



**TRADITIONAL TREATMENT METHODS OF LAKSHMIKUTTY AMMA (TRIBAL  
POISON HEALER) FOR POISONOUS BITES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Many traditional practitioners are practiced all over south India, one of them Lakshmi Kutty Amma, the tribal medical practitioner who recently shot to fame when the Centre honored her with the Padma Shri, exemplifies the need to live in harmony with nature. The aim of the minor project is document the treating methods of Lakshmi Kutty Amma for the poisonous bites. Lakshmi Kutty, a member of the Kani tribe, lives in a small thatched hut in the forests of Kallar near Ponmudi, Thiruvananthapuram. She treats various kind of poisonous bites. I designated the topic for my minor project work about traditional poison healer Lakshmi Kutty Amma. I got permission from my Institution for field visit to her hut. She was treating more than 40 patients per day mostly unknown poisonous bites and also some common chronic illness like Arthritis, Sinusitis, etc., and methodology also documented by video format. she makes herbal formulation by her own Traditional knowledge. Some Medicinal formulations for bites were documented.

**KEYWORDS:** Tribal practitioner, Herbal medicine, Poisonous bites.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Traditional medicine (also known as indigenous or folk medicine) comprises medical aspects of traditional knowledge that developed over generations within various societies before the era of modern medicine. It has been practiced in India over 5000 years. But Institutional level accomplished through degree course past 60 years. Many traditional practitioners practice the indigenous medicine successfully. They also strengthen the value of our traditional medicine. Ultimately, the World Health Organization has implemented a nine year strategy to "support Member States in developing proactive policies and implementing action plans that will strengthen the role traditional medicine plays in keeping populations healthy."<sup>[1]</sup> Mother Nature has created innumerable living-beings and non-living beings of which animals, birds, reptiles, plants, herbs, metals, poisonous substance; mineral, salts and other organic substances are useful in different ways to human being who are considered supreme creation.

Recognition is the acknowledgement of an individual or team's behavior, effort and accomplishments that support their goals and values. The nationwide recognition of Lakshmi Kutty's remarkable contribution to traditional medicine is just the first step. This opportunity must be used to create sustainable benefit and access-sharing

models for indigenous knowledge. Over the last couple of years, the government has made a break with tradition with regard to the Padma awards. First, it democratized the process of nomination, allowing regular citizens to nominate the awardees, thus breaking the stranglehold of members of Parliament, ministers, state governments, governors, previous awardees and prominent citizens. Second, it promised to recognize and honor unsung everyday heroes whose work has improved the lives of people around them.

This has resulted in rewarding unique Padma awardees like Meenakshi Amma, the oldest kalari gurukkal (kalaripayattu teacher), and Nanammal, a 97-year-old yoga teacher. Among them is the remarkable Lakshmi Kutty from Kerala, an expert in tribal medicine. Within three days of the announcement of the **Padma Shri award** for her, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded her service to society in Mann Ki Baat, the radio programme hosted by the Prime Minister.

Lakshmi Kutty, a member of the Kani tribe, lives in a small thatched hut in the forests of Kallar in Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram district. Her reputation as a healer draws hundreds who trek to her hut for treatment, primarily for poisonous snake and insect bites. She learnt her vast repertoire of herbal lore from her mother, who

was a midwife and a healer for the tribe. Her keen observation of nature has given her further insights into creating remedies.

Lakshmikutty, a 75-year-old tribal woman is a poet, poison healer and teacher at Kerala Folklore Academy. She lives in a small hut with a palm leaves roof in a tribal settlement, deep in the forest of Kallar in Thiruvananthapuram district. With medicinal herbs and plants surrounding her small hut, hundreds trek to the forests to visit Lakshmikutty, who offers herbal treatment for poisoning. But it's not only medicine that she has to offer but she also helps calm those affected with her gentle words, which can last for hours.

All her knowledge on herbal treatment, she says, was passed on from her mother, who worked as a midwife. And with neither Lakshmikutty nor her mother making a written record of the medicinal plants and their uses, the Kerala Forest Department has decided to compile a book based on her expertise.

She says, "I can prepare about 500 medicinal treatments from memory. Till now I have not forgotten them. But people come here for poison treatment mainly snake or insect bites," Lakshmikutty has had a keen interest in sharing her deep understanding of plants and herbal medicine. She has guided many research fellows who seek her help in documenting the rich medicinal flora of the Kallar region.

#### **Kallar region**

The Kallar region, where Lakshmikutty lives, is located in the southern part of the Western Ghats, one of the world's 10 'hottest biodiversity hotspots' for its sheer diversity of species. At the last count, the Western Ghats is home to over 9,000 plant species, 139 animal species and over 500 bird species, with many of them endemic to this region. New species are routinely discovered every year.

