

Traditional herbal healer

APPRECIATION

Kunjira Mulya (75) hails from Mala village, Karkala taluk in Udupi district of Karnataka. His father, Angara Mulya was a well known herbal healer (*Naati vaidya*) during his time and he used to treat cattle and human diseases. Kunjira Mulya learnt the skill of herbal medicine from his father. As long his father was alive, he never treated any ailments, as per the family tradition. But, he assisted his father in the collection of medicinal herbs from the nearby forest patches and also in the preparation of medicines. For the last 30 years, after the death of his father, Kunjira Moolya has been practicing herbal medicine in Mala village.

A healer par excellence

Kunjira Mulya treats both human and cattle ailments. According to Kunjira Mulya, so far he has successfully treated over 5000 humans and an equal number of cattle during the last 30 years. With great pride he states that as on today no one has succumbed to death as a result of his treatment, although most of his patients happen to be terminal cases.

Human diseases

Some of the major diseases which affect human beings which he treats are: Malaria, Typhoid, Rheumatism, Jaundice, Herpes, Mumps, Vomiting & Diarrhoea, Diabetes, Sores, Piles, Asthma, Epilepsy, irregular mensus and White discharge.

Poisonous animal bites

He has also got successful antidotes for Cobra bites, as well as other Snake bites (Viper, Krait), Scorpion bites, Spider bites and Bee/Wasp bites.

Cattle diseases

In cattle he treats immobility of limbs, Bloating of stomach or stomach pain, Diarrhoea with mucous and blood, worm

infestation in wounds, loosening of teeth disease and limb fractures.

An extraordinary case

Kunjira Mulya recollects one of the rare cases that he dealt with in 1985. Once all six members of the family of Obayya Gowda fell sick after consuming mushrooms collected from a neighbouring 'Bhogi haadi' (Hopea plantation). Presumably they must have cooked one of the varieties of poisonous mushrooms and consumed it along with their night meal. One by one, the members of the family started suffering from vomiting and dysentery and by early morning their condition was critical. Luckily for them, their neighbours got to know of their plight and called Kunjira Mulya for treatment, since there were no hospitals or clinics in the neighbourhood. After studying the situation, Kunjira went to the nearby forest patch and collected four medicinal herbs and made a decoction and gave them and this saved a family which was practically on the verge of death.

A Parataxonomist too

Besides being an herbal healer, Kunjira



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Mulya also served as a parataxonomist in the Biodiversity Conservation Prioritization Project (BCPP) of WWF-India, which led to the preparation of India's first People's Biodiversity Register (PBR) of Mala village panchayath. The ongoing People's Ecosystem Assessment Project (PEAP) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India, under the guidance of Prof. Madhav Gadgil of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, owes a great deal to Kunjira Mulya for his valuable contributions towards the documentation of traditional knowledge and biodiversity of the Western Ghats of the Mala village Panchayath region. Kunjira Mulya commands respect for his knowledge not only of medicinal plants and herbal medicine, but also of other plant and animal taxa covering over 800 species.

Recognition

Kunjira Mulya was felicitated by the Bhuvanendra Nature Club-India (WWF-India), the Nature Club of Sri Bhuvanendra College, Karkala, in 1996 along with the '*Pashu vaidya*', Kadari Srinivasa Prabhu (another cattle herbal healer of Mala), during the 42nd Wildlife Week Celebrations-cum-Salim Ali Birth Centenary Seminar on 'Conservation of Biodiversity of Wetlands'. Jnanapeeta Awardee Padmabhushana Dr. Kota

Shivarama Karanth, Deepak Sharma, Conservator, Wildlife North Circle, Shimoga, K. Amaranath Shetty, MLA of Moodbidri, were among the dignitaries who felicitated these traditional knowledge holders. Since then a number of organizations have felicitated him and he was also invited for the conferences of the *Naati vaidyas* in several places including the one state level conference recently held in BAIF, Tiptur where he was felicitated. New Delhi's 'National Board of Medicinal Plants' has recently awarded '*Vanaoushada Pandit-2003*' award to Kunjira Mulya. This award includes a bronze idol of *Dhanvantri*, a citation and a cash award of Rs. 10,000.

Future worries

Kunjira Mulya is 75 years old now and what worries him most is that with his demise, his entire traditional knowledge which he has quite proudly preserved will also vanish. He tried to teach this methodology of herbal treatment to his youngest son, who was not enthusiastic about it and did not have the confidence for identifying and procuring the medicinal plants required for the preparation of these herbal medicines. One hopes that the extraordinary knowledge of this healer shall be documented and maintained for the benefit of future generations.