

Literary and Historical sketches of Tulasi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) plant in Ancient Tamil Society.

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Abstract

Tulasi is regarded as a sacred plant by Hindus, who also believe it has medicinal properties. It is grown in every Hindu home and Vaishnava temple, where it is worshipped as the goddess Lakshmi. Numerous references may be found in ancient Tamil literature, particularly Sangam and post-Sangam literatures, as well as devotional hymns written by Nayanmar and Alwar. Tulasi water is served as prasadam at Vaishnava temples, particularly in Tamil Nadu. It also offers typical medical coverage. Tulasi leaves are used to extract oil and produce herbal tea in traditional Ayurvedic medicine. The Tulasi plant's herbal nature is mentioned by Vaishnava saints, as is its link with Lord Vishnu. When a Hindu marriage occurs in a Hindu temple in Karnataka, the bride and groom wear Tulasi garland rather of flower garland.

In the Tamil Nadu district of Kanchipuram, there is an inscription from Tirumukkudal (12.7798o and Longitude 79.87145o). A Veda Patasala (Vedic School) that existed on the temple grounds is mentioned in the inscription of the Chola monarch Veera Rajendra Chola (11th century). Here, different students were taught eight disciplines, including as grammar, Rig Veda, and Yajur Veda. Additionally, this college features a medical centre (Athura Saalai) where students, faculty, and temple employees get treatment for a variety of ailments. Named for the monarch Veera Chozhan, this 15-bed hospital had plenty of staff, including a doctor named Kodhandaraman Aswathaaman Bhattan, a surgeon who operated, nurses who cared for patients, slaves who brought herbs from various locations, and even a barber. The inscriptions include comprehensive details regarding the salaries paid to hospital staff as well as the names of the roughly 20 various kinds of medications that were kept there. This article aimed to highlight the Tulasi plant's value by representation on its literary and historical context. The facts are emphasized, and the epigraphically are also consulted.

Key words: Tulasi, garland, Epigraphs, Vaishanava temples, Tulasi water (thirtham)

Introduction

Ocimum tenuiflorum, commonly known as holy basil, tulasi or tulsi, is an aromatic perennial plant in the family Lamiaceae. The herbal properties of the Tulasi plant and its connection to

Lord Vishnu are mentioned by the Vaishnava saints. When the wedding takes place in a Hindu temple in Karnataka, the bride and groom wear Tulasi garlands rather than flower garlands.

Ocimum sanctum Linn is the name of the plant and its leaves in Tulasi. In the Indian subcontinent, the plant Tulasi is known by several names; it is called Tulasi in Hindi and Sanskrit. Thiruthulazhi is the term for Tulasi that is mentioned in Tamil literary works as well as Holy Basil in English.

Tulsi is an aromatic shrub in the basil family Lamiaceae (tribe ocimeae) that is thought to have originated in north central India and now grows native throughout the eastern world tropics. Within Ayurvedic, tulsi is known as “The Incomparable One,” “Mother Medicine of Nature” and “The Queen of Herbs,” and is revered as an “elixir of life” that is without equal for both its medicinal and spiritual properties. Within India, tulsi has been adopted into spiritual rituals and lifestyle practices that provide a vast array of health benefits that are just beginning to be confirmed by modern science. This emerging science on tulsi, which reinforces ancient Ayurvedic wisdom, suggests that tulsi is a tonic for the body, mind and spirit that offers solutions to many modern day health problems.

Species of Tulasi

Ram Tulasi, which has bright green foliage, Krishna Tulasi, which has purplish green leaves, and Vana Tulasi, which is a common wild variety.

- Rama Tulasi (*Ocimum sanctum*): Also known as green leaf Tulasi, this kind of Tulasi is distinct from others and has light purple blooms with a clove-like fragrance. It contains mellow-flavored clove oil, which is often found in cloves.



- Krishna Tulasi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*): This variety of Tulasi is also known as purple leaf Tulasi and smells like cloves. It has a peppery taste to it. This variety of Tulasi aids in the treatment of skin conditions, respiratory issues, earaches, and throat infections. In addition to being used as ear drops, Krishna Tulasi oil is also used to treat cholera, indigestion, malaria, and sleeplessness.
- Vana Tulasi (*Ocimum gratissum*) : Native to India, Sri Lanka, and northeastern Africa, vana Tulasi is a variety of Tulasi that is typically grown for therapeutic purposes and is ingrained in Indian religious beliefs. This kind requires protection from freezing temperatures and thrives in full sun and arid regions. Its light green

leaves have a citrus fragrance and scent. Vana Tulasi leaves, which are typically used to make tea, boost immunity. When taken as tea, it gives our bodies more oxygen and nutrients and improves our mental and physical stamina, among other health benefits.

The Significance of Tulasi plant:

Hindus consider Tulasi to be a sacred herb, but it also has medicinal uses. It is planted in every Hindu home and Vaishnava temple, where it is revered as the goddess Lakshmi. Ancient Tamil literature, especially Sangam and post-Sangam literatures, as well as devotional hymns of the Nayanmar and Alwar saints, contain numerous references. In Vaishnava temples, especially those in Tamil Nadu, Tulasi water is offered as prasadam. It has traditional medical benefits as well. When the wedding takes place at a Hindu temple in Kerala or Karnataka, the bride and groom wear Tulasi garlands rather than floral garlands.

