

THE PLOT

In awe of caudiciforms

Some of the pachycaul trees live for more than 1,000 years



FEAST TO THE EYE: Garden enthusiasts always evince interest in audiciform plants.

Having said about the plants that stoke the viewers' curiosity, it is nevertheless a daunting task to list the species which will give a garden the touch of extraordinariness through their appearance.

The caudiciforms – one of the most fascinating groups of plants are sometimes aesthetically appealing, sometimes comical-looking, but they always evince interest among the garden enthusiasts. Though many of them look similar, they do not belong to a particular taxonomic group.

Common character in all these plants is the swollen caudex or bulb or stem or rhizome. For most of these plants the caudex is a water reservoir which helps the plant during dry periods. Many of the caudiciform succulents lose their leaves during the dry period to reduce the water loss, which is an adaptation to tide over the periods of water scarcity.

Some of the pachycaul trees grow larger and larger during their long span of life, and flower after many years. Some of them live for more than 1,000 years and grow to enormous sizes. In many cases the plants growing in dry and harsh conditions form good caudex. Some of the Palms and Cycads, though not true succulents, have showy caudex-like trunks.

Among the others belonging to the curious looking group are plants which are insectivorous and carnivorous. Animal-eating nature is a special adaptation of certain plants which grow in the soils poor in nutrients. To make up for the deficiency of Nitrogen and other nutrients, these plants have evolved with special

appendages for trapping and consuming animal species, mainly insects and other small animals like frogs, and lizards.

Carnivorous plants are widespread and found in different regions throughout the world, but are rather rare in number of species and populations. They are restricted to habitats such as bogs, dry and rocky hills where soil nutrients like Nitrogen, Phosphate, Iron, and Calcium are extremely limiting, but sunlight and water are readily available for preparing their food through photosynthesis. The trapping mechanisms vary with the species. The carnivorous plant genera include – *Nepenthes* (Pitcher plants), *Drosera* (sundews), *Pinguicula* (butterworts), *Dionaea* (Venus fly-trap), and *Utricularia* (Bladder-worts).

In some plants, the element of curiosity may be artificially added by careful manicuring. All the topiary plants come under in this category. Many of the old *Ficus* trees, especially *Ficus microcarpa* can be trained into multi heads.

Also

several stems of the *Ficus* and *Pachycaul* species can be braided and twisted together to have that strange appeal.

Another weird, strange and unique kind of plant is *Welwitschia mirabilis*. An adult *Welwitschia* consists of only two leaves, a small caudex stem and roots. The permanent two leaves of this plant are unique in the plant kingdom. They are leathery, broad, and strap-shaped and lie on the ground to become torn and tattered with age. They are the original leaves since the time the plant was a seedling, and they continue to grow and are never shed. The plant lives for more than 1,000 years but only with these two leaves!

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ASK US

Dr. George Michell, an architect turned archaeologist with a Ph.D in Indian Archaeology along with historian Dr. Helen Philon with a Ph.D in Islamic Art and Architecture, talks to G. KIRTANA on Deccan architecture, conservation and significance of cultural heritage

Why Deccan in all of India?

Dr. George Michell: Well, the character of buildings here is multi-ethnic. It is a blend of Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic architecture that needs to be seen, studied and preserved. The heritage in this region receives insufficient attention when compared to other places in India. There are a lot of note worthy buildings that people aren't even aware of.

Should it be conservation versus development or conservation with development?

Dr. Helen Philon: With development, of course! A lot of people live in the myth that conservation opposes development. However, to restore a building and put it to further use is a greater challenge when compared to constructing a new one. A challenge, as it demands detailed analysis, craftsmanship and of course, the economics has a primary role to play. Who would want to spend money on an old structure if they can get a new one for the same monetary value?

How is Deccan architecture different from other styles?

Dr. Helen Philon: Oh! In many ways. You could look at a picture and identify a Deccanised building. In spite of the blend in architectural styles, all of

The DHF prioritises conservation of structures that benefit local community in the form of tourism, income and employment

them have a common character. A Mughal dome can easily be differentiated from a Deccan one and the stucco work predominantly seen in Hyderabad is a Deccan exclusive.

What is the process involved in the restoration of a building?

Dr. George Michell: Well, it involves research and conservation teams. While the former study buildings, digitise drawings and analyse the various aspects of the structure, the latter involves workmanship in accomplishing the task.

What is Deccan Heritage Foundation (DHF) about?

Dr. George Michell: DHF is an organisation that was born out of concern for the cultural heritage in the Deccan. The stupas in Vijayawada, forts in Hyderabad, the architecture in Hampi and many master pieces inspired us to bring

about awareness among people and instil a sense of pride in preserving them. The foundation prioritises the conservation of structures that benefit the local community in the form of tourism, income and employment. It also believes in publishing guide books to promote these places.

When you talk about publications and awareness, it is limited to the architecture and conservation fraternity. How does it reach the common man?

Dr. Helen Philon: We involve the local community in almost all our projects. Another major initiative taken by our Foundation is the program we began for rural and urban children. The program involves basic study of heritage buildings and the surrounding areas in terms of maintenance, cleanliness and repairs. It educates children, who play an instrumental role in enlightening the elders and not vice-versa (laughs).



A MUST READ: George Michell (R) and Helen Philon during the launch of the book, *Discovering The Deccan*, in Hyderabad on Thursday. - PHOTO: G. RAMAKRISHNA

Techno City

The HMDA has decided to revive the proposals on developing integrated townships on the city outskirts. The decision pertains to Techno City at Tellapur and Discovery City (Srinagar and Integrated Township) at Srinagar village in Maheswaram Mandal. Both the projects have been stalled for some time though developers and consultants were selected few years back. Now, the HMDA has called for transaction advisory consultants to take forward the proposed integrated townships.

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