#### **Kani tribe**

Many tribal groups live in harmony with nature. One of the largest is the Kani tribe, with over 16,000 members, to which Lakshmikutty belongs. The Kani's were traditionally nomadic communities who have now largely settled down. They mostly engage in traditional occupations like basket weaving, mat making, cane works and the collection of forest produce like honey.

The tribe has traditionally possessed rich knowledge of herbal medicine, which has been passed down through generations by word of mouth. Generally, this knowledge is strictly kept within the community. The Kani people trace their knowledge of medicine back to Agasthiya Maharishi, who is considered to be the founder of the Siddha system of medicine that is prevalent in Tamil Nadu.

Kani folklore narrates how their ancestors were originally proficient in archery. Agasthiya changed this because he wanted peace in his abode of meditation. He took away their bows and arrows and in return gifted them a scroll of herbal remedies and a boon that they could cure the sick with their sacred chants.

Since then, the Kanis say, they have been proficient in their healing tradition of malamarrunnu, the medicine of the mountains. Interestingly, the entire region is known as Agastiyar Koodam, the abode of Agasthiya.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Kanis consider this medicinal knowledge a sacred practice and the healers would not charge for consultation. The system has a strong focus on toxicology. It says that poison can enter the body through five different routes Damshanam (bite), Sparshanam (touch), Shwasanam (breath), Snamam (bath) and Banam (drink). Each has a different treatment mechanism, which is a combination of external and internal administration of herbal antidotes, followed by a strict dietary regimen. There seem to be strong similarities with Siddha and Ayurveda in terms of diagnosis and treatment.

#### **Education and family life**

She was born on 1944 may 8 her mother's name was kundhi devi and her father's name was sri Rangan. She says about her father "I have not seen my father, he died at my age of six months" and about her mother "My mother was also a traditional medicine practitioner. She was a midwife. My mother passed down the knowledge to me. I deeply watch the nature, it has all the remedies". Her persistence made her the only tribal girl from her area to attend school in the 1950s. "I still wonder how I went to school. I was stubborn that I go to school and my father finally had to agree," she laughs.

Lakshmikutty walked 10 kilometers every day to get to school. She, however, studied only until class 8 as her school did not have higher education. One of the boys she walked to school with was her cousin named Mathan Kaani, who she have a deep friendship with that eventually progressed to marriage. She says about his husband "He was with me in all my decisions and achievements. He used to tell me that I can achieve my goals even without him because I was a strong woman. He was the perfect partner from the day I got married at the age of 16 until he died two years back". She gave birth three sons Lakshmikutty and her husband provided their children with a good education. Not wanting their children to face the same challenges they had undergone as tribals living in the forest., she says. "I was adamant that my children should study. Nobody in our settlement gets an education, I consider it valuable," But misfortune struck Lakshmikutty's family.

The most painful incident she had gone through was her elder son's death. He was killed by a wild elephant. Her younger son also died. Another son is working as chief ticket examiner for the railways. she said "My son died

due to snake poison, so I gained all the knowledge I could on it. When one is injected with poison it is important to suck it out at the earliest, but with no roads and no hospitals nearby, it is a dangerous issue in the village as we live amidst wild animals.”

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

I took my topic for the minor project as my department oriented; I got guidance and permission from my Institution and department for the minor project work, scheduled for field visit to Lakshmikutty amma house, Trivandrum. The visit was programmed by preliminary and foremost. I went to Lakshmikutty amma hut at first on May 1<sup>st</sup> week for three days and Main visit on July 1<sup>st</sup> week for 6 days and it's a interaction visit and all the Data was recorded by video with her permission.

### 2.1 Visit to Lakshmi kutty Amma Hut

I was planned to visit Lakshmikutty amma house because my minor project about treatment of poisoning through traditional medicine. It was wonderful trip to gaining knowledge.

I was reached Thiruvananthapuram, early morning of luminous day i reached the beautiful village; the surrounding lush greenery is heaven to plenty of birds. A small hut with palm leaves roof inside a tribal settlement with medicinal herbs and plants surrounding her hut. It's located inside of the forest near Kallar River.

When I reached her house some patients were waiting for treatment, she had one relative with her named as Devaki to help. At first patients were requested to enroll their name and address and reaching time in the register. Patients came from all surrounding districts of Kerala state, nearly 20 to 40 patients per day (approx.) for various kind of diseases particularly for unknown bites. She nurtures around 150 herbal medicine plants, which have saved around 350 people bitten by poisonous snakes. She also treats the non-communicable diseases like Diabetic mellitus and Hypertension. She wakes up at early morning and continues her medical experiments such as preparing concoctions late into the night. In between, she attends to patients who turn up at her doorstep for help. She approach the patients in compassionate manner, which liked by most of the patients. When the patients came with acute condition she treating with simple herbals which surrounding her hut. If the patients needed some long term treatment she gave her own formulated and prepared medicines, and also had her vast knowledge patent formulations. Especially for unknown bites she used to chant some mantra's before treating the patients.

