

**‘AMRITHAPALA’ (Janakia arayalpatra, Joseph & Chandrasekharan),
A NEW DRUG FROM THE KANI TRIBE OF KERALA**

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ABSTRACT: Amrithapala (Janakia arayalpatra), a rare and endemic plant species found in the Southern forests of Western Ghat region of Kerala, is used by the local ‘Kani’ tribe as an effective remedy for peptic ulcer, cancer-like afflictions and as a rejuvenating tonic. Search made in Ayurvedic literature indicates that the plant may be the divine drug named variously as MRITHA SANJEEVINI (the drug that can revive unconscious or dead) or SANJEEVINI, THAMPRA RASAYANI in the Oushadha Nighantu (Dictionary of Medicinal Drugs) of Tayyil Kumaran Krishnan (1906)

The health tradition of the ‘Kani’ tribe inhabiting the forests of Western Ghat region of Kerala is having a rich knowledge –system on tribal medicines of India. The herbal lore of this tribal community is a veritable storehouse of hitherto unknown information on the medicinal value of a large number of wild plants. We (Pushpangadan et. Al 1988) had reported earlier one such interesting rare plant, *Trichopus zeylanicus*, used by the ‘Kani’ tribe calls this plant AMRITHAPALA and use it as effective remedy for peptic ulcer, cancer-like afflictions and as a tonic to regain the lost strength and stamina.

Note on the Botanical identification and Morphology of the Plant:

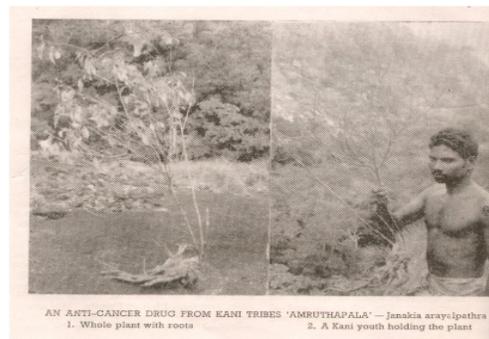
AMRITHAPALA is being identified as *Janakia arayalpatra*, a rare and endemic monospecific genus of the family *Periploaceae*. The plant was first described by Joseph and Chandrasekharan of Botanical Survey of India in 1978. As the plant was found out to be an entirely new genus of the family *Periploaceae*, Joseph and Chandrasekharan who first located this plant at Kurisumali near Trivandrum in Kerala named the genus as *Janakia* in honour of the great Indian Botanist Dr. E.K. Janaki Ammal the specific epithet is after the resemblance of its leaves with that of the ARAYAL (Local name for *Ficus religiosa* Linn., family *Moraceae*), But till date nothing was known about its medicinal value. It was during the course of the ethnobotanical investigation of ‘Kani’ tribe

that the authors have discovered the medicinal use of this plant.

Janakia arayalpatra Joseph & Chandra sekharan (Fig.1) is a perennial undershrub with milky latex. Roots are moniliform, tuberous, highly aromatic and 30 cm. long in clusters. A single healthy plant yields upto 5kg of fresh roots. Leaves are decussate, long petioled; lamina broadly lanceolate to ovate, acuminate; lateral nerves parallel, arching below the margin and getting united or not to form a submarginal vein. Colour of the petiole varies from greenish yellow to deep red on maturity. Cymes are shorter than the leaves. Flowers are small, bracteates, pedicellate. Sepals are 5, quinque-lobed with glands at the base within. Corolla tube is much shorter than the leaves. Lobes are 5 with epipetalous scales with thick discs. Filaments are free from the scales, short; anthers are elongate with an apical tetragonal appendage and pollen grains arranged in tetrads. Stigma is pentagonal and convex. Follicles are double, seeds flat and cotyledons terminal.

Tribal Claims:

The 'Kani' tribe considers the plant *Janakia arayalpatra* as a very important drug with wonderful curative properties. Expressed juice or pounded mass of the fresh tuberous root is mixed with equal quantity of the expressed juice of coconut kernel. The mixture is then boiled for sometime to attain a semisolid form which after cooling is administered per as a dose of 10-15 ml. twice daily for 15 to 30 days to cure all kinds of peptic ulcers and related afflictions. It is also recommended as a stimulant, coolant and blood purifier.



The 'Kani' tribals call this plant, AMRITHAPALA meaning the plant which gives the milky ambrosia or nectar of immortality. AMRITHA —means ambrosia or nectar of immortality and PALA—means milk. AMRITHA is also the mythical antidote potion against poison. According to 'Kani' elders the plant is named as AMRITHAPALA on account of its great medicinal properties. According to an interesting local legend the plant AMRITHAPALA was one of the divine drugs brought by Hanuman along with other divine drugs like VISALYAKANA, SANDANAKARNI and MRITHA SANJEEVINI on the orders of Chiranjeevi Jambavan to revive Laxmanan who became unconscious after the NAGAPASA (a sort of magical noose made of poisonous snakes to entangle and make the enemy unconscious) during the war of Lord Rama with the demon King Ravana of the great Indian epic Ramayana. It is said that Hanuman (the trusted aide and lieutenant of Lord Rama) drunk the milky juice of this plant to relieve himself from the fatigue and restlessness that he experienced after his strenuous journey to bring the medicinal plants from the Himalaya to Lanka, the war site where Laxmanan was lying unconscious.

Search on the Identity or Reference of the Plant in Ayurveda Literature:

A thorough search was made to find out any possible reference of this plant in the classical Ayurvedic literature. But no direct reference about this plant could be found in classical Ayurvedic works of Charaka, Sushruta or Vagbhata. However, the descriptions of a divine drug growing in similar habitat (growing in rocky services where there is deposition of some sand/soil), shape of the leaves (like that of ARAYAL – *Ficus religiosa*) and aroma of the tuberous roots (like that of SARIVA – *Hemidesmus indicus*) etc., as given in the Oushadhi Nighantu (Dictionary of Medicinal Drugs) of Tayyil Kumaran Krishnan (1906) shows striking resemblance to AMRITHAPALA. In Oushadhi Nighantu, the plant has been named variously as MRITHASANJEEVINI, SANJEEVINI or THANPRARASAYANI.

Ethnopharmacological Evaluation

A through investigation on the ethnopharmacology and phytochemistry of this plant has been initiated at the regional research laboratory, Jammu. The preliminary investigations have shown promising results and detailed investigations are in progress.

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