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'Extinct' mangroves rediscovered in state

Neil Pate, TNN Nov 18, 2002, 12:55am IST

PUNE/KOLHAPUR: In a major breakthrough, a team of botanists and researchers from the Shivaji University SU), Kolhapur, have rediscovered two nationally endangered mangrove species — *Xylocarpus granatum* and *Cynometra iripa* (commonly known as Valanda and Cynometra) in Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri districts in Maharashtra after 98 years.

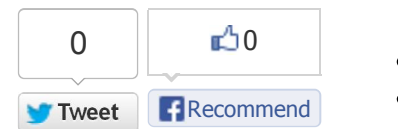
The species were first reported by eminent taxonomist Dr. Thomas Cooke in 1901. Subsequently, they were termed extinct and were not reported in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) report till the team rediscovered it in November 1999. In addition, the team has discovered five other mangrove species — *Cynometra iripa*, *Tamarix troupitii*, *Cerbera odullum* and *Dolichandrone spathacea* — and reported it to the Union ministry of environment and forests (MoEF). Speaking to The Times Of India, national mangrove scientist Prof. Leela J. Bhosale, head of department Botany) SU, Kolhapur, said the threeyear project (1999-2002) is funded entirely by the MoEF.

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"The two species have been reported from the Sunderbans, Bhirtarkanika and Tamil Nadu mangroves in the eastern coast of the country, but never from Maharashtra. Consequently, the scientific community considered it to be extinct from Maharashtra until we rediscovered it and reported to the ministry in 1999," said Bhosale, adding that the discovery has been acknowledged and published in this year's Journal of Economic and Taxonomic Botany, India 2002. However, unaware of the discovery, coastal villagers continue to use the species for fuel wood, timber and fencing even today.

"Some of the tribal communities and village vaidyas use the oil extracted from the seeds of Valanda for cholera in the form of decoction. Likewise, its bark (tannin) is used to cure stomach-ache and headache," Bhosale said. The SU has been involved in research and documentation works of mangrove ecosystem since 1967 and is recognised as a nodal agency of the state. After the findings, as per the germplasm preservation technique, the team immediately started working on tissue culture of the discovered species.

"We have achieved success till the stage of callus development only in some endangered species like *Xylocarpus granatum*, *Cynometra iripa* and *Brugueira gymnorrhiza*," said post doctoral researcher (mangroves) Dr Swagata Banik, now based in Pune. About the human interference in the already dwindling mangrove ecosystem (ME), Bhosale complained that the Maharashtra government has not done anything in this regard.

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