DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY

AN ETHNOBOTANICAL STUDY OF THE ALANGAN MANGYANS OF NORTHEASTERN MINDORO

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GENERAL SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. General Summary

This study attempted to make an ethnobotanical survey of the Alangan Mangyans of Northeastern Mindoro in order to determine the role of plants in their culture. Knowledge of such relationship can contribute to our awareness of the useful elements of the flora of Mt. Halcon and also to our umderstanding about the Alangans.

In order to obtain relevant data, the researcher stayed in five Alangan villages for a total of three months (July to September, 1985) carrying out the ethnobotanical investigations such as observation, participation, interviews and collection of botanical specimens. Most of the Alangans are unable to read and write, hence, it was not possible to disseminate the prepared set of questionnaires. Nevertheless, the questionnaire was found useful in facilitating the interview process. Cited useful plants, except the very common ones, were collected, processed, nomenclaturally determined and classified. Eventually the specimens will be systematically filed in the PNH

and DLSU herbarium for reference use. Tape recorder was also used to record details of interviews and native songs. Photographs of the Alangans doing plant-related activities as well as habits of some useful plants and plant products were taken for record purposes (see Plates 1-16).

/Information obtained from observations and interviews showed that the Alangan Mangyans of Northeastern Mindoro possess a remarkable knowledge of plants and their utilization. A total of 223 plant species were found to be culturally significant to the Alangans. However, only 169 were identified to species level while the rest were determined up to genus (44) and family (10) levels only. Failure to fully determine the scientific identity of some plants collected is due to the lack of fertile organs needed for proper identification, which could not be avoided as plants differ in their flowering season. A total of 74 plant families were covered in this study with family Moraceae and Poaceae having the most number of species (13 species) and family Euphorbiaceae ranking second (12 species) (see Appendix C). Appendix D shows the herbarium collection of the Alangans' useful plants.

The useful plants of the Alangan Mangyans covered in this study consisted of 99 species related to their sources of subsistence, e.g. food, fish traps and poison

and cash crops, 52 species of medicinal plants, 26 species used for tools and household articles, 25 species for firewood, 21 species for dwelling materials, 20 species for cordage, 11 species for personal ornamentation, 6 species for stimulant and 36 species for miscellaneous uses. Many species were found to have multiple uses and they were repeatedly listed under different categories.

Swidden cultigens (mostly food crops) provide the largest amount of usable plant products for the local people. Sweet potato is the main food crop of the Alangans but rice, bananas and other rootcrops are also utilized along with some fruits and vegetables. Wild food crops such as namu, bantuon and labey are of greater concern to the Alangans mostly during times of famine and crop failure. Fishing, hunting and trapping animals are other important sources of food for the Alangans. The Alangans usually resort to selling their crops and some plant products to their non-Mangyan neighbors in order to buy things they consider most important such as bolo, ax and kettle.

Familiarity of the Alangans to the local flora is manifested in many ways. Relief from illnesses is usually obtained from herbal plants which are largely prescribed by the balaonan or medicine man. These plants are planted in yards or found in nearby forests. In

serious cases, however, recourse is made to offerings and divinations.

Self-sufficiency among the Alangans is apparent from their fire-making technique which utilizes mutya (hard stone), bakal (steel) and kumbad (fine rattan or wood shavings) as tinder. The same is true with the Alangans' household articles which are usually fashioned from either treebark, rattan or bamboo strip, dried bottle gourd fruits or wooden blocks. Betel nut chewing constitutes the Alangans' most popular stimulant without which a day is considered dull and empty. Alangan women wear abayon (bark cloth), lingob (rattan skirt) and ulango (breast cover) all taken from local source, and men usually wear katsa (loin cloth) as standard garments. In addition, unmarried men and women use other ornaments to indicate their single state. Familiarity with the local flora is also apparent from the Alangans' utilization of plants for miscellaneous purposes such as those pertaining to their concept of the season.

Considering the wide-range of plant-related Alangan beliefs and practices as well as plant-inspired songs, it is evident that a special relationship is existing between plants and the culture of the Alangans. But as the Alangans are generally shy, aloof and secretive by

nature, it was not possible to extract from them all the needed information. In view of this, there is still much to be learned from the Alangans that this study leaves for future research.

B. Conclusions

In the light of the foregoing findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. A total of 223 plant species belonging to 74 families are considered culturally significant by the Alangan Mangyans; most of these have multiple uses.
2. An intimate relationship exists between plants and the culture of the Alangansas evident from the wide-range of plant-related Alangan beliefs and practices as well as in the plant-inspired songs.
3. The Alangan Mangyans of Northeastern Mindoro constitute an upland population who are remarkably self-sufficient and largely dependent upon their immediate natural surrounding.

C. Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following points are recommended:

1. That a continuation of this study be conducted on the Alangans living in the forest interior as they have not been covered in this study. It might reveal other interesting aspects about the Alangans and their useful plants.
2. That more intensive ethnographic investigations be made on the disintegrating Mangyan culture in Northern Mindoro for this might shed more light on the life of our aborigines.
3. That further investigations be conducted by chemists, pharmacists and other plant specialists to verify the efficacy of the lesser known medicinal plants of the Alangans.
4. That instructions be given by proper government agencies or culturally-concerned organizations to the Mangyns regarding the correct preparation and right dosage of their medicinal flora so as to enhance their curative efficacy.