

ILEIA Newsletter **Vol. 11 No. 3** p. 27

## Extensive knowledge on weeds in Tamil Nadu

### G. Nammalvar

*Tamil Nadu in the southern most part of India lies between the Bay of Bengal in the east and mountains in the west (Western Ghats). Agriculture has been practised along the rivers flowing from west to east since as early as 10,000 BC. Two thousand years of literature reports thousands of plants being studied for their habits, habitats and values.*

*Already in those early days, farmers had the wisdom regarding plants competing with crop plants for nutrients, soil moisture and sunlight. Many different ways to manage this variety of plants have been known. In some places weeds themselves have been treated or cultivated as main crops taking into consideration the economic merits. This short report gives only some examples of the many uses of "weeds" known by farmers in the region.*

In the plains of Cauveri river 1,400,000 acres are under wetland rice cultivation. Based on the availability of river water, a crop rotation pattern has evolved. Where there is sufficient water, short duration rice, long duration rice and gram are rotated. Where there is difficulty in getting water, long duration paddy is followed by gram.

The "weed" wild indigo (*Tephrosia purpurea*) plays an important role in this cropping system. A week before the harvest of winter rice, gram seed (black gram or green gram) is mixed with wild indigo and broadcast. No weeding of any kind is done. Because of early germination and a faster growth rate gram is able to compete with other plants. Wild indigo is very appropriate in this rotation. It does not germinate under wet conditions. So, it comes second, grows slowly and remains as a cover crop cum green manure during summer.

The seeds of wild indigo remain dormant during the growth period of rice. The plant is an annual with self propagation capacity and a drought resistant character. It does not need to be sown every year. It is enough if it is not ploughed before seed setting. This practice is carried out in fields where intensive cropping systems have been introduced supplemented with bore well irrigation. Wild indigo is a companion for many other cultivated plants.

### *Farmers experiment*

Farmers of the Tamil Nadu LEISA Network are keen to look at herbs for their multipurpose values. More than twenty research-cum-resource centres are emerging in the state, carrying out valuable trials and experiments. Mr. Bernard of Annapoorna farm, Auroville, uses all sorts of weeds in combination with crop seeds to improve the fallow before taking up cultivation. He succeeded by growing two creepers, velvet bean and *Canavalia* sp. and making in-situ composting. Mr. Balakrishnan of

Dhabovanam, Thanjavur district, is making use of weeds in converting sand dunes into fertile gardens. He uses all weeds to make mulch that suppresses weed growth and conserves soil moisture.

Mr. Thangasamy of Karpaga Solai, Pudukkottai district, is experimenting with a handful of plants, comparing their use value as cover crop, green manure and fodder. He has been successful in controlling nut grass by growing trees of different kinds. Mr. KR Muthusamy of Annai Pozhil, Tiruppur, has succeeded in getting a good harvest in turmeric by mulching the crop with weeds that grew in between. He allows for weed growth throughout the garden only to do mulching for cultivated crops.

Mr. Rajaram of Thulasi farm, Trichy district, collects the agro-wastes available along road sides, throws them as a thick bund in the contour line. He grows crops, trees and vegetables. With the conservation of moisture and increase in the organic content, a wide range of weeds are growing which in turn are used as material for mulching. Mr. Ganapathi of Sakthi farm, Pudukkottai, is rearing ducks and allows them in the rice fields. The ducks eat the weed seeds and reduce weed population by maintaining the puddled condition.

**G. Nammalvar**, LEISA Network, No. 1, 1st Street, Ezhil Nagar, Keeranur 622 502, Pudukkottai Dist. Tamil Nadu, India.

*Note:* This article is based on a longer article sent to us by Mr. Nammalvar. Readers who are interested in having the longer version can write to ILEIA for a photocopy.

**[Back to Top](#)**