Understorey diversity of tropical dry deciduous forest of eastern plateau, India

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.22271/chemi.2020.v8.i4b.9865

Abstract
The effort has been made in tropical dry deciduous forest of eastern plateau, Ranchi during the year 2018-2019. The floral composition and diversity in shrub and herb layer were quantified which is mostly ignored all time due to lack of methodologies. The entire region divided into two sites based upon the physiognomy. Randomly selected quadrates of 10x10 m² were taken for shrubs while 0.5x0.5 m² quadrates for herbs were taken. A total of 7540-7740 shrubs 29600-476400 herbs were encountered. The basal area was varied between 1.002-2.25 m² ha⁻¹ for shrubs and 0.68-1.35 m² ha⁻¹ for herbs. Lygodium japonicum showed highest value of IVI in shrubs and Cynodon dactylon showed highest value of IVI in herbs. Shannon index ranged from 1.53-1.65 for shrubs and 3.30-3.39 for herbs. The Concentration of dominance varied between 0.46-0.48 for shrubs and 0.13-0.14 for herbs. Equitability ranged from 0.85-0.86 for shrubs and 1.0 for herbs. Species richness ranged from 0.56-0.67 for shrubs and 1.27-1.6 for herbs. The herbal diversity is more than the shrubs in both the sites, which creates a great scope for wild fauna as well as fodder requirement of local live stock and livelihood for forest dwellers.

Keywords: Understorey, composition, diversity, tropical forest

Introduction
The understorey is an intrinsic treasure of forest ecosystems which consisting a large fraction of diverse floristic community (Gentry & Dodson 1987, Gentry & Emmons 1987, Mayfield & Daily 2005, Tchouto et al. 2006) [4, 5, 17, 33]. Inside a forest ecosystem understorey seeks equal importance as overstorey particularly for soil and water conservation and supports the primary food chain. The understorey consists relatively a small portion of overall forest ecosystems, but it plays a crucial role in energy flow and nutrient cycling due to the high gross turnover rates (Nilsson & Wardle 2005, Gilliam 2007, Hubau et al. 2019) [20, 9].

Understorey composition considerably differs among various forest types (Hart and Chen 2008) [8] and several reasonable factors are there for this difference including overstorey structure and composition (Xiao-Tao et al. 2011) [35]. Several studies have disclosed that the abundance, diversity and vegetation composition of understorey along with temporally change, stand development and stand-replacement (Hart & Chen 2006) [7]. Tropical forests have dragged much attention in recent few years in terms of their vegetational richness, species productivity and sequential carbon storage pattern (Bhat et al., 2011) [1] along with other environmental gradients (Struik and Curtis 1962 and Shirima et al. 2015) [31, 28]. Herbaceous vegetation stimulates community dynamics and succession patterns (Newbery et al. 1999; Royo and Carson 2006) [19, 25]. In many forest ecosystems, herbaceous vegetation is a key strata and enduring largest population diversity (Oraon et al., 2014) [21] along with the lianas and shrubs (Jhariya & Oraon 2012) [11].

With such importance understorey diversity of tropical forest was dragged our attention for investigation. Generally the lack of methodological accuracy creates difficulty in estimation (Karki, 2002; Khanal, 2001) [13, 14] and establishment of relationship with other forests.

Materials and Methods
The study site is located in Horhap beat of Ranchi the year 2018-2019 and the entire area, spreads over an area of 651.544 ha, is situated on hilly tract, which comes under eastern
plateau at an elevation of around 629 m (2.064 ft) from mean sea level with 23°18′10″72″ N to 23°21′18″575″ N latitude and 85°26′18″218″ E to 85°29′1.539″ E longitude. It experiences tropical climate, which is characterized by hot summer from March to May range from 20 °C to 38 °C and well distributed rainfall during southwest monsoon (965 mm) from June to September. Winter season in the area is marked by dry and cold with temperatures 5 °C to 25 °C weather during the month of November to February. The whole area was reconnaissance surveyed with field visits and divided into two sites based upon physiognomic factor. A simple random sampling procedure was adopted for characterization of vegetation and phytosociological analysis. Ten sample quadrates of 10x10 m² size were laid down in each site of the forest area for enumerating shrub species and for herbaceous flora twenty sample plots of 0.5 x 0.5 m² were laid at centre of each quadrates. All the quadrates were marked with Google earth images and GPS device (Garmin 72).

