

Ethnomedicinal uses of certain plants from Bay Islands

Sonali Das, T E Sheeja & Asit B Mandal*

Biotechnology section, Central Agricultural Research Institute,
Post Box No 181, Port Blair 744101, Andaman & Nicobar Islands
E-mail: amanda2@rediffmail.com

Received 25 November 2004; revised 15 March 2005

Andaman and Nicobar Islands represent a biological paradise for plant biodiversity. Medicinal plants of these islands also represent a typical Malayan flora. About 52 medicinal plants are found to be endemic. The present article encompasses a glimpse of a few important medicinal plants from Bay Islands along with the folk knowledge gleaned through recurrent survey. Enormous prospect in drug discovery is discernible from these species.

Keywords: *Nicobarese* tribe, *Shompen* tribe, *Jarawas* tribe, *Sentinels* tribe, *Ongese* tribe, *Great Andamanese* tribe, Medicinal plants, Ethnomedicine, Bay Islands

IPC Int. Cl.⁸: A61K36/00, A61P1/04, A61P1/12, A61P11/06, A61P13/00, A61P17/00, A61P19/02, A61P33/06, A61P33/10

Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a landmass of 572 islands, isles, rocks and reefs, located about 1200 km away from the mainland India is located between the latitude of 6-14°N and longitude of 92-14° E. This archipelago possesses rich biodiversity under a typical tropical environment. The total land area encompasses 8249 sq km. The islands are blessed with about 3100 mm rainfall distributed over 8 months starting from May- December owing to the influence of Southwest and Northeast monsoon. The total forest area of the islands is about 84.3% and in general the islands are lush green due to luxuriant vegetation. The vegetation pattern includes coastal littoral, mangroves, island deciduous and evergreen forests. There are 2500 angiospermic species of which 223 are endemic. The human population is increasing at an alarming rate and has already crossed islands carrying capacity¹. The traditional knowledge is fast diminishing owing to recent modernization and overall development of the islands. At this point it was felt essential to survey for collection and collation of folk knowledge in relation to medicinal plants used by the people residing here for generations.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also considered to be a hot spot of biodiversity of medicinal plants. Out of 2500 angiospermic species distributed across the island territory, the aboriginals, viz. *Nicobarese*, *Shompen*, *Jarawas*, *Sentinels*, *Ongese* and *Great*

Andamanese use 52 species as medicaments²⁻⁶. The Central Agricultural Research Institute, Botanical Survey of India and Society of A & N Ecology (SANE) have mounted efforts towards compilation, collection and collation of information about medicinal plants available in these islands. Several studies were conducted and medicinal plants of these islands were documented⁷. The medicinal plants commonly used by the locals and tribes, those found in the mangrove areas, medicinal plants exclusively used by tribals, medicinal plant suited for homestead farming, etc. have been identified. The family consisting of largest number of endemic species is Rubiaceae with 41 species followed by Euphorbiaceae and Orchidaceae with 34 and 24 taxa, respectively. *Isora* of Rubiaceae is the largest genus with 12 species endemic to the islands. Out of 301 taxa, 251 are species, 7 are subspecies and 43 are varieties. Further, 62 species, 2 subspecies and 9 varieties are found to be endemic to both Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 135 species, 5 subspecies and 2 varieties are endemic to Andaman only and 54 species and 12 varieties are endemic to Nicobars only⁸.

Methodology

Recurrent survey was made in South, Middle, North and Little Andaman and Nicobar Islands to document available folk knowledge about the herbal formulations being used by tribals including aboriginals. The plants were identified in Botanical Survey of India, Port Blair and herbaria were kept in

*Corresponding author