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10 pc of native western ghat plants species under threat, says task force member

Mangalore, Nov 12, DHNS:

Nearly 10 per cent of the native plant species, including those having medicinal values in the Western Ghats are in the part of endangered species list.



The threat of extinction of species had come to light during a study conducted by department of Biotechnology, which was jointly sponsored by Forest department and Western Ghats Task Force in the last five years. The research was based on distribution of plants in the Western Ghats.

Western Ghats Task Force Member Dr Vasudev (from College of Forestry, Sirsi) said that he was a member of one of the four teams that were involved in the project. His team had collected data on the species in the central region of the Western Ghats.

Dr Vasudev says that there are nearly 45,000 species of plants in Western Ghats. Speaking about the species, which are under threat, Dr Vasudev said that 'Mappia Foetida' locally called 'Durvasane Gida' (a tree with bad odour) found in the Malnad region is facing threat of extinction because it is a rich source of 'Camptothecin', an anti-cancer drug.

"The plants is illegally transported to pharmaceutical companies. We have lost 60 per cent of this plant species," he said. Another species which is facing threat is 'Ashoka' (Saraca Asoca). The demand for barks of this tree is estimated to be more than 5,000 tons per year.

Dr Vasudev said Ekanayaka (Salacia Chinensis) shrub, known for its anti-diabetic and anti-obesity characteristics, is also in the list of endangered species. Maradarishina, a climber found in forests of Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, and Kodagu, is also under threat.

Around 43 plant species were in the list of endangered species, he added. Other few endangered species are 'Dalchini,' 'Surahonne,' 'Sarpagandha' and others. He said another disturbing aspect is that there had been increase in the number of foreign species such as Acacia, Silver Oak etc which comprises about nine per cent of the plant species in Western Ghats.

Dr Vasudev said there is a need for a policy for creating protection areas on the lines of Tiger corridor. The regions where medicinal plants are grown in large number should be identified.

According to him forests in Kollur, Devaramane, Agumbe, Bisle, and Charmadi should be protected immediately.