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THE BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE FLORA AND VEGETATION OF BENGAL WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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ABSTRACT

A brief account of the history of explorations and taxonomic studies on vascular plants in Bengal is presented. The bibliography has about 500 references and includes most of the literature on the flora and vegetation of Bengal and some related topics. It is a step towards preparing the revised floras of the state of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

The history of studies on vascular plants in Bengal is about 200 years old. Over the bulk of this period some distinguished taxonomists and plant-geographers worked on the plants of Bengal and greatly influenced the development of botanical studies in India. Although the important taxonomic publications in India were summarised earlier (King, 1895-1899; Agharkar, 1938; Biswas, 1943; Chatterjee, 1957; Santapau, 1958; Jain, 1961; Maheshwari and Kapil, 1963; Narayanaswami, 1961, 1965; Rolla Rao and Wadhwa, 1971 and Rolla Rao, 1973), there is no comprehensive bibliography on the taxonomy of Bengal plants as a whole for reference purpose. The aim of this paper is to make an up-to-date, and as complete as possible, bibliography on the flora and vegetation of Bengal and to provide with necessary information for future work. Some related subjects such as forestry, horticulture, geography and economic botany are also included, because of their impact on the study of plants in Bengal. Monographs, revisions and floras covering Indian sub-continent, which obviously refer to plants of Bengal as well, are generally not cited in the bibliography.

Area: The studies made on the plants of politically undivided Bengal (presently Bangladesh and West Bengal), in a rather wider geographical sense, have been discussed here. The area as covered under literature, includes the following 6 botanical regions of the old province of Bengal, out of the 11 regions as recognised earlier by Prain (1903a). These are (1) *North Bengal* bounded by the foot hills of the Himalaya in the north, east by the Brahmaputra, south by the Ganga and the west by the Mahananda river (2) *Central Bengal* between the Brahmaputra, the Hooghly and the Ganga, just to the north of Sundarbans (3) *West Bengal* between the Bhagirathi and the Chotonagpur plateau (4) *East Bengal* in the east of the Brahmaputra including Sylhet (5) *Sundarbans* and (6) *Chittagong*. Although markedly different from the main part of Bengal, the Flora of Darjeeling district (a part of the Sikkim Himalaya) has been considered in order to cover all the geographical regions. The botanical area dealt with lies approximately between 20°75′ and 27°14′ North Latitude and between 85°70′ and 92°75′ East Longitude. The present area of West Bengal is about 87,853 sq. km and that of Bangladesh is about 141,122 sq. km.

SYSTEMATIC STUDIES

The history of botanical studies in Bengal dates back to 1784, when W. Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal to study the Man and Nature in Asia with special refer-

ence to its Oriental Learning, Arts and Natural History. The botanical activity in Bengal actually started in 1787, when Robert Kyd founded the Botanic Garden near Calcutta. The earlier botanical works in Bengal are associated with John Fleming, W. Jones, Roxburgh, Wallich, Buchanan-Hamilton and were mainly centred around the Botanic Garden at Calcutta (Santapau, 1958). Since its foundation, the Botanic Garden at Calcutta has played a distinct role in the introduction, naturalization and development of Tea, Jute, Cinchona, Teak and Mahogony cultivation in India, particularly in Bengal. The famous *'Hortus Bengalensis'* by Roxburgh was published in 1814. Roxburgh prepared about 2533 coloured illustrations of Indian plants, many of which were collected from the old province of Bengal (*cf.* Icones Roxburghianae 1964, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971 and Prain, *l.c.*). Buchanan-Hamilton worked out his collections from Noakhali and Chittagong in correspondence with Roxburgh (Hamilton, 1825a, b, 1826 and Burkill, 1965). French Botanist Jacquemont travelled through Bengal in the year 1829 and collected many specimens. All his collections are deposited in Paris (Stacton, 1954).

W. Carey occupies a distinct position in the history of botanical and horticultural researches in Bengal (Ghosh, 1947; Srinivasan, 1961 and Burkill, *l.c.*). Carey helped Roxburgh to collect most of the species available in the plain of Central Bengal (Prain, *l.c.*). He edited Roxburgh's *'Flora Indica'* (1832) in 3 volumes. His garden at Serampore was almost as important as the Botanic Garden at Calcutta. A comprehensive list of plants of Carey's garden at Serampore and of Calcutta Botanic Garden was published by Voigt (1845). It also includes the list drawn up by Masters for his abandoned *'Calcutta Flora'* (1839-1840).