The vegetational data was quantitatively analyzed for frequency, density, abundance (Curtis and McIntosh, 1950) [2]. An importance value index was calculated as the sum total of relative frequency, relative density and relative basal area (Phillips, 1959) [23]. Plant diversity in both the sites was quantified by Shannon Index (Shannon and Weaver, 1963) [23]. Concentration of dominance or Simpson’s Index (Simpson, 1949) [29], Equitability (Pielou, 1966) [24] and Species richness (Margalef, 1958) [10].

Results and Discussions

The vegetational composition and diversity in shrub and herb vegetation in both the sites are described below.

Composition of shrub layer

In the site I, a total of 7540 stems ha⁻¹ representing 7 species and 6 families were enumerated. It is evident from the data presented in the table 1 that Lygodium japonicum was the most abundant followed by Clerodendrum infortunatum and Lantana camara, as well as represented the highest density respectively. Lowest density was recorded in case of Agave sisalana. Highest basal area was observed in Woodfordia fruticosa followed by Agave sisalana and Lantana camara. Lowest basal area was observed in Vitex negundo. Basal area and density of individual shrub species varied from 0.0005m² ha⁻¹ to 1.45 m² ha⁻¹ and 70 to 4960 stems ha⁻¹, respectively. Lygodium japonicum showed highest value of IVI (88.97) followed by Woodfordia fruticosa (83.39) and Lantana camara (46.17). Similarly Vitex negundo showed lowest value of IVI (5.9) followed by Rauvolfia serpentine (8.8) and Agave sisalana (28.8). The total shrub density and basal area of site I was recorded 7540 shrubs ha⁻¹ and 2.25 m² ha⁻¹, respectively.

Composition of herb layer

In the site I, a total of 299600 herbs ha⁻¹ representing 17 species and 8 families were enumerated. The Poaceae family was represented by 162000 individuals followed by Cyperaceae (36800), Asteraceae (27600) and Fabaceae (16000). It is evident from the data presented in the table 2 that Leptochloa chinesis was the most abundant herb followed by Cynodon dactylon and Cyperus rotundas, as well as represented the highest density respectively. Lowest density was recorded in case of Xanthium strumarium, Diger arvensis, Mimosa pudica and Amaranthus spinosus. Highest basal area was observed in Amaranthus spinosus followed by Tridax procumbens, Digitaria sanguinalis, Parthenium hysteroophorus, Commelina benghalensis and Achyranthes aspera. Lowest basal area was observed in Mimosa pudica. Basal area and density of individual herbs varied from 0.005 m² ha⁻¹ to 0.165 m² ha⁻¹ and 1600 to 69600 stems ha⁻¹, respectively. Leptochloa chinesis showed highest value of IVI (39.36) followed by Cynodon dactylon (33.09) and Tridax procumbens (32.3). Similarly Mimosa pudica showed lowest value of IVI (3.85) followed by Celosia spicata (3.996) and Diger arvensis (4.25). The total herb density and basal area of site I was recorded 299600 herbs ha⁻¹ and 0.68 m² ha⁻¹, respectively.

### Table 1: Vegetational Composition of Shrub Layer

| Sl. No. | Species                   | SITE I | SITE II |
|---------|---------------------------|--------|---------|
|         | F (%), D (stems ha⁻¹), BA (m² ha⁻¹), IVI |        |         |
| 1       | Lantana camara L.         | 100    | 90      |
| 2       | Lygodium japonicum (Thumb.) Sw. | 90     | 50      |
| 3       | Woodfordia fruticosa (L.) Kurz. | 50   | 40      |
| 4       | Vitex negundo L.          | 10     | 20      |
| 5       | Clerodendrum infortunatum L. | 90     | 70      |
| 6       | Rauvolfia serpentine (L.) Benth. | 80     | 30      |
| 7       | Agave sisalana Perrine    | 30     | 30      |
| 8       | Hibiscus rosa-sinensis L.  | 70     | 70      |

F= Frequency, D= Density, BA= Basal Area, IVI= Important Value Index

In the site II, a total of 7740 stems ha⁻¹ representing 6 species and 5 families were enumerated. It is evident from the data presented in the table 1 that Lygodium japonicum was the most abundant followed by Clerodendrum infortunatum and Lantana camara, as well as represented the highest density respectively. Lowest density was recorded in case of Ageratum conyzoides. Highest basal area was observed in Woodfordia fruticosa followed by Agave sisalana and Lantana camara. Lowest basal area was observed in Vitex negundo. Basal area and density of individual shrub species varied from 0.0005m² ha⁻¹ to 1.45 m² ha⁻¹ and 70 to 4960 stems ha⁻¹, respectively. Lygodium japonicum showed highest value of IVI (88.97) followed by Woodfordia fruticosa (83.39) and Lantana camara (46.17). Similarly Vitex negundo showed lowest value of IVI (5.9) followed by Rauvolfia serpentine (8.8) and Agave sisalana (28.8). The total shrub density and basal area of site II was recorded 7540 shrubs ha⁻¹ and 2.25 m² ha⁻¹, respectively.

