few collection trips in selected forests as part of the floristic study of erstwhile North Arcot district. He also initiated the study of ethnobotany of the Malayali tribes of Javvadhu hills. Ravikumar studied the flora and ethnobotany of Malayali tribes (Ravikumar & Vijaya Sankar, 2003) in and around the Thenmalai Medicinal Plants Conservation Area (MPCA) near Melpattu in Javvadhu hills during 1995-1997.

IV. PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Reconnaissance surveys conducted in different parts of the district reveal that it has rich vegetation and some of the pockets in high altitudes of Javvadhu hills and Kalrayan hill ranges are well preserved without any anthropogenic disturbances. As per the literature none of the pockets of these vegetations is explored thoroughly and some of the areas are totally remain unexplored. Apparently, the district has not been given much importance taxonomically. For this reason, the present study was launched with an objective of making a complete documentation of the floral wealth of the district.

A few important taxa such as Barleria lupulina, Cucumis prophetarum, Dioscorea belophylla, Eragrostiella bifaria var. walkeri, Rhynchosia heynei, etc. were collected from the study area during preliminary study (1997-1999). These taxa have not been collected earlier from the state. This has prompted an interest in studying the floristic wealth of the whole district in detail.

It has been realized through personal discussion with local folk healers and knowledgeable people that some of the hill forests in the district are rich in medicinal
plants including a few, which are localized, not seen elsewhere. Sacred hills like Arunachala hill and Paruvathamalai are also known for their rich medicinal wealth. According to the experienced local healers, some of the important medicinal plant species like *Acorus calamus*, *Curculigo orchioides*, *Drosera* spp, *Habenaria* spp. and *Ormocarpum sennoides* once abundant in the district, are now extremely rare owing to overexploitation and habitat destruction. Hence, it is felt that there is an urgent need for the documentation of the existing floristic wealth of the district before they vanish from their primeval habitat.

The Tiruvannamalai district has recently (in 1989) been formed out of the erstwhile North Arcot district. The new status has made it an important place and rapid urbanization is taking place. This has led to over exploitation of natural resources such as timbers, grasses, plants of medicinal and commercial importance and the forests are facing high risk of threat of extinction. Therefore, the need for documenting the existing floristic resources before their disappearance from the region has been felt resulting in this study.

Lastly, as the smaller area facilitates more focussed study, the district as a unit is selected for thorough exploration. The present study of the Flora of the Tiruvannamalai district would help in updating Flora of Tamil Nadu as well as of the country.

The present floristic account is the result of five years (2001-2005) of extensive and intensive explorations in selected areas covering all habitats and vegetation types across the district throughout the year.