THE WILD PLANTS OF AESTHETIC VALUE IN ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands situated in the Bay of Bengal (Lat. $6^{0}14^{0}$ N and Long. $92^{0}94^{0}$ E) are bestowed with bounty of natural scenic beauties in and around. The evergreen forests spreading over the islands and the blue sea water around make a good contrast thus commanding the attention of the inquisitive tourists and visitors. It is quite interesting to know that without the plant life and greenery, the islands would not have been a botanical paradise.

FLORA

The insular flora of Andaman & Nicobar Islands consisting of more than 2000 angiospermic species is unique to India because of the tropical humid climate and insular nature of the territory (8290 sq. km), although it shows affinities to the flora of Myanmar in the north, Thailand and Malaysia in the east and Sumatra and Java in the south. As nearly 280 species that grow in the isles do not occur elsewhere in the world they deserve to be conserved in their natural habitats at any cost.

TYPES OF FORESTS

There are four distinct types of forests in these islands viz. the littoral forests occupying the flat strips of land along the sandy coasts (Fig.1), the mangrove forests also known as 'Mangal' forests confining to sea washed soil and fringing the creeks (Fig.2), the evergreen forests perhaps the lovliest of all the types of forests on these islands and lastly the deciduous forests with normal leaf shedding character.

AESTHETIC VALUE

Any plant community or a plant or a part of the plant attracting the attention of any visitor will be certainly of some botanical significance. The showy flowers, the green foliage, the pillar like boles, the closely set root stock and pendulous radicles in case of mangroves, the winged fruits and the forest canopy as a whole are of aesthetic value fascinating the nature lovers, and the islanders are fortunate enough to be in the midst of innumerable botanical beauties around. Among the littoral forests the most notable

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Fig.1. Littoral vegetation in Great Nicobar.



Fig.2. *Rhizophora mucronata* Lam. (A mangrove fringing the creeks)



Fig.3 *Manilkara littoralis* (Kurz) Dub. - Along seashore in Andaman Islands.



Fig.4. *Pandanus lerum* Jones

and common along the seashores of the islands is *Manilkara littoralis* (Kurz) Dub. ('Mohwa' or 'Andaman Bulletwood Tree') with its dark green foliage look majestic and magnificent reaching a height of about 40 m above msl (Fig.3). These trees broadering the coasts give definite shape and beauty to the islands. There are many other trees and shrubs in the littoral forests such as *Pongamia pinnata* (L.) Pierre with its newly put on light green foliage and lilac flowers, the species of PANDANUS (Fig.4) with their scarlet fruits of the size of a man's head, the plants of BARRINGTONIA (Fig.5) also known as 'The Queen of the seashores' with their 'powder-puff' looking like flowers, the *Linostoma andamanica* Hutch. an endemic plant whose fruits are attractive with their delicate veined wings spreading out like those of birds are some of the handsome plants that beautify the seashores.

Next comes the well known mangrove forests also known as Mangal forests, the chief component of them being the RHIZOPHORA (Fig.2) fringing all the tidal creeks At some places they being closely set form impenetrable belts of vegetation at the water's edge many miles long and as much as a mile towards the land regularly getting inundated by the tides. Their pendulous radicles and exposed root stock are also a source of attraction. Another mangrove looking pretty well and beautiful is *Excoecaria agallocha* L. when it puts on new foliage and also when the leaves turn bright yellow or red before falling. These mangroves not only look attractive but also protect the islands from soil erosion hence acquiring the epithet the coast guard'.

No less important are our deciduous trees such as the well known padauk botanically known as *Pterocarpus dalbergioides* Roxb. with very large buttresses and stout ascending and spreading branches, *Terminalia procera* Roxb. also known as 'badam' with a flat umbrella shaped crown *Pterocymbium tinctorium* (Blanco) Merr. also known as 'papita' with unique and attractive folicles shaped like a lady's shoe and the famous 'Garjan' botanically known as *Dipterocarpus incanus* Roxb. with its straight cylindrical bole and large crown with stout, fantastically curving branches. This particular noble tree is perhaps the largest of all the magnificent forest trees attaining greatest height while growing along the large strems. *Lagerstroemia hypoleuca* Kurz, an endemic tree with its attractive flower bunches is yet another one looking conspicuous when it is in blossom.

It is the evergreen forests undoubtedly where the vegetation has the ample growth and healthy colour of luxuriance indicating the fertility of the soil. These forests are the abode for a variety of most beautiful and captivating plants such as *Dipterocarpus griffithii* Miq. another 'Garjan' species with a grey bark peeling in flakes. ANCISTROCLADUS



Fig.5. *Barringtonia asiatica* (L) Kurz.



Fig.6. *Rhynchostylis retusa* (Linn.) Bl.



Fig 7 *Cymbidium aloifolium* (Linn) Sw



Fig.8. *Phalaenopsis cornu-cervi* (Brede) Bl. & Reichb f



Fig.9. *Cyathea albo-setacea* (Bedd) Copel (Tree Fern).

(Lour.) Merr. a climbing plant with tufts of long handsome leaves, *Gnetum scandens* Roxb. an interesting gymnosperm with its catkin inflorescences which look exactly like caterpillars with black rings and legs all around, and the climbing bamboo botanically known as *Dinochloa scandens* (Bl. ex Nees) O.K. which form impenetrable thickets on the high hills.

In addition to the plants already mentioned there are other groups of plants like the drooping orchids (Fig.6, 7 & 8) from the tree branches, the monsoon plants coming up in the marshy places with their attractive coloured spathes and spadices, the aroids lining the roads in rainy season, the flowering 'Melastomas' and 'Balsam' plants in the inhabited areas and the common 'banyan' trees with their clasping stems certainly add to the beauty of the islands. The areca nut and coconut groves at several places, the 'tree ferns' in Nicobars (Fig.9), the scrub forests adorning the Saddle Peak in north Andamans, evergreen forests of Mt. Harriet in south Andaman near Port Blair and Mt. Thullier in Nicobar group of islands are some of the natural spots contributing to the aesthetic view of the islands in general.

CONCLUSIONS

The great responsibility lies in conserving the plant diversity in the islands without which these islands can hardly deserve to be called as the green emeralds of the Bay of Bengal. This is more pertinent at this juncture in view of the fast expanding tourism industry in the islands.

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