

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE BOTANICAL SURVEY OF INDIA AND THE UNIVERSITIES

K. M. MATTHEW

*St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirapalli*

### INTRODUCTION

The Botanical Survey of India is the heir to the great heritage of Indian botany. It is committed to carry forward and improve the rich legacies, especially in the two main areas of *exploration* and *research* (floristic and monographic). It should supervise the overall planning at the national level in consultation with experts, on the lines outlined in the report of the Royal Society (1963). The Council of the Royal Society of Taxonomy, London, appointed a committee of experts (E J H Corner Chairman) to study the state of taxonomy in U. K. This committee had detailed questionnaires sent to teachers, researchers and directors of herbaria, museums and gardens to obtain an objective evaluation of the situation. It is suggested that such a committee consisting of competent and practising taxonomists from the Survey and from the Universities, even with a few from the international herbaria, should advise on the current priorities in Indian taxonomy and plan for the future.

'Botany' in the universities needs redefinition of its goals (U G C 1963; Matthew 1977 a). Systematic botany is a *specialized* subject with *limited employment opportunities* but

nevertheless requiring well-trained workers. I have advocated a drastic overhauling of the teaching of taxonomy in the universities (Matthew 1976 b).

In the present situation in the universities, one must distinguish between the general run of unspecialized botany departments and a few faculties that offer specialized courses in taxonomy. As for the former, the Survey can provide handbooks for field work (Jain & Rao 1977 ; Santapau 1956), the service of naming of plants or supply of materials for research (within reasonable limits), and offer instruction on herbarium techniques to visiting students. An occasional student may feel inspired to do very creative field work within the framework of his curriculum (Ramesh 1971). A couple of hours of instruction at a working herbarium can be far more profitable to the student than the present virtually useless practice of submitting herbarium sheets for examination.

On the other hand, are a few faculties specializing in taxonomy, collaboration with which can be enriching to the Survey as well. The scope of such collaboration is visualized as follows. Whereas the Survey has its unique collections, experienced staff, specialized literature and contacts with international

herbaria, the specialized university departments have the academic background and contacts, teaching and research traditions and laboratory facilities. Contact with such departments can help the Survey staff to keep abreast of modern developments and check on the theoretical background of their taxonomic practice (Matthew 1976 a). It is suggested that the Survey generally concentrate on research along traditional lines leaving those that require sophisticated instrumentation to the universities. Much mutual benefit can accrue from this collaboration. Two such cases may be mentioned: that between the Kew Herbarium and the Reading University in U K, and the situation at the Rijksherbarium, Leiden, Netherlands. In the latter case, the herbarium, itself part of the university, trains prospective taxonomists and absorbs the best among them into its own staff. This is an example worth attaining (Matthew 1975).

#### A SCHEME OF COLLABORATION ILLUSTRATED

I shall illustrate the case for collaboration from that proposed between the Southern Circle (MH) and The Rapinat Herbarium, Tiruchirapalli (RHT). MH has its invaluable collections and a devoted staff known for dedicated work. But it has been entrusted with too vast an area for effective exploration. The Carnatic Flora Project, commenced in November 1975 by the RHT, shares the field work with the MH avoiding any duplication of efforts. It was further visualized that the MH staff would help in the naming of the collections and that all competent and interested members would collaborate in the writing up of the Families for the Flora. Since organization work was to remain with the RHT, the services of the MH staff would be required only for a few months and for strictly scientific work. The result would be that the

best talents in the Survey would be used for a regional Flora without themselves being away from their routine commitments for long.

Such collaboration provides an excellent opportunity for the members of the Survey to be exposed to current trends in the subject, and avail themselves of facilities in allied fields like phytochemistry, biosystematics (Matthew 1977 b) and come into active contact with the leading workers in the country. In return, university workers can have precise and firsthand instruction on the requirements of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature, the preserving of voucher specimens and similar fundamental taxonomic procedures, the ignorance of which is all too common. It should be possible to have some selected centres in the country where such collaboration is actively maintained. A "BSI-University appendix" to the *Bulletin* reporting on joint schemes is recommended.

#### CONCLUSION

Indian taxonomy has a stupendous task awaiting it and it is suggested that collaboration between the Survey and specialized university departments in plant taxonomy can achieve this goal earlier and more integrally than without such collaboration.

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