

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary (GBS), located in Wynad, Kerala, is a private botanical garden, and is included within the Western Ghats of South India. The primary focus of the GBS is conservation of native South Indian plants, forest research and regeneration, Nature education and sustainable agriculture. The Sanctuary consists of 40 acres of land, a quarter of which is under original forest of the wet evergreen type, and this borders a government forest reserve. This portion of the Sanctuary has been left completely untouched and now is an area of high diversity. An additional 10 acres of land, which was once cleared, has been allowed to recover. The Sanctuary includes areas ranging from recently cultivated to old growth forest. Conservation of the amazing diversity of the rain forest flora and fauna is of immediate concern to the Sanctuary. The need to study the natural flora and fauna, identify, locate, record and map them has been recognised.

For the type 1 fieldwork I have undertaken a descriptive study of the neighbouring areas of the Botanical Sanctuary, covering approximately 100 sq. kms. The area is a mosaic of different land use patterns, adjoining a large old growth forest reserve, and is poorly documented. Another factor that interested me is that the region has undergone significant changes in a fairly short span of time, with the impact of settlers moving in during the last 50 years. What had once been a lush wilderness teeming with wild life and home to 13 different tribes, was converted, over the last few years into a settled agricultural landscape.

The type 2 fieldwork is a more detailed survey and study of the Sanctuary land itself. This study looks at the trajectory of forest re-generation on cleared

lands. It has been observed that in a period of 15-20 years a fairly diverse and healthy forest grows, and this is probably because the GBS lands are on the edge of a State Reserve Forest. However, the degree of similarity between the regenerated and secondary forest and the old growth forest, in terms of structure and species composition is not clear. As part of its research work the GBS has been wanting to monitor the different areas that have been allowed to regenerate, to understand better the trajectory of forest recovery.

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