

the laboratory. Information about the medicinal uses of those plants was collected from the tribal people inhabiting these islands. Some important species are described below with botanical description, their uses as gleaned from folk knowledge in cure of diverse ailments of the islanders.

### Results

1. *Alstonia macrophylla* Wall. ex G. Don (Apocynaceae); Local name: *Chatium*, *Chuharoi* (Nicobari) (Fig. 1)

Salient features: A tall tree; leaves digitately compound, alternate, entire, attached at the nodal region of the stem, margin slightly curved, tetranately whorled; flowers in polychasial, corymbose cymes; sepals connate, lobes short, usually obtuse; petals 5, connate in a salver shaped corolla; tubes cylindrical; stamen adnate near apex of tube; anthers subacute; carpels 2, distinct; ovules numerous, seriate. Fruits slender follicles; seeds oblong or linear flattened; flowers in February; found in sea level at Katchal, North Nicobar, Car Nicobar and in North, Middle (Baratang) and South Andaman.

Uses: In curing gastric disorder, malarial fever, swelling, bone fracture. The leaves as well as stem bark are being used to treat various human ailments. The stem bark and leaf are said to possess emmenagogue, anti-choleric and vulnerary properties<sup>9</sup>. It can be administered either as decoction, infusion or tincture. Decoctions of leaves and stem bark were widely used among the tribal population of Bay Islands to treat stomachache, skin diseases and urinary infections<sup>3-4, 6</sup>. The leaves greased with hot coconut oil are applied to sprains bruise and dislocated joints as a poultice<sup>10</sup>. Leaf decoction is also used to induce sleep and relief from tension.

2. *Amomum fenellii* Kurz. (Zingiberaceae); Local name: *Jungli adhrak* (Fig. 8)

Salient features: Erect perennial herb, up to 6-7 m, sparingly form rhizome, basal spathe 10-20 cm long, pseudostem elongated and leafy; leaves oblong-lanceolate, spathe pink with white frilly margin; flowers in dense spikes, direct from rootstock, imbricate bracts; ovules 3 celled, superposed; fruits indehiscent or bursting irregularly, sometimes beaked or winged or echinate; seeds globose or truncate, found in moist forests of Great Nicobar on shaded and partially open rocky clay loam.

Uses: Masticatory, useful in malarial fever, and gastrointestinal disorders. Also bee repellent due to its

tranquilizing property. Roots and flowers juice are used in fever and stomach disorder.

3. *Costus speciosus* (Cone.) J. E. Smith, (Costaceae); Local name: *Keokanda* (Fig. 7)

Salient features: A succulent perennial herb, up to 2.7 m high with erect stems; leaves petiolated, simple, elliptic, spirally / alternately arranged, dark green; flowers dense spikes, many; tubular calyx, corolla funnel shaped, lips obovate, fruits capsule, globose trigonus, red in colour; seeds black with white fleshy aril flowering in July to October and fruits in August-September, widely distributed in A&N Islands.

Uses: To cure stomach disorders and headache. The rhizomes cooked and are eaten accredited with purgative and tonic properties. The roots are used as a tonic and eaten with sugar as anthelmintic. The crushed stem sap is given to treat diarrhoea and eye trouble. Leaf infusion or decoction is utilized as a sudorific or in a bath for patients with high fever. Fresh rhizome juice is considered purgative and is used in snakebites, headache and earache by the tribal people.

4. *Dioscorea vexans* Prain & Burk (Dioscoreaceae); Local name: *Getti* (Fig. 4)

Salient features: A twining climber with yellowish green stem having a circumference of 1.2-1.5 cm; leaves coriaceous, ovate, alternate oppositely paired; flowers yellowish, male flowers packed on spikes, arranged on special leafless branches, female flowers greenish yellow, solitary or paired, decurved; fruits 3-cornered/ triangular, laterally flattened, almost winged; capsules green, contains 6 brown walled round seeds; flowering and fruiting observed in October to March, found on the edges of forests in South Andaman.

Uses: The tubers are known to have antifertility activity. These are used for arthritis, asthma, eczema, chronic cough, diarrhoea and diabetes and regulate metabolism.

5. *Hernandia ovigera* Linn. (Hernandiaceae); Local name: Jack in the box plant (Fig. 6)

Salient features: A moderate tree densely covered with minute red hairs; leaves alternate, ovate, acuminate and entire; flowers dioecious, male flowers clustered, sessile; female flowers sessile in short spikes; fruits round, distributed in littoral forest, common along seashores of the islands, growing mostly at water edge.