

Is *Hyphaene dichotoma* (White) Furtado, an indigenous ‘Branching Palm’ species under habitat threat?

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ABSTRACTS

Hyphaene dichotoma (White) Furtado or we would prefer to call it *Hyphaene indica* Becc., as Furtado (Furtado 1970) has not given sufficient reasons as on what basis he pulled this indigenous palm species name *indica* to *dichotoma* where dichotomous character is common to most of the *Hyphaene* members. Moreover, this is the only species of branching palm endemic to India, confined to western part (Govaerts and Dransfield, 2005 and iucn. redlist). In recent field visit to Goa where the natural population of this interesting palm seen is experiencing varying degrees of threat. It was a regretful scene to witness that the areas where once the lush green growth of this palm observed is almost now converted into residential complexes/multi-storeyed buildings by ruthless clearing of this unique palm species. It was a journey to locate the natural population of this palm in India. It is locally known as ‘Ravan-tal’ symbolising its multi-headed branching. Apart from Goa, very scanty populations of this palm also found in parts of Bombay, Daman and Diu, parts of Baroda etc., often confused with the introduced species of *Hyphaene thebaica* Mart. from Africa. The seeds of *H.indica* might have escaped from India to Sri Lanka, during the course of time, where scarce population of this species is found here and there.

Key words : *Hyphaene dichotoma*, Branching Palm, Habitat threat

Introduction

The doubtful occurrence of this species in Goa was expressed by Prof. S.R.Yadav, Head, Dept. of Botany, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, during a visit to there then only the curiosity began to have a glimpse of the natural population of this interesting palm. Accordingly Prof. M.K. Janarthanam, the Head, Dept. of Botany, Goa University was contacted and requested to accompany up to the site. The next day morning Prof. Janarthana right way took us to the site (Mira Mar Beach, Panjim, Goa), a few km away from the Goa University Campus,

where *H.dichotoma* was plentiful once upon a time.

It was a spectacular view of about 10-14 palms in that area, bearing mature fruits. Interestingly, all the palms observed in that area were belonging to the same species (*H. dichotoma*) and no other mixing up of species was recorded. Prof. Janarthanam reminded that many of the palms in the surrounding area were felled in the past to erect multi-storeyed buildings, and it was common in many parts of Goa earlier. A few more plants were spotted along the side of highway between Goa Science Centre and Sharada Mandir School. Two to three small plants also observed on the beach and not more.

(*Scientist-C)



(a) A close view of *Hyphaene dichotoma* bearing ripened fruits

(B) A close view of *Hyphaene dichotoma* habit



(C) A way side view of *Hyphaene dichotoma* near Goa Science Centre

(D) The place once *Hyphaene dichotoma* palm was abundant now converted into multistoreyed residential complexes



(E) Survival in question, as *Hyphaene dichotoma* blocks the view of multistoreyed buildings

(F) A close view of fruits

There, a ray of hope arose in my mind by seeing the throw of seedlings planted on the high way side near Goa Science Centre looking like *H. dichotoma* and the people's conservation mind was really appreciable, but all gone in vain in another moment identifying that the species planted is not *H. dichotoma* but *Latania lantaroides* (Gaertn.) H.E. Moore (Red Latan Palm) an exotic species from Reunion Islands. It was dismay that why people are neglecting this curious, much cheaper, stylish indigenous palm suited to the local climate and best for landscape than the much expensive inferior exotic ones?. If they do so one can enhance the beauty of high way sides, parks and beaches of Goa many folds and finally it would turn into icons of Goa; and in such a way we could have conserved this indigenous palm species effectively from extinction.

After analysing its status, one of the students of Prof. S.R. Yadav who accompanied during the tour

from Kolhapur, collected as much as fallen seeds as possible from the ground to sow at different coastal locations. A bag full of seeds carried back to AJC Bose Indian Botanic Garden, Botanical Survey of India, and Howrah for effective *ex-situ* conservation. The Government/local bodies of Goa should take adequate steps to conserve this endemic species.

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