The Europeans who arrived at India after the perilous voyages were astonished at the variety of flora and fauna of India. Some of the European Doctors evinced keen interest in identifying the locally available plants along with their medicinal uses as known and used by the local physicians and made efforts to publish books with illustrations of these plants and also other substances of medicinal value.

A book, rather a monumental work, with many illustrations is *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* written by Hendrik Adrian Van Rheede (1637-1691). Van Rheede was a Commander of Cochin in the employ of the Dutch East India Company from 1673-1678. It was during these years, he had time to study and collect a large amount of information about the plants of Kerala. Van Rheede died on voyage from Ceylon to Surat in 1691 and was buried in Surat where a very fine monument has been built over his tomb. But a still more enduring monument is his scientific memoir, *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus*.

*Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* is a work of 12 folio volumes with 794 illustrations, published in Amsterdam during 1678 and 1703. The pictures of each plant of Malabar have been prepared with detail and the names are mentioned in four languages *viz.*, Latin, Arabic, Sanskrit and Malayalam. While collecting information regarding the plants of Kerala, the author sought help of the natives and the Portuguese. In the preparation of this work for publication, he received assistance from scientists and medical men of Holland. Some historians are of the opinion that this book was prepared by Reverend Father Mathews, born in Italy and spent about 60 years in Kerala as a Priest. His name was mentioned in the introduction of the book. The title page indicates that Prof. Johannes Munnicks, M.n., of the Faculty of Anatomy and Botany, was joint-author of one volume and that Abrahamus Appoot, M.D., added notes, commentary and illustrations to another.

Four renowned physicians and scholars of Kerala of that period by name Ranga Bhattan, Vinayaka Pandithan, Appu Bhattan and Itty Atchuthan, mainly contributed to this work. *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* contains statements of these persons regarding their respective roles in the construction of this work. The statement of the first three persons was combinedly written in Marathi language and attested with their signatures. The statement of Itty Atchuthan, who belonged to Alleppey district, is in Malayalam language and the signature at the end of the statement is “Kollattu Vaidyan”. This perhaps is the first time in History that the script of Malayalam was printed.

English translation of the Marathi statement is as follows:
HORTUS
INDICUS
MALABARICUS,

Catalogus Malabarici, Indorum, & c. rariorum plantarum, nominibus expressus,

Una cum Raminis, Fructibus, & seminibus, naturali magnitudine et

peromnia pictorum delineatás, & ad vnum exhibitis.

Adnotatque accurate eorum descriptionem, quae coloris, odoris, jure, facultatum,

et quae primo Medicini, & servis exstilendi demonstrantur.

Henricum van Rheede, van Draakensteyn,

vapriem Malabari Regni Gubernatorem, munе supremi Contraeapud

Indos Belgii Senatori, Extraordinariam, & primum succellorem

loci ordinarior destinatam,

et

Johannem Casearium, Fidelissimi in Cochin.

Notis adduxit, & Commentariis illustravit

Arnoldus Syen, Medicus & Botanicus in Academia

Lugduno-Bavari Prefector.

Amstelodami,

Joannis van Someren,

et

Joannis van Dyck

Anno MDCLXXVIII.
Photo-stat copy of the statement of the three physician-scholars—Rangabhattan, Vinayakapanditan and Apubhattan in Marathi.
"On the tenth day of the black fortnight of Chaitra month and Rakshasa year of Salivahana saka 1597, on a camp at Cochin, we Rangbhatta, Vinayak Pandit and Appu Bhattan (eye physician) write the following in testimony of truth so that no one should treat this as false: On a message from Adrikin Fondre, Commander of Cochin, we collected herbs, flowers, fruits which are used for medicine from this Malabar Desha through a person who was paid for it and who was specialised in discriminating medicinal plants. This material was collected in the various seasons when they are grown. Then on, all the herbs, fruits, flowers etc. were painted. Later on we testified and tallied this material with the descriptions in the Materia Medica which we had brought along with us. We then described these herbs, their effect etc. of which we had experimental knowledge. For the last two years both in mornings and evenings we were doing this. Whatever is written over here should not be treated as false hence we are attesting our signatures below.


The statement of Itty Achuthan (Kollatu Vaidyan) is written in the so called "Kolaluthu script" of Malayalam which was employed to write documents up to the 18th century. The following is the English translation of this statement:

"By the order of the Commander Hendrik Van Rheede, I, a Malabar Physician of the Ezhava caste, born in Kollad House at Kadakkarapally in Karapuram village came to the Cochin Fort and dictated as already agreed, the details of the trees, shrubs, creepers and grasses in Kerala providing with diagrams, and the medicinal treatment with them, from the practical experiences as well as the erudition gained from our precious old books, to Manuel Carner, the official translator of the Company, so as to record them in books after clearing the doubts, in such a manner that no learned men of this field in Kerala could find fault with it and for this it is written in Cochin Fort on 20th April, 1675.

Kollatuvaidyam."

There is also a statement by Manuel Carner, the official translator of the Company, written in the so called “Grantha Lipi” of Malayalam. The following is the English translation:

"By the order of the Commander Hendrika Van Rheede, I, Manuel Carner, born, married and put up in Cochin, working as the official translator of the Company at Cochin Fort, wrote down in books both in Malayalam and Portuguese languages separately, the details, virtues and uses of (medicinal) trees, shrubs, creepers and grasses in Kerala and their flowers, fruits, seeds, roots and essences etc. being dictated by a Malabar Physician, Kolladan, belonging to Ezhava caste, born in Karapuram village, according to my previous agreement thus the work is completed after clearing all doubts and mistakes and for this agreement my signature is given in this writings in Cochin Fort on the day, the 19th April, 1675.

Manuel Carner."

The information collected for the preparation of this voluminous work is about 3 centuries old and therefore reveals both the ecological and medicinal values of these
A Photo–stat of the statement of Kollatu Vaidyan in Malayalam.
A copy of statement of Manuel Carner in Malayalam
medicinal plants of that period. A comparison between this knowledge of 3 centuries old with that of the present day may enlighten the scholars of various disciplines regarding the flora of the Malabar Coast.

I wish to acknowledge with thanks that the information about the life of Van Rheede and magnum opus Hortus Indicus Malabaricus was brought to my knowledge by Dr. D. V. Subba Reddy who also collected the photographs of Title page etc. for the museum of the Institute.

I acknowledge with thanks the help rendered by Sri Shamsuddin Kunju, Lexicon Assistant, Malayalam Lexicon, Trivandrum and Prof. S.R. Kulkarni, Head of the Department of Marathi, Osmania University, Hyderabad for translating the respective Malayalam and Marathi statements.

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