INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN FOREST NOMENCLATURE IN SRI LANKA: AN APPLIED ETHNOBOTANICAL STUDY

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Recently Applied Ethnobotany is recognized as a fascinating field for research which enables an interdisciplinary approach to development that helps to explore Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and its capacity to effect change in Biodiversity Conservation and Natural Resource Management (NRM). This research aimed an ethnobotanical analysis on ecological perspective of cultural and spiritual implications of forest nomenclature in rural communities, which can be defined in terms of conservation. For this study 43 village localities from 5 areas with different geo-ecological and socio-cultural backgrounds were selected. 616 local informants selected from various impact groups were interviewed and data collected by the participatory action research methodologies during the period of 18 months.

Total number of forest areas reported in all the areas is 834 out of which, 766 forest areas bear suffixes describing vegetation type or habitat features or floristic characteristics of the forest. That is 91.8% as a percentage. Total number of species used for this nomenclature is 161 out of which 105 (65.2%) are playing ecologically very important role in conservation. These species are playing remarkably vital role in ecosystem as biodiversity generative, keystone and flagship species that up keep sustainable survival of the ecosystem being vital indicators of micro-ecological changes of the natural habitat. Out of total forest areas, 279 (33.4%) forest areas are named after a floristic source. Out of total species 121 (75.1%) are registered for any kind of cultural, ritualistic, religious use by the community and have become more sacred or venerable. The average percentage of culturally and spiritually important plant species is 75.8% and 92.9% of threatened plants are culturally important as perceived by the community.

Key Words: Applied Ethnobotany, Indigenous Knowledge, Forest Nomenclature, Natural Resource Management, Biodiversity Conservation, Keystone Species