The Calcutta Herbarium (CAL) is closely linked with the advances of the botanical research in Bengal. A local herbarium of Bengal plants was started earlier in the Calcutta Herbarium by Griffith (Mukerjee, 1959). Among the collections listed by T. Thomson (1856) from Bengal, the following deserve mention: a complete set of specimens collected and dried in the Botanic Garden, Calcutta and labelled by Wallich, collections made by McClelland in 1849 from Birbhum district, collections made by Hooker and Thomson till 1851 and some specimens from Jessore. Hooker made his extensive collections of Bengal plants from Darjeeling, Sylhet, Chittagong and Sunderbans. The botanical observations on the areas travelled were systematically recorded by him (Hooker, 1848, 1849a, b, 1850, 1852, 1854a, b, 1904, 1907; Hooker and Thomson, 1855; Hooker *et al.*, 1872-1897).

Some noteworthy publications during the second half of 19th century are by Long (1857-1859) on indigenous plants of Bengal, Anderson (1862) on plants of Calcutta and Ball (1869) on the flora of Manbhum.

Clarke paid much of his attention to the herbaceous weeds of cultivation occurring in Bengal plains, particularly in the rice fields. His interest was in herbaceous members of the families like Cyperaceae, Commelinaceae and little Scrophulariaceae (Clarke, 1871, 1874, 1875, 1885, 1898). His knowledge of the topography and vegetation of Sunderbans (Clarke, 1896) was intimate and he explored Madhupur jungles of Mymensingh extensively (Prain, *l.c.*). Gamble joined his service in North Bengal in 1872 and subsequently made a considerable collection from Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Sunderbans, Dacca, Chittagong and adjoining areas (Gamble, 1875, 1878 and Prain, *l.c.*). Kurz with plenty material at hand, wished to publish a flora of Bengal when he was asked to switch over from Bengal to Burma (Burkill, *l.c.*). Later, King and Haines explored various parts of North Bengal and Duars (Prain, *l.c.*, Haines, 1896, 1906).

Following the publication of Hooker's

'Flora of British India' (1872-1897), Prain published his account of *'Bengal Plants'* (1903a). This is the only comprehensive work on Bengal plants with workable keys for identification and vernacular names. In the introductory review, Prain described the characteristic of the flora of Bengal and discussed its relationship. He, however, considered his work on Bengal Plants as a provisional list or a census of the plants of a distinct geographical unit of Eastern India. He stressed upon the need of more explorations and much special work in order to have a complete and standard flora of Bengal. The flora of Sundarbans (Prain, 1903b) and the flora of Howrah, Hooghly and 24-Parganas (Prain, 1905) were published subsequently.

The earlier research work on Bengal plants up to the year 1920 or thereabout, were mainly carried on by the Government Departments like the Botanical Survey of India, the Forest and Agriculture Departments. Thereafter, workers in different universities, colleges, research institutes and several individuals became interested in the flora of Bengal and made some significant contributions (Bose 1920; Brühl, 1920, 1922, 1926; Banerji, 1934; Datta and Mitra, 1953; Watts, 1953; Ara, 1954; Sinclair, 1955; Khan, 1959; Ghosh, 1960; Datta and Majumdar, 1961; Datta and Majumdar, 1966; Dutta and Ganguly, 1967; Guha, 1968, 1971; Khan and Afza, 1968; Khan and Farida Banu, 1969; Khan and Huda 1970; Khan and Huq, 1972, 1973; Khan and Hassan, 1973 and others). The studies made on the grasses of 24-Parganas and on the weed flora of 24-Parganas by Majumder (1956, 1962) contain useful keys, careful descriptions and illustrations of plants occurring in the area. Benthall (1946) described and illustrated over 250 tree species to be found in or near Calcutta. An interesting descriptive account of trees and shrubs of Santiniketan was given by Basu and Dutta (1957). Apart from these important contributions, numerous casual publications and some incomplete check lists of species occurring in smaller areas in Bengal were also published during recent years.

