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BOOK REVIEW

A LOOK OVER ON RED SANDERS

S. Suresh Ramanan

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A look over on Red Sanders

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One among the rare and highly valuable timbers of the Indian sub-continent is the Red Sanders. Its natural distribution is confined to a very small region in India. Hyped as 'Pride of Eastern Ghats', its distribution is restricted to Kadapa, Chittoor, Kurnool, and Nellore districts in Andhra Pradesh and a few patches in Vellore, Tiruvannamalai, and Chengalpattu districts in Tamil Nadu.

For a deciduous tree growing up to 15m height, with round symmetrical crown architecture, the tree typically dominates other vegetation in the forest. The tree remains leafless for a short stint of time from February to March. This is followed by new green foliage and bright yellow coloured racemose inflorescence in the subsequent months. The pods mature before the next leaf fall. Red Sanders has a distinctive bark pattern concealing the bright red coloured wood beneath it. This deep red-coloured wood has a high price in the international market because of which this tree is felled rampantly, thus pushing this endemic species to the verge of extinction.

From the 2000s, the Red Sanders has captured the attention of the media due to the illicit felling and trade network, especially the social implications of its illegal trade network. It is believed that the locals and tribal men nearby the forest regions are involved in felling of the trees. Investigations, however, revealed that these men are the mere puppet of the wildlife trade kingpins. These mastermind kingpins engage the locals and tribal men as daily labour for felling the trees. Having little awareness nor any idea about the consequence of felling Red Sanders trees, these labours simply fell the trees to earn their daily wage.

There are dedicated forest staff to patrol and protect the Red Sanders and this has proven to reduce the felling

but there is a dark side. Many times, the fellers get shot down by the forest officials or the forest officials get injured or killed. There was a news story published in a leading English daily; The Hindu on 07 April 2015. It was about the 20 tree fellers from Tamil Nadu gunned

Red Sanders: Silviculture and Conservation

T. Pullaiah, S. Balasubramanya & M. Anuradha (eds.)
2019.

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Pages: viii+210pp.



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by the Andhra Pradesh police department. Another story published in *The New Indian Express* (on 24 February 2018) reports that “Between January 2015 and December 2017, 10,558 Tamil Nadu residents were arrested by Andhra Pradesh police, forest department and Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF)”. This led to hatred, ethnicity controversy, insulting and even name-calling of the officials. Overall, it further added to the regional dispute existing between two states, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Is it a controversial tree? It is one more question in my mind when I began my quest to understand this tree. As a forestry graduate, I first encountered this species in plantations raised in our college. It did not have the appeal, nor the enchantment because it was grown outside the natural geographical zone, however, it was my first encounter with this species. Before my graduation, I did a six-month project work on the characterization of Red Sanders. It was aimed at understanding the phenotypical difference across different provenances. And personally visited some regions in Tamil Nadu where the tree was occurring naturally. More I learned about the species, the more questions popped up in my mind. Some of the questions remain a mystery to me, even today!

So, when I stumbled upon a monograph on Red Sanders, published by Springer, I was instantly curious to open the book anticipating answers to my questions. The book under review pieced together by T. Pullaiah, S. Balasubramanya, and M. Anuradha is an important addition to the literature on Red Sanders. Three editors have meticulously worked to bring out this 15-chapter book. Apart from the editors, there are other prominent researchers and scientists who have also shared their work on Red Sanders in this book.

Now begins the story of the book, with a formal introduction chapter. It is intended for any beginner, giving exposure to Red Sanders as a tree – botanically. Chapter two is all about the taxonomy, one of the core areas of botanical science, and distribution of Red Sanders. The lead author of the first two chapters, Dr. T. Pullaiah’s experience is reflected here. I am sure, even if you have not seen this tree so far, you might become curious like me to know more. On finishing chapter three, the readers might be able to comprehend the reasons – Why this tree is so valued for? Short, explicit narration about the uses of Red Sanders’ wood and its parts are there in chapter three, along with beautiful photographs. Some typical wood characteristic features are also enlisted in chapter 3. Some properties described

here may not be familiar, still, they do have significance while identification of wood.

In my opinion, the chapters in this book can be grouped into four sections. The first three chapters form section I, aimed at introducing the species. Chapter four to six is more technical content on biochemistry and pharmacology of Red Sanders. This forms section II. Silviculture, the art and science of cultivating trees is the centre-hub in forestry science. Chapters seven to eleven deal with the silvicultural aspects of Red Sanders. This can be section III. The remaining chapters can be grouped as section IV dealing with a socio-economic and ecological aspect such as genetic diversity, threats, conservation and illegal trade networks. Except for chapter 15, titled as ‘Tree Improvement of Red Sanders’ can be placed after chapter 9, so that there is a coherence.

At the beginning of the article, I was narrating about the media highlighting the conflict due to Red Sanders tree felling. In Chapter 14, there is a long list of news stories published in different newspapers in India. This support my narration about the social significance of this species.

There is repetition of information and content which I believe is inevitable in an edited book, especially when it is about a single species. For instance, there is the redundancy of information on the natural distribution of Red Sanders in many chapters. This does affect the readability of the content. However, there is a specific need to mention the repetition of information even within the same chapter. In chapter three, there are two sub-sections with the same heading – ‘Fluorescence Analysis’. This is one example which indicates that the book needs to be brushed up.

If I need to recommend this book, I feel myself at conflict. For this is not a textbook, nor mere summarization of the information about Red Sanders but I feel it is a book written mainly for researchers. This monograph gives an idea about the research work carried out on Red Sanders and also points out the potential areas to work in future. More specifically, it implies understanding how certain species might be unique and need more focus.

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