1. INTRODUCTION:

Nature always stands a golden mark to exemplify the outstanding phenomenon of symbiosis. The plant kingdom supplies three important necessities of life, viz the food, clothing and shelter and a host of other useful products. Through centuries, plants are indispensable to man for life. Among other animals, human beings appear to be afflicted with more number of diseases. But, as a result of his inquisitive nature, man very early sought the advantages from the various plants growing around him to alleviate his sufferings from injury and diseases. Thus nature has provided storehouse of remedies to cure all suffering of mankind, the plants being man’s only chemist for ages. Herbal medicine is the oldest form of medicine known to mankind. It was the mainstay of many early civilizations and still most widely practiced form of medicine in the world today.

As time went on, each tribe added the medicinal power of herbs in their area to its knowledgebase. They methodically collected information on herbs and developed well-defined herbal pharmacopoeias. Indeed, well into the 20th century much of the pharmacopoeia of scientific medicine was derived from the herbal lore of native peoples.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 4 billion people that are 80 percent of the world population presently use herbal medicine for some aspect of primary health care. They have also noted that of 119 plant-derived pharmaceutical medicines and about 74 percent are used in modern medicine in ways that directly correlated with their traditional uses as plant medicines by native cultures.

Major pharmaceutical companies are currently conducting extensive research on plant materials gathered from the rain forests and other places for their potential medicinal value. Substances derived from the plant is the basis for a large proportion of the commercial medications used today for the treatment of heart disease, high blood pressure, pain, asthma, and other problems. For example, Ephedra is an herb used in Traditional Chinese Medicine for more than two thousand years to treat asthma and other respiratory problems. There are some Ayurvedic herbs that are very useful for reducing cholesterol, diabetes etc.

There has been an increasing awareness in recent years in ‘Medicinal Ethnobotany’ mainly because of renewed interest in traditional herbal medicine, popularly called Tribal medicine. The interest in natural drugs, especially those derived from plants has been renewed in the last few decades mainly because of
the widespread belief that Green Medicine, unlike synthetic ones is healthier, safer and without side effects. Though there is a consistent impact and pressure from urbanization, 80% of the world population is still dependent on natural medicine for its chronic and day to day ailments. Realizing its importance, the World Health Organization in its 20th and 30th assembly (1977) gave a formal recognition to traditional medicine and traditional healers in the National health programmed. Another resolution proposed in this assembly has also provided a mandate for the member countries to initiate comprehensive programmes for the identification, evaluation, preparation, cultivation and conservation of medicinal plants used in traditional medicine.

The World Health organization (WHO) has listed 20,000 medicinal plants globally; India’s contribution is 15-20%. According to the WHO estimation, about 80% of the populations in the developing countries depending directly on plants for its medicine (Gupta, 1995, Singh, 2000) In India about 2000 drugs used are of plants origin. In the last few decades over-exploitation of forest resources has led to species loss. As a result 20-25% of existing plant species in India has become endangered. Medicinal plants are now under great pressure due to their excessive collection or exploitation. The degree threat to natural population of medicinal plants has increased because more than 90% of medicinal plant raw material for herbal industries in India and also for export are drawn from natural habitat.

Plants are useful for man in many ways. They are the source of food, fodder, fruits, manure and medicine. Modern man depends on the advanced medical systems such as allopathic and homeopathy for healthcare. But Ayurveda played major role in India and now it is in the path of revival and global acceptance.

India has a century's old tradition of using medicinal plants and herbal medicines for the alleviation of various diseases and ailments, as well as for the promotion of health and happiness. People often look towards the traditional systems of medicine not only for the curative effects of plants, but also to hopefully provide them with elixirs of youth and good health. Ethno medicine is one of the systems of medicine that is widely practiced among the tribal and aboriginal populations of our country for the treatment of ailments.

The tribal tracts are the storehouses of information and knowledge on the multiple uses of plants. However, such traditional knowledge is rapidly disappearing. There is an urgent need to document this knowledge, as otherwise it will be lost forever. The knowledge of the use of natural plant products amongst our people is truly phenomenal.
It is a matter of great pride that among the 18 largest centers of floral diversity in the world, two are located in India. They are the Eastern Himalayas and Western Ghats (Khoshoo, 1996). The hill chain of Western Ghats is under the threat of rapid loss of genetic resources (Gadgil, 1996). A perusal of the available literature reveals that information on the comprehensive survey, documentation and enumeration of wild medicinal plants used by the people of Western Ghats, Vengurla, Sindhudurga District, Maharashtra. Hence, in the present study, an attempt was made to survey, document and enumerate the wild medicinal species of this area. Our survey is the first to attempt an exhaustive analysis of the therapeutic values of such medicinal plants.

Geographic Location of Sindhudurga District, Maharashtra, India:

Maharashtra encompasses an area of 3,07,713 km² (9.4% of country) and is the third largest state in India. Maharashtra is bordered by the states of Madhya Pradesh to the north, Chhattisgarh to the east, Andhra Pradesh to the southeast, Karnataka to the south, and Goa to the southwest. The state of Gujarat lies to the northwest, with the Union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli sandwiched in between. The Arabian Sea makes up Maharashtra's west coast and lies at Latitude: 20.00 N Longitude: 76.00 E. The total forest cover of Maharashtra is 61939 km². This includes 28387 km² of dense forest and 18478 km² of open forest of the total forest area of Maharashtra, 8196 km² are under protected area which includes 35 sanctuaries, 5 National Parks, and 26 Tiger reserve.

Topology.

Vengurla is a town located on the Kankan coast of Maharashtra, India. The town is surrounded by a semicircular range of hills with lush green foliage. This is located at 15°52′N 73°38′E / 15.87°N 73.63°E / 15.87; 73.63. It has an average elevation of 11 meters (36 feet). This small town some say has natural beauty, good beaches, as well as a rich culture and heritage. The town is surrounded by a semicircular range of hills with lush green foliage.

It also has some beautiful temples like Shri Sateri, Rameshwar, the famous "Shri Navadurga at Kanyale-Redi", Vengurla Taluka, Shri Vetoba at Shiroda, Shri Ravalnath etc. The Vengurla Taluka consists of 77 small villages.

Traditional medicinal plant knowledge helps meet the health needs of a large section of the world's population; especially socially and economically disadvantaged of developing countries like India.