



# **Astrological belief and practices of plants corresponded to Sun in Tamil culture of Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu – A qualitative ethnobotanical study**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present study aims to document the plants associated with Sun's remedial measures in astrology, traditional knowledge related to astrological purpose from astrologers (n=34) and belief cum practices from local people (n= 156) of Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu. Participatory Rural Appraisal methods and Rapid Rural Appraisal were used to collect data and information from the study area. The present study has reported 8 plant species namely *Aegle marmelos*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Cinnamomum camphora*, *Cinnamomum verum*, *Crocus sativus*, *Hibiscus rosa sinensis*, *Nelumbo nucifera* and *Triticum. aestivum* along with 15 astrological purposes, 19 beliefs and 22 ritual practices. The study evaluated the practices and revealed that the used plant parts nature, colour and wavelength were associated with remedial measures and supports that there is a systematic and scientific reason behind the astrological belief, custom, knowledge, opinions and practices.

Keywords: Astrology, Belief, Ethnobotany, Practices, Sun Remedial plants, Traditional knowledge

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Astrology is an integral part of Tamil culture as people seek astrologer predictions related to all auspicious and inauspicious religious rituals starting from birth to death, for their wealth, health and materialistic issues based on individual's natal chart. Astrologer based on the pre-determined position of planets in natal chart, studies the energy of the planets related to the planets movement over time of during prediction and suggests various remedial measures to planets adversity or malefic effects. Plants were one among them and astrologer use the plants associated to celestial bodies for remedial measures. Every country in all continents some kind of astrological practice exists or has existed. Presently, humans are living in the age of uncertainty and they want to assess materialistic things and get remedy instantly. For this purpose, they are using astrology as a tool and the current astrological boom began with the advent of the personal computer, accelerated with the Internet, and now reached new speeds through astrology based smart phone applications and social media. Ruminant nature of astrology also encourages self-reflection, enabling individuals to understand themselves and their environment more clearly. Moreover, all sects of people from the urban to rural, the most educated to the most ignorant and the higher to the lower social strata believe celestial bodies linked with certain plants will emancipate the planets malefic effects. However, the exact basis of planets and plants interrelation and how these plants will emancipate the planets malefic effects remain mystic till date. Therefore, there is a need to unravel the specific connections between the plants and the planets used in remedial measures for deductive inference of whether these practices have any practical use to humankind today. An in depth view of astrological practices identifies and provide scientific knowledge, information and strengthens its reality through congruence of science. Earlier work reports only the remedial plants of moon (Komalavalli & Shanthini, 2021) and not about the belief and practices. In view of this, the celestial body Sun the main source of light and life on earth was selected to explore and assess the people belief and practices about remedial plants among astrologers and local public of Sivaganga, the most backward districts known for its great heritage of culture and tradition of Tamil Nadu, India.

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## 2.Methodology

Sivaganga, a landlocked district lies between 9° 30' – 10° 30' N latitude and 77° 00' – 78 ° 30' E longitude with an altitude of about 102 m (334 feet) above mean sea level has an area of about 4189 sq. km. The investigation period was from December 2020 to December 2021 and study sites includes twelve blocks viz. Sivagangai, Kalayarkoil, Manamadurai, Thiruppuvanam, Ilyankudi, Devakottai, Kannangudi, Sakottai, Kallal, Thiruppathur, Singampunari and S. Pudur of Sivaganga district to get all possible information from informants. The techniques and method followed for information gathering from astrologers and local public includes Snowball and Participatory Rural Appraisal methods for astrologers and random selection and Rapid Rural Appraisal methods for local public informants using semi structured questionnaire, direct interviews and oral conversation in the local language Tamil. The method of selecting informants depends upon the distribution of having knowledge and practicing experience regarding astrology, belief and ritual practice.