A distinguished group of horticulturists attached to the *Cinchona* industry in India, extensively studied the flora of Sikkim Himalaya, which also included Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas of West Bengal (Burkill, *l.c.*). The weed flora and some common flowering plants of Darjeeling district were listed by Shebbeare (1941), Watts (1954), Ghose (1949, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959a, b, 1966), Sain (1958, 1959), Sen (1963), Datta (1964), Mahapatra, Guha, Roy and Paul (1965), Mathew (1966, 1969) and Sharma and Ghosh (1970). The gymnosperms of the Sikkim Himalaya were described by Sengupta (1933) and Shebbeare (1934). Recently, Mathew (1970) has published a bibliography on the botany of Sikkim and adjoining areas. A few more are added here.

A little attention has been paid so far to the vascular cryptogams of Bengal. Majumdar (1930, 1933) made some preliminary observations on the fern flora of Calcutta. The distribution of pteridophytes in the Cooch Behar district, West Bengal was noted by Biswas (1956). Mehra and Bir (1964) and Mathew (1971) reported pteridophytes Darjeeling district. Chaudhuri (1964) studied the ferns of Sikkim forests in West Bengal and discussed some aspects of their ecology. Mukerjee (1972) presented an account of fern flora of the plain of North Bengal.

Since the publication of the *Flora of British India* and *Bengal Plants*, numbers of new species and distributional notes are being published regularly. Calder, Narayanaswami and Ramaswami (1926) and Razi (1959) compiled two useful lists of such species and recorded several taxa as occurring in Bengal. Some other species, hitherto known from other parts of Indian sub-continent and some foreign species have now

been found growing wild in Bengal. Several distributional records of such plants have been published by various authors (Bhattacharya, 1935; Culshaw, 1950; Chatterjee, 1960; Mukerjee, 1960, 1966; Dutta and Mitra, 1961; Srinivasan and Agrawal, 1963; Maheshwari, 1964; Bennet, 1965a, b, c, 1966, 1967, 1971; Rao and Mukherjee, 1965; Banerjee, 1966; Ghosh, 1966a, b; Jain, 1966a, b, c, 1968; Chandra, 1966; Chandra and Bhattacharya, 1966; Datta and Majumdar, 1966; Santapau and Korlahalli, 1966; Guha Bakshi and Naskar, 1966, 1967; Rao and Shanware, 1966; Jain and Banerjee, 1967; Korlahalli, 1967; Mitra, 1967, 1969, 1971; Khan and Huda, 1967; Rao, Banerjee and Mukherjee, 1967; Basak, 1968a, b; Mukherjee and Banerjee, 1968; Jain and Pal, 1968; Guha Bakshi, 1969; Banerjee, 1969; Das 1969; Mukherjee, 1969a; Vuppuluri Sharma, 1969a, b; Banerjee and Pal, 1970; Das and Pramanik, 1970; Rao, Mukherjee and Banerjee, 1970; Khan, Khan and Huq, 1970; Babu and Biswas, 1970; Yonzone, Babu and Das, 1970; Banerjee, 1971a; Ghosh, Guha Bakshi, Mukherjee and Mondal, 1971; Biswas, 1971; Banerjee and Babu, 1971; Khan and Hossain, 1971; Khan, Hossain and Huq, 1971; Mitra and Roy, 1971 and others).

As a result of intensive search for new taxonomic entities, some new taxa were described from Bengal during recent years. Some notable ones are *Ixora athroantha, I. longibracteata* and *I. tigriomustax* by Bremekamp (1959) from Chittagong Hill Tracts, *Microula duthiei* by Banerjee (1966) from Tista Valley, *Phyllanthus mukerjeeanus* by Mitra and Bennet (1966) from Howrah district, *Hydrocotyle himalaica* by Mukherjee (1969b) from Darjeeling district, *Cuscuta sharmanum* by Mukerjee and Bhattacharya (1970) from Burdwan and Midnapore districts, *Hypericum assamicum* by Biswas (1971) from Assam and Darjeeling district, *Tetrastigma indicum* by Maulik (1974) from Sikkim Himalaya and *Dalbergia duarensis* by Thothathri (1975) from Alipurduars, North Bengal.