### Table 2: Vegetational Composition of Herb Layer

| Sl. No. | Species                   | SITE I | SITE II |
|---------|---------------------------|--------|---------|
|         | F (%), D (stems ha⁻¹), BA (m² ha⁻¹), IVI |        |         |
| 1       | Lantana camara L.         | 100    | 90      |
| 2       | Lygodium japonicum (Thumb.) Sw. | 90     | 50      |
| 3       | Woodfordia fruticosa (L.) Kurz. | 50   | 40      |
| 4       | Vitex negundo L.          | 10     | 20      |
| 5       | Clerodendrum infortunatum L. | 90     | 70      |
| 6       | Rauvolfia serpentine (L.) Benth. | 80     | 30      |
| 7       | Agave sisalana Perrine    | 30     | 30      |
| 8       | Hibiscus rosa-sinensis L.  | 70     | 70      |

F= Frequency, D= Density, BA= Basal Area, IVI= Important Value Index
The shrub and herb density in the present study varied between Argemone Mexicana (27.32) and Digitaria sanguinalis (39.36) species respectively. Lowest density was recorded in case of the most abundant herb followed by Leucas aspera (Willd.) Link. Datura metel, Argemone Mexicana respectively. However, higher than the tropical moister deciduous forest (Kumar & Saikia 2018) [18]. If we consider the herbal population a reverse order was found that the herb diversity was quite higher than other dry deciduous forests (Jhariya 2017; Oraon et al. 2015; Sharma & Kant 2014) [20], however, lesser than the tropical moister deciduous forest (Kumar & Saikia 2018) [18]. If we consider the herbal population a reverse order was found that the herb diversity was quite higher than other dry deciduous forests (Jhariya 2017; Oraon et al. 2015; Sharma & Kant 2014) [20], however, lesser than the tropical moister deciduous forest (Kumar & Saikia 2018) [18].

Table 2: Vegetational Composition of Herb Layer

| Sl. No. | Species                      | SITE I       | SITE II      |
|--------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
|        |                              | F (%)        | D stems ha⁻¹ | BA m²ha⁻¹ | IVI | F (%) | D stems ha⁻¹ | BA m²ha⁻¹ | IVI |
| 1      | Phyllanthus niruri L.        | 30           | 6800         | 0.015  | 11.28 | 20 | 11600 | 0.020  | 8.06 |
| 2      | Marsilea minuta L.          | 20           | 33200        | 0.014  | 17.68 | 30 | 74400 | 0.017  | 23.16 |
| 3      | Cyodon dactylon (L.) Pers.  | 50           | 50400        | 0.033  | 33.09 | 80 | 138000 | 0.040  | 48.62 |
| 4      | Leptochloa chinesis (L.) Nees.| 60           | 69600        | 0.017  | 39.36 | 30 | 34800 | 0.010  | 14.27 |
| 5      | Commelina benghalensis L.   | 20           | 7200         | 0.044  | 13.34 | 10 | 2400  | 0.016  | 3.80  |
| 6      | Tridax procumbens L.        | 40           | 22400        | 0.107  | 32.30 | 10 | 9200  | 0.031  | 6.28  |
| 7      | Cassia tora L.              | 30           | 13600        | 0.035  | 16.50 | 40 | 43600 | 0.017  | 18.72 |
| 8      | Parthenium hysterophorus L.  | 20           | 3600         | 0.057  | 14.13 | 20 | 4800  | 0.017  | 6.41  |
| 9      | Digitaria sanguinalis (L.) Scop. | 40     | 30800        | 0.079  | 30.92 | 30 | 40800 | 0.098  | 22.03 |
| 10     | Digeria arvensis Forsk.      | 10           | 1600         | 0.010  | 4.25  | 10 | 1200  | 0.022  | 3.93  |
| 11     | Amaranthus spinulosus L.     | 20           | 2400         | 0.165  | 29.61 | 20 | 2400  | 0.088  | 11.15 |
| 12     | Acalypha aspera L.          | 20           | 3200         | 0.043  | 11.97 | 10 | 1200  | 0.022  | 3.93  |
| 13     | Cyperus rotundus L.         | 40           | 36800        | 0.035  | 26.55 | 10 | 1200  | 0.0002 | 2.35  |
| 14     | Celosia spicata L.          | 10           | 2800         | 0.005  | 4.00  |    |       |        |      |
| 15     | Dactylolchenium aegyptium (L.) Wild. | 10     | 11200        | 0.003  | 6.51  |    |       |        |      |
| 16     | Mimosa pudica L.            | 10           | 2400         | 0.005  | 3.85  | 10 | 3200  | 0.009  | 3.45  |
| 17     | Xanthium strumarium L.      | 10           | 1600         | 0.013  | 4.64  | 20 | 84000 | 0.058  | 10.20 |
| 18     | Trifolium repens L.         | 20           | 8400         | 0.050  | 9.62  |    |       |        |      |
| 19     | Cleome viscosa L.           | 20           | 20000        | 0.052  | 12.24 |    |       |        |      |
| 20     | Chenopodium ciliaris L.      | 20           | 27600        | 0.045  | 13.29 |    |       |        |      |
| 21     | Phalaris minor Retz.        | 20           | 25200        | 0.073  | 14.87 |    |       |        |      |
| 22     | Leucas aspera (Wild.) Link. | 20           | 20000        | 0.308  | 27.31 |    |       |        |      |
| 23     | Setaria verticillata (L.) P. Beauv. | 20     | 15600        | 0.215  | 23.33 |    |       |        |      |
| 24     | Argemone Mexicana L.        | 10           | 800          | 0.009  | 2.94  |    |       |        |      |
| 25     | Datura metel L.             | 10           | 800          | 0.158  | 13.96 |    |       |        |      |
| Total  | 440                         | 299600       | 0.681        | 800.048 | 476400 | 1.353 | 300.00 |       |      |