## 3.Results and Discussion

**Table 1 - Socio-Demographic details of informants.**

Variables	Dimensions	Informants types					
		Astrologers	%	Local public	%	Total	%
Gender	Men	24	70.59	76	48.72	100	52.63
	Women	10	29.41	80	51.28	90	47.37
Informants	Total	34	100	156	100	190	100
Age	20 - 30	1	2.94	20	12.82	21	11.05
	31 - 40	3	8.82	19	12.18	22	11.58
	41 - 50	3	8.82	22	14.1	25	13.16
	51 - 60	5	14.71	20	12.82	25	13.16
	61 - 70	8	23.53	16	10.26	24	12.63
	71 - 80	5	14.71	18	11.54	23	12.11
	81 - 90	7	20.59	24	15.38	31	16.32
	91 - 100	2	5.88	12	7.69	14	7.37
	Above 100	0	0.00	5	3.21	5	2.63
	Illiterate	0	0.00	24	15.38	24	12.63
Education	Upto class 5	2	5.88	11	7.05	13	6.84
	Below SSLC	2	5.88	19	12.18	21	11.05
	Matriculation	0	0.00	11	7.05	11	5.79
	Graduate	25	73.53	52	33.33	77	40.53
	Postgraduate	5	14.71	25	16.03	30	15.79
	Doctorate	0	0.00	14	8.97	14	7.37
Experience as astrologer or practicing rituals	Between 11–20 years	7	20.59	81	51.92	88	46.32
	Between 21–30 years	8	23.53	16	10.26	24	12.63
	Between 31–40 years	10	29.41	18	11.54	28	14.74
	Between 41–50 years	7	20.59	24	15.38	31	16.32
	Above 60 Years	2	5.88	17	10.9	19	10.00

Table 2 - Astrological purpose, belief and practices of plants corresponded to sun as reported by astrologers and local public in response

Plant name	Parts used	Astrological		
		Purpose	Belief	Practice or Ritual
<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Correa.	Leaves	Neutralize the sun's afflicted and debilitated effects	Provide positive frequencies as each leaflet in trifoliolate leaves denotes Lord Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma	Worshipping the deity of sun, Lord Shiva with trifoliolate leaves on Monday for a period of 48 days
	Fruits	Eliminate bad luck and karmic (previous birth) sins	Increase the longevity of a debilitated husband, to promote fertility and to observe positive frequencies	Girls having debilitated husband are married to <i>A. marmelos</i> fruit on Monday either prior to marriage or during the afflicted period
	Wood	Overcome sun's malefic effects and to remove karmic sins	Connect with the cosmos and with their own consciousness to remove negative energy	Performing havan on birth star day of an afflicted individual during early morning hours between 3 to 5 am
	Roots	To overcome sun's malefic and ill effects	Remove negative energy and brings prosperity and positivity in life.	Tied red cloth containing roots in the ankle of an afflicted individual.
<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) Dryand.	Leaves	Get blessing from divine power or God	Protect from negative energy and evil forces	Offering leaves to Lord Ganesha, Hanuman and Shiva on Saturday
	Flower	Get blessing from divine power or God	Protect from negative energy and evil forces	Flowers are offered to Lord Ganesha, Hanuman and Shiva on Saturday
	Stem	Purify the afflicted individual's environment	Cleanse all negative energy present in one's aura.	Performing havan on birth star day of an individual during early morning hours between 3 to 5 am
<i>Cinnamomum camphora</i> (L.) J Presl.	Distilled Bark or Wood	Get blessing from God	Cleanse all negative energy present in one's aura.	Lighting the Camphor and showing the flame to God
		Increase prosperity and health.	To experience deep reflection of mindfulness.	Using camphor to lite the ritual fire
		Remove envy and ill effects Ward of negative energy in house	To attract money and goodluck. Bring success, health, wealth and joy	Keeping camphor in wallet, jewel or cash box Hanging cinnamon sticks at the front door on waxing sunday.
<i>Cinnamomum verum</i> J.Presl.	Wood or Bark	Remove bad dreams	Keep the individual safe	Placing cinnamon sticks under the pillow
		To attract money	Bring prosperity	Keeping bark sticks on wallet on full moon day
		Get blessings from ancestor and god	Brings piety and power to religious practice.	Offering saffron as <i>prasadam</i> to God
<i>Crocus sativus</i> L.	Dried stigmas	Remove envy and ill effects	Bring success in business	Keeping saffron in red cloth on full moon day and sprinkling saffron ink in business paper
		Attain spiritual dimension	Awaken <i>kundalini</i> energy	Using saffron in ritual fire
		Get rid of Venus ill effect in married life of female	Attain deliverance from <i>Maangalyadosha</i>	Donating cosmetics containing saffron to female, Wearing saffron <i>tilak</i> (a dot on the forehead).
<i>Hibiscus rosasinensis</i> L.	Flowers	Get blessings from divine power	Create positive divine force	Offering Hibiscus flowers to all Hindu deities
<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.	Flower	Neutralize the sun's afflicted, debilitated and malefic effects	Bring prosperity, peaceful and positivity in life	Offering flowers to Devi Lakshmi, Lord Shiva, Vishnu and Sun on Sundays
	Stem Fiber	Get rid of Sun's ill effect in life	To attain deliverance	Lighting a lamp with the wick obtained from the stem of the lotus flower every Sunday
	Seeds	To attract money	Bring prosperity	Used in havan to please goddess Mahalakshmi. Seeds are connected with a string and weared as chain
<i>Triticum aestivum</i> L.	Grains	To get blessings from ancestor and god	Provide positive energy throughout the body	Cooked or germinated grains are offered to God
		To remove envy and get blessings from elders	Bring success in married life	Wheat Grains are thrown over the Bride during Bridal Wedding