Few phytogeographical and ecological studies have been carried out on the vegetation of Bengal. The mangrove forests of Sundarbans occupied the attention of botanists like Roxburgh, Griffith, Falconer, Kurz, Clarke, Schlich, Gamble, King and Prain. Heinig made extensive collections from Sundarbans between the years 1891 and 1894 in succession of seasons. Thus with sufficient material at hand, Prain (1903b) published his *Flora of Sundribuns* which is, more or less, a complete census of mangrove plants in Bengal. Much of this forest area is now in Bangladesh and a small portion of it belongs to the southernmost part of West Bengal. The various facets of forestry and the prospects of mangrove and other forest areas in West Bengal were discussed in several symposia (Anon., 1959, 1966b). The composition of forest belts in Bengal and their ecology were described in detail by different authors (Heinig, 1907; Cowan, 1928, 1929a, b; Cowan and Cowan, 1922, 1929; Ahmad, 1937; Calder, 1937; Coffey, 1940; Raizada, 1941; Anon., 1935, 1954, 1957, 1960, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1966a; Ahmad, 1958; Patil, 1961). Puri (1960) and Champion and Seth (1968) brought together most of the information of Indian forest ecology and referred to many of the works on Bengal area. In a series of ecological studies along the Indian coasts, Rao and his associates (Rao *et al.*, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972, 1974) made some observations on the coastal areas of West Bengal. An interesting account of the *flora advena* of Bengal was given by Brühl (1908). He also presented a chronological classification of the immigrant plants in Bengal.

The different types of plant communities from the sea-shore to higher regions in North Bengal were described by Biswas (1943). The vegetation of Jalpaiguri district and the geobotany of Murshidabad district were respectively studied by Mukerjee (1965) and

Chowdhury and Bhattacharya (1966). The natural vegetation and phytogeography of Darjeeling district in Eastern Himalaya were described by Anon. (1963), Hara (1966) and Biswas (1967). The components of successive forest types in different altitudinal zones were studied by Schweinfurth (1957) and Klotz (1966). An ecological-botanical study of the family Lauraceae of North Bengal was also undertaken by Chaudhuri (1970). Biswas (1927a), Biswas and Calder (1936) and Subramanyam (1962) noted the distribution of aquatic and marsh plants in Bengal. Chaudhuri, Mallick and Sen (1962) presented a summary of the history of vegetation of the Lower Gangetic Plain. The ecology of the grass vegetation in different districts of West Bengal was studied in detail by Chaudhuri (1959b, d, 1960a, b, 1965a). The plant types and aquatic vegetation of Damodar Valley area of West Bengal were described by Kachroo (1956, 1959). Observations on the vegetation of the Upper Damodar Catchment area were published by Mitra (1972). A critical quantitative analysis and special ecological features of the vegetation of North Bengal were presented by Chaudhuri (1969). Certain aspects of weeds of rice fields in West Bengal were described by Bandyopadhyay (1972, unpub.).

According to Chatterjee (1940, 1962) Bengal belongs to the Indo-Gangetic Plain Floristic Region and is relatively poor in endemic forms. Bangladesh presents many typical Burmese and Malayan elements, particularly in the eastern hilly regions and shows a botanical relationship to Indo-Chinese flora (Prain, *l.c.*).

An analysis of the composition of the flora of Bengal (Agharkar and Ghosh, 1931) revealed that out of 2741 species in Bengal (Prain, *l.c.*, excluding ferns), 1109 are perennials, 53% Indo-Malayan, 24% Indian, 16.5% exotic and widely distributed, 3% Himalayan and 8 Oriental, 174 endemic to India only. Ghosh (1938) later presented a summary of the results of a study of distribution of 1200 species found in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Deb (1963) critically analysed various views expressed on the vegetation of the state of Tripura, an area adjacent to Bangladesh, and examined its phytogeographical and ecological aspects (cf. Prain, 1903a).

Finally the literature dealing with the medicinal and economic plants of Bengal needs a special mention. The diagnostic features of medicinal plants and their uses were published by Bodding (1927), Kirtikar and Basu (1935), Bal (1940a), Basu (1956), Maiti (1968) and Jain and Tarafdar (1970). Chopra and his associates investigated on the properties and distribution of several medicinal, insecticidal and poisonous plants of India (Chopra *et al.*, 1949, 1956, 1958, 1961, 1969). Biswas (1956a, b, 1961) and Biswas and Ghosh (1950) published some interesting notes on medicinal plants of Darjeeling district and Bengal plains. Ball (1866, 1867), Jain and De (1964, 1966) and De (1965, 1969) reported their observations on some plants used by local people of Purulia district, West Bengal. The economic importance and medicinal uses of some of the common water plants of Bangladesh were discussed by Gani and Khan (1967). The Bengali local names and uses of some medicinal plants of Tripura were given by Deb (1968). The Western and the three Himalayan districts of West Bengal are particularly very rich in medicinal plants (Randhawa, Mitra and Mehta, 1964). A variety of useful medicinal plants are now being grown successfully in Darjeeling district and in other parts of North Bengal (Anon., 1931 ; Bal, 1940b ; De, 1952 ; Biswas, 1956b, 1961 ; Mukerjee, 1966). India has the largest Ipecac plantation in the world in the Darjeeling district (Biswas, 1958). Watt (1889-1896) and Anon. (*Wealth of India,* 1948-date) presented accounts, vernacular names and uses of various medicinal and economic plants growing in Bengal.

