The temple trees of the Eight Heroic Shiva Temples should not only be seen from a religious perspective, but also considered as a compendium of Siddha Medicine.

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