### 3.1. Socio-demography of informants

The study includes information about socio-demographic variables of informants such as age, education, gender and years of practicing experience (Table 1). Information gathered from 34 astrologer (male 24 and female 10) related to astrology and about people belief and practices from local public (male 76 and female 80) alone in order to avoid bias. The age group range 61-70 has highest number of astrologer (8) followed by 81-90 (7), 51-60 and 21-80 (each 5), 31-40 and 41-50 (each 3), 91-100 (2) and 20-31 (1). The local public has maximum informants in the age group 71-80 (49) and minimum in above 100 (10) group. All the astrologers' informants are literates. Out of 34 astrologers 25 (73.53%) are graduates, 5 (14.71%) postgraduates, 2 (5.88%) below SSLC and 2 (5.88%) upto class five. In the case of local public, 15.38% are illiterates, 33.33% graduates, 16.03% postgraduate and 8.97% doctorates. In total, 87.37% of informants were literate and 12.63% were illiterate which shows that the literacy rate was high in the study area. The experience of astrologer and local public practicing astrology and rituals respectively range between 10 to 70 years.

### 3.2 Scientific rationale of astrological belief and practices

The Tamil people seek astrologer advice mainly to neutralize or to overcome sun's afflicted, debilitated and malefic effects for deliverance and to bring prosperity, peaceful and positivity in life. Table 2 shows the astrological purpose, its belief, plants and plant parts used for various ritual practices. The present study has reported 8 plant species, 15 astrological purposes, 19 beliefs and 22 ritual practices to emancipate Sun's ill effects. The use of *Aegle marmelos*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Cinnamomum camphora*, *Crocus sativus* and *Nelumbo nucifera* for havan is to purify the environment as the species are natural purifier of the environment through controlling pathogens, phytoremediation and absorbing atmospheric and aquatic pollutants (Seth, 2003; Abdullatif *et al.*, 2016; Ravi Kant *et al.*, 2020) and also due to longevity and survival nature at extreme conditions. Keeping *Cinnamomum camphora* and *Cinnamomum verum* plant parts in cash or jewel box may be due to insect repellent fragrance and embalming nature of the species (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Narayanankutty *et al.*, 2021) which protect wealth from natural damage that is tagged to wealth attraction and ward off negative energy. Ritual use of *Crocus sativus*, *Hibiscus rosa sinensis* flower and *Triticum aestivum* grains were said to be auspicious because of its respective red and yellow colour as both wavelengths increases cognitive performance, decrease depression and bring happiness, improve mood, stabilize human circadian rhythm by stimulating melatonin production and regulate plant growth development (Mbina *et al.*, 2015; Subba Rao, 2019). The rational reason behind the practice have shed light on remedial plant mysteries and proves that for every astrological purpose, belief and practices there was a systematic and scientific reason.

## 4. Conclusion

In this study, the Sun remedial plants belief and practices is of traditional scientific concern as the remedial measures identifies the Inductive inferences of ancestral practices and validated to deductive inference through evaluation of existing practices. It suggests that, there was a systematic and scientific reason behind the astrological belief and practices. This might also contribute to future studies related to diseases and medicinal uses that might provide a comprehensive insight into taxonomy, pharmacognosy and drug development of these remedial plants.

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