

The Vegetation in and Around Pondichery Town *

by

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Pondichery was the chief of French settlements in India and it is situated on the Coromandel coast in 11° 56'N and 79° 49'E about 12 miles north of Cuddalore on the road leading from Madras to the former.

Climate: The climate is tropical with a mean annual temperature of 28° C. Most of the rainfall is obtained from north east monsoon. The mean annual rainfall of the last five years (i. e. from 1953 to 1957) is 1,201.4 mm.

Soil: While the soil near the coastal belt is a mixture of recently formed sea-sands and disintegrated rocks of cretaceous origin of Ariyalur stage, in the interior the soil is of varying colour (brown to red), depth and texture.

Vegetation: In the coastal belt *Spinifex littoreus* Merr. and *Ipomoea pes-caprae* (L.) Sweet. are dominant. This may be favourably compared with the mature zone of *Spinifictum squarrosae* described by Satyanarayan (1958). Associated plants are *Launaea sarmentosa* (Willd) Alston., *Trachys muricata* Steud., *Bulbostylis barbata* Kunth. and *Pycreus odorata* Urb. A little interior to coast and interspersed in the open places between coconut palm groves, it is not uncommon to find pure stand of *Pedaliium murex* L. Other stray trees coming up here are *Calophyllum inophyllum* L. and *Barringtonia acutangula* Gaertn. The most conspicuous vegetation apart from coconut palms are *Casuarina aquisetifolia* Forst. which are cropped on a five year rotation for fuel which yields rich dividends.

Along the roads, it is a common sight especially after the inception of the monsoon, to find plants like *Croton bonplandianum* Baill., *Sida acuta* Burm., *Leucus aspera* Spreng., *Tephrosia purpurca* Pers., *Achyranthus aspera* L., *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* (Desf.) Beauv., *Chloris inflata* Link., *Eragrostis tremula* Hochst. Other associated plants are *Tribulus terrestris* L., *Anisomeles malabarica* Br., *A. indica* O. Kze., *Corchorus fascicularis* Lamk., *Euphorbia pilulifera* L., *Scoparia dulcis* L., *Tridax procumbens* L., *Boerhaavia diffusa* L., *Mariscus cynosu* Vahl. and *Cyperus* species.

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In waste places, the vegetation essentially consists of *Lochnera rosea* (L.) Reichb., *Calotropis gigantea* Br., *Cassia occidentalis* L., *Solanum xanthocarpum* Schard. and Wendl. and *Pavonia odorata* Willd.

Avenue trees on either side of the road especially near the park lend a picturesque view to the landscape. During the season when the trees are laden with flowers, they not only please the eyes but richly embellish the roads as well. The most common trees are *Peltophorum pterocarpum* (DC.) Backer et Heyne with its beautiful yellow flowers, *Delonix regia* Raf., *Hibiscus tiliacus* L., *Thespesia populnea* Cav. to mention a few.

Distributed within the Botanical garden just at the entrance can be seen lofty trees like *Khaya senegalensis* Juss. a species introduced from Africa and whose timber is of inestimable value. *Swietenia macrophylla* King., *S. mahogoni* Jacq., *Bombax malabaricum* DC., *Polyalthia longifolia* Benth. and HK. F., *Polyalthia coffeoides* Benth. and HK. F., *Chickrassia tabularis* Juss., *Cleistanthus collinus* Benth., are not uncommon. The curiously flowered cannon ball tree *Cauroupita guianensis* Aubl. is noteworthy. The Baobab of Africa *Adansonia digitata* L. with its unusually massive trunk of all trees stand sentinel. Associated trees are *Guttardia speciosa* L., *Mimusops elengi* L., *Manilkara hexandra* (Roxb.) Dub., *Berrya ammonilla* Roxb., *Kleinhovia hospita* L. and *Sterculia foetida* L. Near the edge of the canal is found a group of *Bambusa arundinacea* Willd. imparting a natural and wild aspect to the scenery. A few graceful palms like *Roystonea regia* (HB. and K.) O. F. Cook., *Caryota urens* L. and *Areca catechu* L. are also met with. *Ravenala madagascarensis* Sonn. the famous travellers' palm is a delightful sight to behold.

Trees of economic importance have also received their share of attention. Of these, though the coconut and casuarina have been planted on an extensive scale, there are useful trees like *Mangifera* L., *Tamarindus indica* L., *Artocarpus heterophyllus* Lam., the curiously fruited cashewnut *Anacardium occidentale* L., *Madhuka longifolia* (L.) Macbride., the soap-nut tree *Sapindus emarginata* Vahl. besides a host of fruit trees and shrubs of the orchards like *Citrus maxima* (Burm.) Merr., *Achras sapota* L. *Garcinia mangostana* L., *Psidium guava* L., *Carica papaya* L. and the less valuable wood-apple *Feronia limonia* (L.) Swingle.

The infinite variety of garden shrubs and climbers which by their variegated foliage or brilliance of colour of the flowers or inflorescence form additions to the natural vegetation. Thus, it is common to find *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* L., *Nerium indicum* Mill. with white, pink or red flowers, *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* Swartz., *Ervatamia caronaria* Stapf., *Thevetia*

peruviana (Pers) K. Schum., *Bauhinia variegata* L., *Gailardia* species, *Acalypha wilkesiana* M. Arg., to mention a few. *Bougainvillea spectabilis* Willd. offers a delightful sight with deep purple bracts which could with advantage be used for hedges, arches and trellis of various designs. Plethora of *Codiaeum* and *Croton* species are grown successfully in the gardens.

A few noteworthy ornamental climbers are *Aganosoma dichotoma* (Roth) K. Schum., the purple wreath *Petrea volubilis* L., *Allamanda cathartica* L., *Ipomoea quamoclit* L., *Jasminum sambac* Ait., *Quisqualis indica* L., *Passiflora* species and common *Antigonon leptopus* HK. and Arn. with white or pink flowers.

There are a few hydrophytic vegetation in the pool tanks and puddles. In the ornamental tank of the park opposite the Chief Commissioner's abode are found floating the sacred lotus *Nelumbium nucifera* Gaertn. and *Nymphaea stellata* Willd. Other floating forms commonly met with are *Pistia stratiotes* L., *Neptunia oleacea* Lour., *Ceratophyllum demersum* L., and *Eichhornia crassipes* Solms. which is however, the most dominant species. *Hydrilla verticillata* Casp. and *Chara* species are not uncommon.

The detailed list of the plants of this place would be published elsewhere.

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