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Cover: Digital illustration of *Impatiens chamchumroonii* in Krita by Dupati Poojitha.



A note on the Petal-less Caper *Maerua apetala* (B.Heyne ex Roth) Jacobs (Capparaceae)

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A Capparaceae family member, the Petal-less Caper *Maerua apetala* (B.Heyne ex Roth) Jacobs (= *Capparis apetala* B.Heyne ex Roth), was first reported as a small unarmed tree, endemic to the dry forest in the Eastern Ghats in Krishna, Kurnool, and Cuddapah districts, and southern Western Ghats in Tirunelveli (Gamble & Fischer 1935; Ahmedullah & Nayar 1987). Later, it was reported to be a medium-sized deciduous tree, endemic to southeastern India, especially in Eastern Ghats (Pullaiah & Rao 2002; Kumar & Raju 2021; Narasimhan & Sheeba 2021; POWO 2024), and Kanniyakumari coast (Kader 2015). In this paper, we report it as a large-canopied but short dry evergreen tree. In Tamil Nadu, it was reported from the districts of Kanniyakumari, Tirunelveli, Virudhunagar, Madurai, and Namakkal (Narasimhan & Sheeba 2021). The first author already reported five small trees in Kanniyakumari Railway Station (Kader 2015) which were removed for extending the railway track during December 2020–January 2022. In this paper, we report that *M. apetala* is also distributed in Vattakottai Fort in Kanniyakumari, Kavalkinaru in Tirunelveli District, in the hills of Thirupparanuntram and Kidaripatti in Madurai.

Maerua apetala is a rare, large-canopied but usually a short, unarmed, dry evergreen tree with

pinnately trifoliolate dimorphic leaves, small dark greenish-purple fragrant flowers in axillary and terminal racemes, and long-stalked ovoid berries (Image 1). It is an ethnobotanically important tree species. In Andhra Pradesh the Chenchu and Lambadi people use root bark paste and root extract to treat leucoderma. The tender leaves are ground with spices and the paste obtained is made into pills which are given orally for nervous disorders and foot pain (Flowers of India 2023). It has been reported to grow up to 4 m (Pullaiah 2000), up to 5 m (Pullaiah & Rao 2002), and up to 10 m height (Kumar & Raju 2021) at 0–300 m elevation, however, none of them reported its girth. During our field visit on 15 January 2022, we noticed a large tree with 3.30 m GBH and 10 m height inside Vattakottai Fort near Kanniyakumari (Image 1). It is the largest known tree of *M. apetala* and is under the control of Tamil Nadu State Department of Archeology. Extensive explorations to similar habitats in the adjacent localities are required to estimate its threat status for conservation assessment. Its flowering occurs during December–February and fruiting during February–April.

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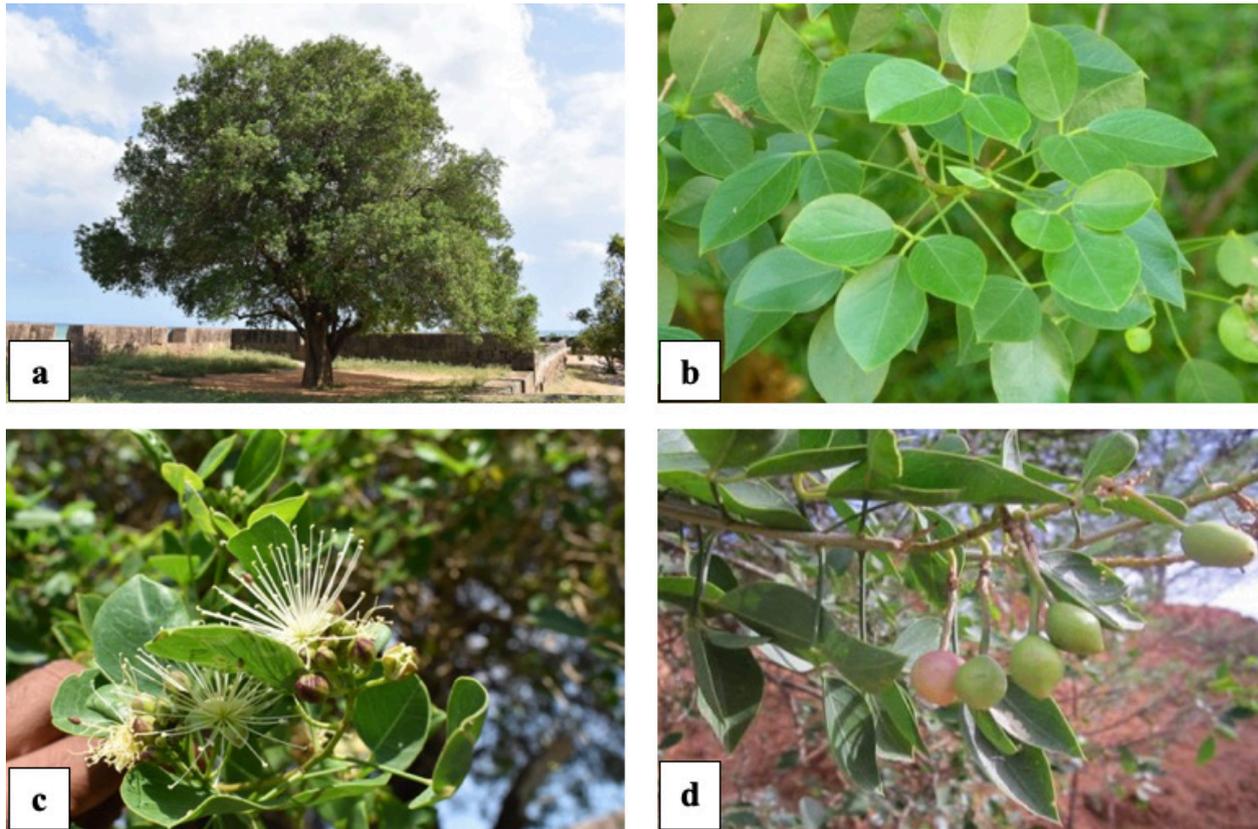


Image 1. *Maerua apetala*: a—habit | b—leaves | c—flowering twig | d—fruits. © Kader S.A.

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