F= Frequency, D=Density, BA=Basal Area, IVI=Important Value Index

In the site II, a total of 476400 herbs ha⁻¹ representing 22 species and 12 families were enumerated. It is evident from the data presented in the table 2 that Cynodon dactylon was the most abundant herb followed by Marsilea minuta and Digitaria sanguinalis, as well as represented the highest density respectively. Lowest density was recorded in case of Datura metel, Argemone Mexicana, Xanthium strumarium and Trifolium repens. Highest basal area was observed in Leucas aspera followed by Setaria verticillata, Datura metel and Digitaria sanguinalis. Lowest basal area was observed in Cyperus rotundus. Basal area and density of individual tree species varied from 0.0002 m³ ha⁻¹ to 0.215 m³ ha⁻¹ and 800 to 138000 stems ha⁻¹, respectively. Cynodon dactylon showed highest value of IVI (48.62) followed by Leucas aspera (27.32) and Setaria verticillata (23.33). Similarly Cyperus rotundus showed lowest value of IVI (2.35) followed by Argemone Mexicana (2.94) and Mimosa pudica (3.45). The total herb density and basal area of site II was recorded 476400 herbs ha⁻¹ and 1.35 m³ ha⁻¹, respectively.

Table 3: Comparison of vegetational composition with other forests

| Location               | Layers          | Density (stems ha⁻¹) | Basal area (m² ha⁻¹) | Source                                      |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Tropical dry forest, Eastern Ghats | Shrub Herb | 3484-4040 | 655750-708450 | -- | Gandhi & Sundarapandian (2014) [13] |
| Tropical moist deciduous forest, Ranchi | Shrub Herb | 11.047 | 232.553 | -- | Kumar & Saikia (2018) [15] |
| Tropical deciduous forest | Shrub Herb | 1250-3750 | 2.79-4.92 | -- | Jhariya (2017) |
| Tropical forest, Bharamdeo WLS | Shrub Herb | 760-3080 | 0.39-2.49 | -- | Oraon et. al. (2015) |
| Tropical forest, Bharamdeo WLS | Herb | 67800-119200 | -- | -- | Oraon et. al. (2014) [21] |
| Sarguja forest, Chhattisgar | Shrub Herb | 4500 | 8.32000 | 5.43 | -- | Jhariya & Yadav (2016) |
| Subtropical dry deciduous forest | Shrub | 376 | -- | -- | Sharma & Kant (2014) [28] |
| Himalayan subtropical Pine forest | Shrub | 163 | -- | -- | -- |
Species Diversity
Species diversity, the number of species in a community, is ecologically important to ensure the population structure of the ecosystem. Since, it seems to increase as more stable community.
Shannon index was found to be variable in both the sites in different vegetational layers. The Shannon index values recorded in site I were 1.65 for shrubs layer and 3.297 for herbs layer. Similarly in site II, 1.53 for shrubs layer and 3.39 for herbs layer, was calculated. The values recorded for Concentration of dominance in different vegetational layers of site I were 0.46 for shrubs layer and 0.13 for herbs layer. Similarly in site II, 0.48 for shrubs layer and 0. 0.14 for herbs layer was recorded. Equitability (e) values were 0.85 for shrubs layer and 1.0 for herbs layer found in site I. Similarly in site II equitability values were 0.86 for shrubs layer and 1.0 for herbs layer. In site I species richness values were 0.67 for shrubs layer and 1.27 for herbs layer. Similarly species richness values were 0.56 for shrubs layer and 1.6 for herbs layer found in site II.