She did not have any fixed consulting fees and charging for medicines only. For the poor and needy person she did not demand for money. She was sharing her enormous knowledge about the herbal treatment with the persons whom desire to know about the herbals and also she allowed willing person to stay in the hut.

Some Medicinal plants are commonly used by Lakshmi kutty amma which mentioned below,

1. Clinacanthus nutans- விஷபச்சிலை
2. Tribulus terrestris -யானை நெருஞ்சில்
3. Tylophora indica-நஞ்சறுப்பான்
4. Piper longum- திப்பிலி.
5. Sida Cordifolia- குறுந்தொட்டி
6. Desmodium gyrans- தொழுகண்ணி
7. Salacia reticulata. Wight-பொன்கரண்டி
8. Piper nigrum- மிளகு
9. Cedrus deodara-தேவதாரு
10. Vitex negundo- நொச்சி
11. Andrographis paniculata -சிரியாநங்கை
12. Tinospora Cordifolia- சீந்தில் கொடி

When the patients came with poisonous bites she use one of the above mentioned medicinal plants internally and externally. She make extract immediately from the plants by using her palm and gave the extract orally and apply the mixture of the plants over the affected part. Before doing this she chanting some Mantras and pray with divine poems to god.

### 2.2 Awards and honors

However, Lakshmi kutty amma who has been awarded so many honors lives in difficult circumstances. She has won numerous awards.<sup>[3]</sup>

- Many fondly refer to her as 'Vanamuthassi' (Grandmother of the jungle in Malayalam).
- It was in 1995 that Lakshmikutty got noticed by those outside her forest when she received the 'Naattu Vaidya Rathna' award (award for naturopathy) from the Kerala government.
- Awards from Kerala University, the State Biodiversity Board and recently from the Indian Biodiversity Congress in 2016.
- She has received the country's fourth highest civilian honours Padma Shri Award for her breakthrough in practicing traditional medicine in 2018.

### 2.3 Other works

Lakshmikutty has been invited to conferences on traditional medicine across the southern states. But beyond the world of natural medicine, she is also a writer with over 40 poems to her credit. who also writes dramas and is a teacher in folklore academy, revealed that she got this knowledge from her mother who was a traditional midwife. She has written numerous articles ranging from tribal culture to the forests, which have been published by DC Books. Her poems, she observes, can be recited on a rhythm. "These are simple words anybody can recite, it's not in tribal language as you expect," she smiles.

### 3. OBSERVATION

The Padma Shri awarded to Lakshmikutty is indeed a well-deserved recognition for her life and work. However, it is important that we don't confine this to only a celebration, but also focus on the larger issue of recognition of the knowledge systems of our forest dwellers and tribes. We must use this opportunity to ideate on and create sustainable benefit and access-sharing models for indigenous knowledge.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The 75-year-old woman insists, "The outer world has given me a lot, awards, honors, published books and so on. But I want to stay here. To live in the forest, you need courage. Despite fame and recognition, Lakshmikutty still lives a difficult life. She resides alone in her hut that has no road connectivity, making travel difficult and perilous in a forest with wild animals. She is also concerned that patients cannot be brought to her in time for treatment. Lakshmikutty dreams of setting up a small hospital around her home so that those who come for treatment can stay until recovery.

She said "There is no road to my home. It was approved in 1952, but the work hasn't started till now," she said. she hopes the government will consider it. "We have to travel many kilometers through the forest. There are wild animals including elephants. People cannot bring patients in time. Hence, I request the government to do something about it,"

Many of the plant species and herbal remedies used are unique to the tribe and unknown to the outside world. This holds tremendous possibilities for furthering medical research. If this is done in a sensitive, just and equitable manner, by consulting the tribe and protecting their intellectual property, this could be beneficial both for the Kanis and humanity at large. With India being home to over 100 million forest occupants, each group possessing its own unique traditional medicinal systems, this assumes tremendous importance.

While Lakshmikutty's story is inspiring to say the minimum, it is definitely one of courage and inspired effort. It is also important for us to see her in the light of the broader context of tribal knowledge systems and practices.

She does not depend on anyone else to collect raw materials from the forest and make medicines. Her tale of struggle is an inspiration as she takes care of precious lives as well as the nature that surrounds her.

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