

A NOTE ON ETHNO – OCEANO BIOLOGY OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

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Received: 9 September, 1990

Accepted: 15 November, 1991

ABSTRACT: *The present paper coins a new term Ethno-Oceanobiology, a new sub-discipline of ethnobiology and deals with the uses of some marine plants by tribals of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.*

INTRODUCTION

In India, the subject of ethnobotany has fairly expanded and over 300 papers have been published (Jain *et al.*, 1989). Now it has become an interdisciplinary subject including several disciplines apart from botany and anthropology. Its number of branches and aspects of ethnobotany are now recognized all over the world (Jain, 1987). Our knowledge regarding relationship of human beings, mainly tribals and rural folk with plants and animals of marine habitat is almost nil or in other words we can say that ‘ethno – oceanobiology’ needs its expansion. Aboriginal tribes living in coastal forests mostly make best use of their surrounding forest produce for their daily needs e.g. fuel, fodder, edibles and others items but also come out of the forest towards sea coasts and utilize its resources too, to meet their basic requirements. During the course of our survey to Andaman and Nicobar Islands for the collection of maine plants and animals for biological screening programme which is in operation in our Institute, the authors collected some ethnic information about marine plants and animals which are being enumerated in the present communication. Thus, the study of relationship of human beings with plants and

animals of marine habitat may be dealt under the sub discipline “Ethno-oceanobiology”.

There are several tribal communities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Andamanese (including Chariar or Chari, Kora, Tabo or Bo, Yere, Kede, Bea, Balawa, Bojigiyab, Jowai and Kol), Jarawas, Ongens and Sentinelese confine themselves to Andaman group of islands while Nicobarese and Shompens inhabit Nicobar group of Islands. All the four tribes of Andaman group of Islands belong to the Negrito stock, quite short in statue with dark steel-grey complexion, copper brown eyes nad wooly curly short hair growing in tufts. However, they are entirely different from the African tribes. On the other hand, the Nicobarese and Shompens of the Nicobar group have Mangoloid characteristics and their way of life is totally different from the tribes of Andaman group (Anonymous, 1976). The uses of some marine flora and fauna are given below:

1. *Enteromorpha compressa* Greville (Alga Chlorophyceae)

Andamanese and Onges take out few thalli of fresh *Enteromorpha compressa* Greville and rub over the cuts or injuries whenever they meet in sea. They believe that it promotes healing.

2. *Acmaea stellaris* Quoy et Gaimard
(Animal - Mollusca)

The animal is found attached to rocks of intertidal zone. Onges collect the animal and boil in water. They eat the flesh of the animal on one hand and use the shell as knife on the other hand. They sharpen the edge of shell by rubbing over rocky hard surface and use it for scrapping the hair of head to give desired hair style. The shells are also used for making show-pieces.

3. *Nerita costata* Gmelin (Animal – Mollusca)

Onges collect the animals and roast them in open fire. They take out the flesh of animal by breaking shell and eat. Shells are used for making show-pieces. Broken shells are ground and used commercially in mortar for building construction.

4. *Ambergris* of Whale

Ambergris is a wax-like substance (mixture of Glyceridic esters of complex nature including a waxy ester of the alcohol, ambreine) originating in digestive tract of the sperm whale *Physeteridae* sp. (Anonymous, 1976a). Whale frequently

spew up their ambergris (Engle, 1962). It is an expensive and highly valuable thing used in perfumery as a fixative for odours. In medicine, it is used as antispasmodic, aphrodisiac, stimulant and antihysterical (Anonymous, 1976 a).

Sentinelese and Shompens have very sensitive sense of olfaction. They perceive the odour of ambergris through wind whenever whale vomits. They carry food material for long time and move in sea in their boats in search of ambergris. Previously, they were using it for making fire (as it catches fire very quickly) but these days whenever they get it, they sell and earn money.

5. *Magico – religious belief.*

Onges prefer to catch sea cow (a mammal belonging to order Sirenia) *Dugong dugon* for delicious meat. These are hairless creatures having flippers instead of forelegs and their hind legs are lost altogether. They place the lower jaw of dugong in front of their house to ward off evil spirits.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors are thankful to the Director Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow for facilities. One of the authors (MNS) is also thankful to the council of scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi for financial support in the form of Research Associateship.

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