

Begonia andamensis Parish ex C.B. Clarke



Begonia andamensis originally reported by Charles Samuel Pollock Parish in 1861 and mentioned the locality of type collection as 'Moulmein and the Andaman Islands' leading to considerable uncertainty about the exact type locality. Moulmein is presently known as Mawlamyaing located in Southern Myanmar near Thanlwin or Salween River about 300 km away from Yangon. According to current information, the natural geographical occurrence of *Begonia andamensis* is traced along the corridor of Southern Myanmar towards Andaman Islands; but not recorded anywhere else from the Nicobar group Islands. The disjunct distribution of the species indicates the earlier geological connections of the Andaman Islands towards the Arakan-Yoma Mountains of Burma during the remote past. In Andaman group of Islands, *Begonia andamensis* is characterized by small gene pool found growing in unique ecological niches of wet moist shady lithophytic habitats of evergreen forests. The natural distribution of the species in Andaman group of islands has so far been located only from a few localities like Saddle Peak (North Andaman), Wright Myo, Henry Lawrance Island and Chester Island (South Andaman) with limited populations. This beautiful lithophytic herb grows up to a height of 30 cm. The species could simply be demarcated with white flowers, pinkish stem and reniform or cordate orbicular leaves with lax pubescence on nerves beneath. From taxonomical point of view, *Begonia andamensis* is closely allied to *Begonia sinuata* Wall. ex Meisn. However, some earlier taxonomists like Sulpiz Kurz (1834-1878) treated this species as a synonym of *B. sinuata*. Nevertheless, Clarke's treatment with independent status seems more logic, since *Begonia andamensis* exhibits marked differences with its allied one in flower size, degree and nature of pubescence. As regards to etymology of *Begonia andamensis*, the generic epithet is derived from the name of Michel Begon (1638-1710), the earlier French Governor of Haiti, a navy commander as well as a plant collector. However, Linnaeus mentioned Begon only as a navy commander and coined the genus name as '*Begonia*'; but not mentioned about Begon as the French Governor of Haiti and plant collector. Interestingly, it is noted that the specific epithet was written as '*andamanensis*' by Parish on herbarium sheet (*Begonia andamanensis*) of its type collection. However, this species was later validated and described in Flora of British India by C. B. Clarke (1879) as *Begonia andamensis*. The type locality recorded by Parish as 'Moulmein and the Andaman Islands' on the herbarium sheet deposited at Kew (Parish 7, 1861, acc. No. K000761439) was really puzzling over a century, since no further collections or report on this species from the Andaman Islands after type collection until 1982. During the latter half of 1982 Dr Hore from the Botanical Survey of India located this species from Wright Myo (South Andamans). It obviously indicates the specific epithet of the taxon is named after the insular name, Andaman Islands, by Parish. Hence, it is presumed that this species must have located for the first time from the Andaman Islands by Parish rather than Moulmein of Burma.

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