

CHAPTER - I

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Vast stretches of roaring seas, lyric of dancing waves, shining beaches fringed with tall, nodding palms under the dome of blue skies is the landscape of any coastal site. But when one ascends the hills of Kanakeshwar, only a short distance away from the shore line, the panorama, becomes still more bright and the hills beckon the visitor over and over again.

Really the place is a beauty spot, not renowned and that's why still maintaining its complexion. When these hills were surveyed from botanical point of view, they disclosed the vast expanse of plant wealth, not mentioned anywhere in the existing floristic accounts. It seems that coastal plains of Konkan, alongwith neighbouring hilly regions have remained neglected and therefore unexplored. Eminent botanists have contributed to our knowledge of the flora of India. Hooker (1872-1892) 'Flora of British India', Nairne (1894) 'Flowering plants of Western India', Cooke (1901-1908) 'Flora of the Presidency of Bombay', Talbot (1909) 'Forest Flora of Bombay Presidency and Sind', are the milestones in the history of Floristic studies, so far as Western India is

concerned. But unfortunately, there is no reference made to the area under investigation in any of these monumental works. Although in very close vicinity of Bombay, the area has escaped the attention of Blatter & Santapau. This was the foremost reason for selecting the area for the present project.

Ezekiel (1915) has published a note on 'Secondary succession in the rice fields of Alibag'. 'Vegetation of Flora of Konkan & Goa' Vartak (1968) adds a few glimpses to the forest types in coastal areas.

Recently, botanical exploration has been undertaken by Botanical Survey of India authorities for the revision of regional and district floras. Floristic work of South Ratnagiri (Kulkarni, 1979) and that of Thana District (Belore, 1973-74) has already been carried out. These two areas are adjacent areas to the area under investigation. Floristic works of South Ratnagiri and that of Thane were research projects leading to degree of Ph.D. and their valid publication is still awaited.

Within a shortwhile, after the exploration started, neighbouring two small villages, Thal and Wayshet came into focus as the site of the proposed project of petrochemicals and fertilizers.

Since the last two years, the whole area under

consideration is taking a sharp turn in its socio-economic status. No doubt, this radical change will accelerate economic progress of this area. But, at the same time, it is bound to affect the vegetation of not only Kanakeshwar, but also of the adjoining areas.

For the development of residential facilities and other consequent amenities, such as tar roads and a railway line, the rate of deforestation is fast increasing.

Once the project starts operating several types of waste products will be released in the air, affecting the vegetation of the plains and neighbouring hill tops.

In order to meet the increasing demand of the inhabitants, there will be additional pressure on the nearby forest for the supply of fuel. Deforestation and pollution will play their own role in the climate of the area.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to discuss the vegetation types of the area under consideration. Chapter 5 will enlighten the vast treasure of plant wealth that awaits attention, followed by its floristic analysis. Further, two special aspects, viz., Casuarina plantation on sandy beaches and shore gardens (Chapters 7 & 8), have been discussed. These will contribute positively to the progress of the area.