Wild Edible and Medicinal Plants and the VALAIYANS

- An Investigation
The present investigation deals with the distribution of the Valaiyans and their dependence on different wild food and medicinal plants.

The Valaiyans are distributed in various places of Tamil Nadu in small settlements especially along the hill tracts in Madurai and Tanjore districts (Sampathkumar, 1991). In the census report 1991, the Valaiyans are described as a "Shikkari (hunting) caste" in Madurai and Tanjore: In the Madras Gazette, the Valaiyans are included in the list of denotified community (number 220) inhabiting Madurai, Dindigul, Tiruchirapalli, Pudukkottai, Erode and Coimbatore districts. In the manual of Madurai, the Valaiyans are referred as "a low and debased class" (Thurston and Rengachari, 1987). The name Valaiyans is supposed to be derived from Valai a net and it has been given to them because they are constantly employed in netting game in the jungles.

The present study focuses on the wild edible food and medicinal plants consumed by the Valaiyans settled in the forest areas. The study area lies in Madurai district.

The area of investigation lies between 78°E and 78°2' E longitudes and 10°N and 10°2' N latitude. The altitude varies from 2000'-3000'. It receives rainfall from both Southwest and the Northeast monsoons.
Variations in the altitude and rainfall always have a bearing on the vegetation in general. The study area consists of tropical evergreen forests, semi evergreen forests, mixed deciduous forests and dry grassland.

In the study area, the Valaiyans live in several isolated pockets or in small hamlets. Their habitations are known by the following names.

1. Chathiravellalapatti  2. Katchaikatti
5. Muduvarpatti        6. Ramakoundanpatti
PLATE - 1

AREA SURVEYED

a. A view of Western Ghats in Perumalai

b. Sirumalai Hills

c. Vaguthumalai Hills
a. Kilavamalai Hills

b. Forest area in Kilavamalai Hills

c. Upper Hills in Parumalai
PLATE - III

VALAIYANS OF THE AREA SURVEYED

a. A Valaiyans family of Mettupatti

b. A Valaiyans family of Valaiyapatti

c. A Valaiyans family of Saranthangi

d. Children of Valaiyans of Saranthangi

e. Chithirai, a Valaiyan holding Ceropegia juncea Roxb.