

**INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE ON PLANT TAXONOMY IN SRI LANKA
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE FOLK CLASSIFICATION
SYSTEM IN THE NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCE**

H.M.D.R. Herath

*Department of Sociology, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
herathsoc@yahoo.com*

Four medical traditions are in operation in Sri Lanka since ancient times namely, the *Sinhalese* indigenous medical tradition, the Auyrvedic tradition, the Siddi tradition and the Unani tradition. All four traditions are directly connected to plant extractions of root, bark, leaves, flowers, and seeds or fruits. The plant taxonomic knowledge has evolved in the Auyrvedic tradition using Sanskrit words in the “*Saraswathei Niganduwa*,” in Siddi tradition using the South Indian Dravidian names defined by “*Vanavasa Niganduwa*”, and in Unani tradition based on the Islamic cultural tradition. The main objective of this study was to discuss the Sinhalese plant taxonomy which has been developed based on close observations made on plant behavior. The field research was done in five villages in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka, close to the Ritigala rock plant preservation area. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted. The results showed that there is a well-developed plant taxonomic knowledge in Sri Lanka with the use of vernacular names based on color, shape and other qualities of the plant and its appearance. Sixteen plant groups were reported by according to the nature of the vernacular names; vernacular name linked to the nature of the plant (*e.g.* whether a tree, creeper or green leaf - *pala*), environmental objects major geographical region, climatic zones, indigenous or foreign origin, whether naturally occurring or domesticated, plant height, stem, thickness and other characteristics, body parts of humans, taste of the plant, agricultural tools used in the Sinhalese society, intrinsic characteristics of plants, another plant and to Sinhalese gods and the devils. The study revealed the presence of a Sinhalese Indigenous Plant Classification and an adhered, advanced medical system that were different to the Auyrvedic, the Siddi and the Unani systems.