



SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS, FOREST-LANDS AND TRIBAL KNOWLEDGE OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS, INDIA.

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Aspects of ethno-botany in developing regions of South and East Asia especially, the problems of socio-economic development of tribals *vis-à-vis* local resource and knowledge seems a meaningful discourse of local, regional and global dimension. A test case of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India situates itself in an area of rich plant diversity, vast array of local races and their wild relatives of medicinal and crop plants. This region is also a home of varied ethnic groups striving to carve their place in the developing societies. Despite this interesting socio-economic construct studies on the region have remained casual and patchy, providing no answers to tribal developments on the strength of local resource knowledge that remains still un-tapped. The present paper deals with socio-economic primacy and significance of local- indigenous tribal knowledge with regional and global implications *vis-à-vis* ethno botanical significance of forests of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India.

Andaman Islands are home of four 'Negrito' tribes- The Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese. The Nicobar Islands are home to two 'Mongloid, tribes-The Shompen and Nicobarese. These tribes are relegated to the nick-name of *van putras* based on their intimate knowledge and living in harmony with forests and its resource. These tribes, as many other forest dwellers cling to the remote areas of the region in the Andaman and Nicobar islands in deep forests preserving and using the forest lands and its resource. These open up opportunities and scope for studying folklores and folk claims for enhancement of knowledge preserved with these primitive tribal communities for systematic utilization and sustainable exploitation of forest lands and plant resources for the benefit of mankind, especially, the medicinal and herbal use of endemic and rich biodiversity in South Asia.

Tribals are the natural protectors of the forest and their practices are detrimental to forest conservation. Indian tribal community is an isolated group confined mostly to forests or other remote regions, away from the mainstream populations and forests remained their chief source of livelihood. The ecosystem of forests has an intimate relationship with the life of these forest dwellers. The cultural pattern and economic activities such as food gathering, pastoral life, cultivation, handicraft and other labour activities are largely based on forests. Various forests policies and developmental plans have provisions to the protection and development of tribal people, the indigenous age old customs and their way of life have already been threatened to a great extent. Their survival continues at the cost of over consumption of resources and exploitation human values. Understanding the extent of such situation requires knowledge of the existing social status, human value, and equipment of artifacts, interaction patterns and the utilization patterns of the surrounding resources. However such up to date scientific information is lacking for most of the Indian regions where tribals had been anthropologically subscribed but their role in the forest ecosystem is not sufficiently elucidated. The present study is carried out to record and to conserve the traditional knowledge of the Andaman and Nicobar islands inhabitants for the benefit of their socio-economic status.

Ethnobotany, is the first science which originated with the evolution of man on this planet. India has very rich tradition in knowledge of folk about various useful and harmful properties of plants around them. Broadly, this is the science called Ethnobotany today, though the term Ethnobotany was coined by Harsh Berger (1895) only about a century ago. Organized study in this science was initiated in India by E.K. Janaki Ammal in the second quarter of 20th century. Since then several Botanists in India initiated studies in different aspects of ethnobotany and published over 1500 research papers in national and international journals covering over 125 ethnic groups (Jain, 1963; Jamir, 1990; Rao 1981; Saxena and Vyas, 1983; Gupta and Awasthi ,2003; Awasthi, et.al. 2008).

Almost all the states of India have been studied, but islands of Andaman and Nicobar are less explored. There are 572 islands in the territory having an area of 8249 km². Of these, about 38 are permanently inhabited. The Andaman and Nicobar islands have a tropical rainforest ecoregion, has not been ethnobotanically explored except a few works (Bhargava, 1983; Awasthi, 1991; Awasthi and Goel, 1999; Patnaik, 2006). Ethnobotanical studies made during the author's stay at the Botanical Survey of India, Andaman-Nicobar Circle, Port Blair, India. During this study the information are collected on particular class of indigenous uses, like plants in food, medicine, other material culture and even faith or tradition related to the conservation of bioresources.

Alcorn, 1995 studied the researches of several ethnobotanists in developing countries relating specially to problems of socio-economic development and laid emphasis on the question- what good in this plant? If this question can become the focus of field workers, interviewers, the data and interpretations of ethnobotanical research can become still more meaningful. Keeping this view in mind the present study has been carried out. Plants have a very important place in the economic and cultural life of the tribals and tie between the two can be strengthened by preserving the forests. Since, the tribal economy and the forest development are mutually dependent; if the forests are destroyed the tribal too would perish.

I feel, there is an urgent need to conserve the natural wealth of The Andaman and Nicobar islands, which can become an economic resource directly or after some improvement and processing for local inhabitants. The findings of present study have given a good contribution to the knowledge of local plants and their uses to the society. Recommendations of present work have provided a guideline for improving the socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants.

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