Maximum diversity as found in herb layer with Shannon index ranged from 3.30-3.39 followed by shrubs 1.53-1.65 which indicates the more diversity in herbs than shrubs that shows the stability of the communal succession. The concentration of dominance was found higher in shrub layer 0.46-0.48 than herbs 0.13-0.14; indicating less dominance of the dominant shrub species and least dominance of the dominant herb species; which evident very less colonization of single species. Highest evenness was found higher in herb with equitability 1.0 than shrubs (0.85-0.86) that shows all the species are evenly distributed and this condition helps to reduce the intra-specific competition. The species richness was found higher in herbs (1.27-1.6) and shrubs (0.56-0.67); this indicating lesser available of all species in all the quadrates. If we considered both the sites in terms of diversity indices both had similar pattern of diversity in understorey. It indicates narrow difference in pattern of succession in the entire area of eastern plateau consider for investigation.
The comparisons of diversity of the said forest area with other tropical forests were described in table 4. Particularly for shrubs has lesser Shannon index, concentration of dominants, species richness and with moderate evenness among the species. In case of herbs all the values comes under the range of other tropical dry deciduous forest but comparison with tropical moist deciduous forest all the entities coexist. In case of herbs all the values comes under the range of other tropical dry deciduous forest but comparison with tropical moist deciduous forest all the entities comes almost similar except the species richness. It may be caused by forest fragmentation and cattle grazing.

| Location                        | Layers       | H’       | Cd    | e      | d      | sources            |
|---------------------------------|--------------|----------|-------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| Sal mixed forest                | Under storey | 3.64     | 1.45  | 0.939  | 24.76  | Thakur (2018)      |
| Tropical moist deciduous forest | Shrub        | 2.72     | 1.1   | 0.76   | 4.88   | Kumar & Saikia (15) |
| Ranchi                          | Herb         | 2.98     | 0.08  | 0.78   | 3.85   |                    |
| Tropical deciduous forest       | Shrub        | 2.32-3.77| 0.08-0.2| 1.41-1.44| 0.56-1.58| Jhariya (2017)    |
| Sarga Forest                    | Herb         | 4.606    | 0.045 | 1.397  | 1.917  | Sinha et. (2015)  |
| Tropical forest, Bhoramdeo WLS | Herb         | 2.50-4.25| 0.06-0.37| 0.76-1.34| 1.35-2.19| Oraon et. (2014)  |
| Sarguja Forest                  | Shrub        | 0.71-5.27| 0.13-0.77| 0.52-2.12| 0.27-1.37| Oraon et. (2015)  |
| Eastern ghats, Andhra Pradesh   | Under storey | 3.76-3.96| 0.96-0.97| 0.6-0.78| 10.0-11.2| Naidu & Kumar (2016)|
| Subtropical forest Siwaliks     | Shrub        | 2.68     | 0.89  | 0.75   | 10.27  | Sharma & Kant (2014)|
| Tropical deciduous forest       | Shrub        | 1.53-1.65| 0.46-0.48| 0.13-0.14| 0.85-0.86| 0.56-0.67 1.27-1.6| Present Study |

H’= Shannon index, Cd= Concentration of dominance, e=Equitability, d= Species Richness

Conclusion
The understorey keeps a very crucial role due to their medicinal and production values. The herbal diversity of the eastern plateau plays an efficient role in soil moisture conservation as well as improvement of the soil life in terms of humus generation. Intensive cattle grazing create a threat for long term although it helps in dissemination of seeds but it can be well regulated with stall feeding method. The herb diversity is more over the shrubs which indicate a healthy forest ecosystem. Shrubs are primary preference of the browsing animals along with much suitable for fire wood, so control cutting helps in conservation and control of crown fire.

Acknowledgment
A soulful thank to the Jharkhand State Forest Department for due support in conducting the research work smoothly.

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