Ahmad (1958) described the physical geo-

graphy, natural resources, pattern of production and economic activities of Bangladesh. He attempted to correlate the geographical factors with productive forces in order to trace the changes in the pattern of vegetation in that country. A similar comprehensive and analytical treatment on West Bengal is yet to be published (Mukherjee, 1956). This is essentially required in view of the need to utilise rationally the plant resources and to conserve them for the future (Mukerjee, 1966).

The important collections of Bengal plants are kept in the various herbaria of Botanical Survey of India at Calcutta, especially in the Calcutta Herbarium (CAL). The original regional herbarium of Bengal local is at present maintained at the Eden Gardens, Calcutta. The Lloyd Botanic Garden and Herbarium at Darjeeling contain collections of Himalayan plants. Some interesting collections of Bengal plants are deposited in the herbaria of Calcutta and Dacca Universities. A few collections of local interest can be found in the departments of Botany of different universities and colleges.

PRESENT TREND OF TAXONOMIC RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

This treatment is an attempt to record facts of the progress of taxonomic researches in Bengal during the past 200 years. The bibliography contains all available references on the flora and vegetation of Bengal. However, only a few selected data could be discussed here. In addition, recent discoveries in various disciplines of botany usually have a bearing on the plant systematics to interpret its problems. A lot has been done on plant materials available in Bengal in conducting such investigations. Monographs and reviews present exhaustive references to such studies (also see Majumdar, 1957; Narayanaswami, 1961, 1965; Maheshwari and Kapil, 1963; Anon., 1967, 1970; Sharma, 1973 and others).

Our present knowledge of the flora of West Bengal is inadequate. Very little information is available on the botany of West Bengal, particularly of the western part of the state. There had never been a systematic exploration of this vast tract. Prain (*l.c.*) also admitted that his records of this area were very limited. It was Culshaw (1950), who first contemplated for a flora of West Bengal and discussed on several aspects of it. With ample facilities of research now available in different universities, colleges and research institutions and with the revival of the Botanical Survey of India in 1954 having Calcutta as its headquarters, a fresh impetus to floristic studies and revision work on plants of West Bengal is evident. A programme of botanical collection and exploration of different districts of West Bengal has been taken up by the Botanical Survey of India and by enthusiastic taxonomists in various universities and research centres. These accounts (Bennet, 1968; Das, 1968; Sanyal, 1970; Vuppuluri Sharma, 1970; Sen, 1972; Mitra, 1973; Guha Bakshi, 1974 and others) when published, will serve as a precursor to the future revised flora of the state of West Bengal.

Bangladesh is fortunate enough in having a good number of collectors in the 19th century. However, after the partition of Bengal in 1947, few research papers on the floristic and taxonomic studies on Bangladesh have appeared. In recent years, interest in the study of plant systematics is apparent there. Md. Salar Khan and his associates of Dacca University have made valuable additions to our knowledge of the flora of that country. Lately, the People's Republic of Bangladesh has implemented the project the 'Botanical Survey of Bangladesh' with a view to complete in stages the flora of that country through floristic and ecological survey (Khan and Huq, 1972, 1973). This will definitely gain an increased momentum with the establishment of a National Herbarium in Bangladesh. The recent publication of the Bangla-

desh Journal of Botany is of much value to the country.

The usefulness of Prain's *Bengal Plants* in the field of floristic studies in Bengal is undoubtedly great. But in view of recent explorations, changes in the taxonomic categories and due to realignment of political boundaries, it requires an immediate revision. Although considerable work is in progress, the study of the flora of different districts of West Bengal and Bangladesh, however, merits more careful attention. It is hoped that these enumeration of species of different districts, together with keys and descriptions of floristic and ecological features of respective areas, will ultimately form the basis for writing the revised floras of the state of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

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PART III

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