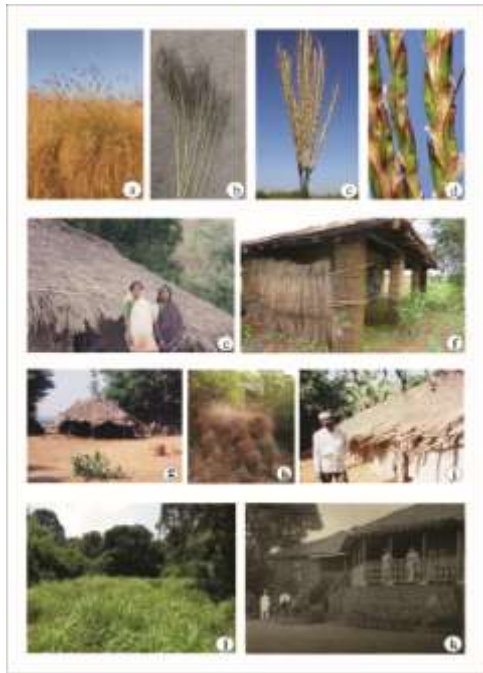


## ‘Threatened’ grass species found being used by local communities in Western Ghats

Scientists from Agharkar Research Institute (ARI) Pune, an autonomous institute under Department of Science & Technology (DST) have found a grass species that was so far declared threatened being used by local inhabitants of Northern Western Ghats as roof thatching material for many generations.

The grass, which is used for roof thatching before the advent of monsoon and protects the houses from heavy rains in the Western Ghats, is placed under threatened plant category Endangered (EN) owing to its underrepresentation in herbarium collections.

The categorisation of the grass as threatened stems from the fact that there are just a handful number of specimens of *Dichanthium jainii*, endemic to Sahyadri, Northern Western Ghats deposited in various herbaria of the region. It is locally known as ‘Kolim’ in Marathi.



Dr Mandar Datar, Scientist at ARI, Pune carried out the study on the threatened plant species of North Western Ghats.

This grass is not only conserved by local inhabitants *in situ* but also planted for domestic use by every household. The paradoxical situation of its threat status, based on herbarium studies, and its extensive extent of occurrence, in reality, is a result of overlooking traditional knowledge in taxonomic surveys. The study was published in the journal National Academy of Science Letters.

Floristic and taxonomic explorations began in India during the British regime. They focused on documenting flora and fauna of the region. This documentation was used in assigning global biodiversity hotspots in the regions where the concentration of endemic and threatened species was greater.

However, taxonomic surveys have missed out on certain species. This has resulted in treating them under threatened categories based on under representations in herbarium collections. It is most likely that such plants are recognised adequately by traditional knowledge if the plant has some known utilities.

Knowledge about plant resources with forest-dwelling human communities is a key constituent of their traditional knowledge, and harnessing natural resources has been a part of their lifestyle for centuries. Local people of Western Ghats are known to utilise various plant resources wisely and sustainably.

The published paper can encourage taxonomists to consider traditional knowledge as one of the sources while reassessing the status of threatened plants.