

COIMBATORE

# Rare root parasite plant blooms in Upper Nilgiris

**Staff Reporter**

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**The plant bearing scientific name *Balanophora fungosa* is often mistaken for a colourful cluster of red mushrooms**



Parts of Upper Nilgiris are now witnessing the blooming of a plant that parasitizes roots of other plants. Known as *Bhoomi Budalam* and *Veru Chedi* in Tamil, the plant bearing scientific name *Balanophora fungosa* is often mistaken for a colourful cluster of red mushrooms.

According to Botanist S. Rajan, *Balanophora fungosa* parasitizes the roots of certain types of plants. “It lacks green pigments. The underground haustoria attach to the roots of host plants for nourishment. The inflorescences emerge out of the soil only at the time of blooming and they last for a very short period,” he said. The plant is dioecious – its stalk bears male and female inflorescence.

“As the plant grows only by parasitizing the roots of certain trees in the natural environment, it cannot be raised in nurseries. Conserving their natural environment is the

only way to protect them from destruction. Already, their numbers have come down due to various human interventions,” Dr. Rajan said.

C. Kunhikannan, Director of Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB), Coimbatore, said the conservation status of the plant was not available in database like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, probably because no assessments were done yet. He said studies were done in the past by some researchers to assess if the plant had therapeutic values.

V. Ramsundar, a botanist who has lived in the Nilgiris for several years, said he had seen tribal people collecting the plant for natural remedies. He said that a legal procurement certificate from the Forest Department was required for the export of the plant because it comes under Appendix-XLIII-H, negative list of exports in Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

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