Tulasi in Tamil Literature:

In Tamil literature, Tulasi is frequently mentioned in relation to Lord Vishnu. Tulasi is revered as being extremely close and precious to Vishnu in the Sangam texts Paripadal and Padirrupattu. In Patherrupattu, 31:8 Silapadikaram XII: 113, Paripadal: 13:29

In third-century BCE Sangam literature, Tulasi is referred to as Tulai. They report that the leaves of the Tulasi plant have a pungent and powerful scent. Its lovely odour is discussed by the sangam poets. Paripadal Tulasi, who is glad to wear it, adores Lord Vishnu's shoulders in the Sangam masterpiece. The Parapadal time is 4.58, 8.1, 13:60, 15.15.

Tamil literature's devotional songs capture the social and religious climate of the time. Two significant compilations of Tamil devotional literature are the Devaram and Divyaprabandham. Saints from Alwar and Nayanmar, respectively, wrote them. Praise for Vishnu and His various forms is sung by the Divya Prabandham. A song to Lord Shiva called Devaram. In South Indian tradition, they have great cultural and religious significance, especially in relation to Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Twelve Vaishnava poets (Alwars) compiled four thousand holy lines about Lord Vishnu in the Naalayira Divya Prabandham. It is thought that the Tamil verses were written in the eighth century CE.

Ancient Hospitals in Tamil Nadu:

The existence of hospitals in ancient Tamil land was mentioned in a number of inscriptions. Following the Jains' arrival in Tamil Nadu, the Jain monks began practicing medicine after learning the Tamil medical system. They made medications for the public while residing in the hillocks and caves. Both the northern region of Tamil Nadu and the area surrounding Madurai include Jain beds and inscriptions. Their time span is from the third century BCE to the third century CE. The inscriptions date from the 9th to the 13th century CE, which is the mediaeval Chola period.

The hospital system of medical services that later developed in Tamil Nadu, especially during the Chola period (9th century CE to 13th century CE), may have been based on this kind of medical treatment.

Hospitals at Thanjavur Sundara Chola Vinnagara Athula Salai, Thanjavur, Sivayoganathar Temple Thiruvialur, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur, Vembattur, Thanjavur, Srirangam, Trichy, Thiruppugalur, Nagappattinam, Thirundhudhevanakudi, Thanjavur, and Thirumukkudal in Chingleput district near Chennai were among those listed in the inscriptions. Rajendra Cholan, Vira (1062–1067).

Inscription from Tirumukkudal

- In the Tamil Nadu district of Kanchipuram, there is an inscription from Tirumukkudal (12.7798o and Longitude 79.87145o).
- A Veda Patasala (Vedic School) that existed on the temple grounds is mentioned in the inscription of the Chola monarch Veera Rajendra Chola (11th century).
- Various students were taught eight disciplines here, including grammar, Rig Veda, and Yajur Veda. Additionally, this college features a medical centre (Athura Saalai) where students, faculty, and temple employees get treatment for a variety of ailments.

This 15-bed hospital bears King Veera Chozhan's name. The hospital had a lot of staff, including a doctor named Kodhandaraman Aswathaaman Bhattan, a surgeon who operated, nurses who cared for patients, servants who brought herbs from other locations, and even a barber. The inscription includes information on the salaries paid to the hospital's staff as well as the names of roughly 20 different kinds of medications that were kept there.

In Ayurvedic medicine, tulasi:

- Supports Heart Health;
- Treats Kidney Stones;
- Reduces Headaches;
- Fights Acne;
- Reduces Fever;
- Improves Eye Health;
- Improves Oral Health;
- Treats Respiratory Disorders;
- Rich in Vitamin K

Present day Tulasi

In the United States, Tulasi (Holy Basil) is mostly utilised as a nutritional supplement. Tulasi's adaptogenic qualities are well known for assisting the body in managing stress. Ayurvedic medicine has long utilised tulasi for its anti-inflammatory properties. Tulasi may have anti-cancer effects, according to research. Tulasi has been shown to support liver function by having hepatoprotective properties.

Conclusion

The Tulasi plant has both medicinal and religious uses. When Corona virus Disease (COVID-19) struck, Ayurvedic practitioners used Tulasi water and tablets to treat the patients. It has been suggested that tulasi is an antibiotic. The custom of administering water containing Tulasi to a dying individual additionally, it temporarily postpones degradation. It was valued in ancient customs, especially in Ayurveda, for its capacity to ward against illness and advance general health. Tulasi is still utilised today for a number of health advantages, such as its antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant qualities. Tulasi cultivation goes beyond delivering benefits for people and households by focussing on ethical, sustainable, and ecological farming practices that provide a living for thousands of growers. It also begins to address bigger social, economic, and environmental concerns.

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