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**AN ETHNO BOTANICAL ANALYSIS OF MONTANE
FLORA IN THE RITIGALA RANGE**

A PROJECT REPORT PRESENTED BY

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AN ETHNO- BOTANICAL ANALYSIS OF MONTANE FLORA IN THE RITIGALA RANGE

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Key words: Ritigala range, Non Timber Forest Products, *Mangifera zeylanica* (Bl.) Hook.f, Kalu-ebe, Ayurveda

Ritigala range is an ideal setting for an ethno- botanic study on account of its ecological and phytogeographic uniqueness. In view of ecological as well as commercial value of some species, their propagation will be beneficial to the community.

The objectives of the study are to improve the present ethno botanic knowledge of the Ritigala region; to understand the significance of Ritigala as a source of medicinal plants and other Non Timber Forest Products and to understand the nature and the extent of human encroachment in Ritigala area.

A social survey was carried out in Kalu-ebe village. It indicated the utilization pattern of the forest by the village community. It was evident that they exploit forest largely for NTFPs such as edible plants and medicines. The study of morphological cross sections explains the accessibility to the forest. The study of aerial photographs indicated different patterns in the canopy cover and variation over time.

The aerial photographs show improvement of the forest area within the period of ten years from 1982 to 1992. It is obvious that the community is now restricted in access to the forest reserve due to law enforcements, beliefs and values, availability of usable forests other than Nature Reserve and increased awareness. Access to the forest due to rugged terrain and other geographic features had always been a discouraging factor. There had been little change of the forest within the limits of the Strict Nature Reserve.

Temporal changes as observed in the aerial photographs, deserve special attention. A decline in the white canopies within a short period of ten years may be indicative of climate change or biological changes in certain species with emerging crowns. The study also revealed that several medicinal plants are ethno- botanically valuable but not documented in conventional Ayurvedic literature. While the user level of the other natural habitats in the country is relatively high, the human impact on the Ritigala Reserve is surprisingly minimal or even non existent.