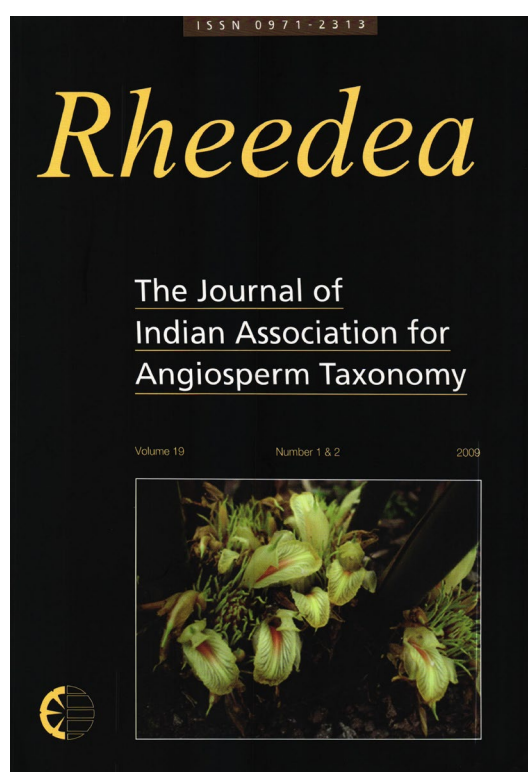




Book Review: Flora of Tamil Nadu – Grasses

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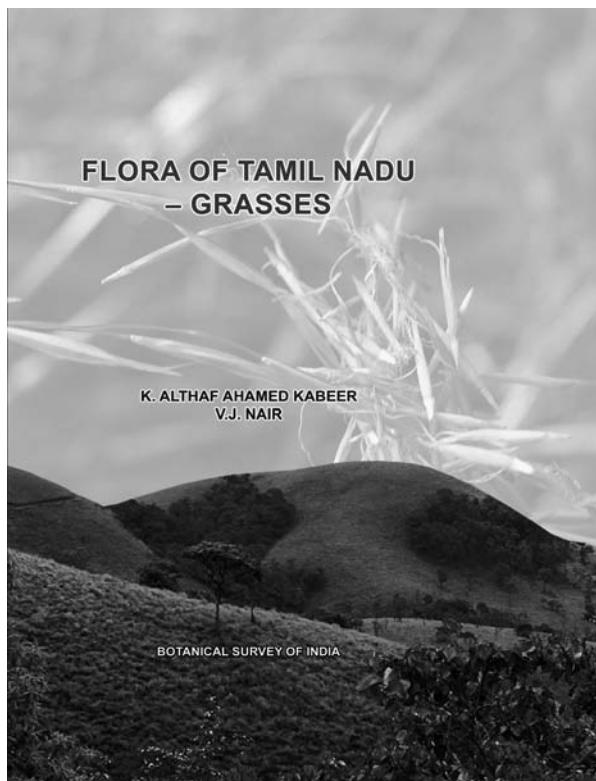
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Book Review

K. Althaf Ahamed Kabeer and V. J. Nair 2009

Flora of Tamil Nadu – Grasses, Botanical Survey of India, Ministry of Environment & Forests, C. G. O. Complex, 3rd M. S. O. Building, DF Block, Sector I, 5th & 6th Floor, Salt Lake City, Kolkata 700 064, i – xxxii + 525 pp (all in art paper), HB, with 18 colour plates, 87 plates of line drawings, 2 plates of colour maps, 2 plates of B & W maps.

ISBN 81-8177-031-5, Price: Rs. 804/-



Grasses that fulfil more than 80% of food requirements of the human population and forming one of the largest families with more than 9500 species have not received required attention from taxonomists for long. The monumental work of Bor on 'The Grasses of Burma, Ceylon, India and Pakistan (excluding Bambusiae)' published about 50 years ago has changed this scenario and created interest on the study of grasses. This resulted in publications of several looks on grasses and the latest addition is 'Flora of Tamil Nadu – Grasses' that deals with 447 species (excluding Bamboos).

Introduction gives brief background (in two paragraphs) for taking up this arduous task. The chapter on study area provides information on

political divisions, topography and rivers of the state. However it is not clear that whose classification was followed in classifying the topography of the state. Table 1 that provides details of collectors (of grasses), year(s) of collection and area (districts) proves useful. However, these details are restricted to collections at MH, though other herbaria such as FRC, HIFP, PCM and RHT also have reasonably good collections.

Morphological variations and economic importance provided in the book are quite useful to students as well as professionals, though diagrams depicting these features would have been more useful. Couple of tables compare the grasses of Tamil Nadu, tribe wise and dominant genera wise, with that of Kerala and India. But the reason for the differences has not been analysed. Altogether, 99 grass taxa are listed as endemic to India that are present in Tamil Nadu; their status mentioned therein is not as per IUCN categories. Discussion on endemism, conservation and maps provided for the strict endemic taxa of Tamil Nadu will help people to take up further research on these taxa.

Systematic treatment provided in this Flora is a taxonomist's delight. It starts with key to tribes (29 tribes); but the practical problem is, page numbers for tribes are not provided making it cumbersome to use. Neither index nor contents refer to the tribes. For effective use, I suggest the users to prepare their own index for Tribes.

For each genus, author citation, reference to protologue, distribution, number of species in the World, India and Tamil Nadu are given followed by key to species. Nomenclature of each species is dealt in detail with reference to pertinent literature at national, regional and state level. Local names are given wherever available and 148 local names listed at the end indicate the richness of folk knowledge

in Tamil Nadu. Descriptions are elaborate covering all the details, and certainly serve as a model to learn the intricate art of describing a grass. Flowering and fruiting, habitat, distribution, uses and notes (on morphology, taxonomy, and nomenclature depending on the case) are given for each species. Line drawings totalling 87 plates are of very good quality and are useful for identification.

Index differentiates correct names from synonyms. Page numbers indicating illustrations are marked bold. Good design, layout and printing of this book make this book stand out from the rest of the publications of Botanical Survey of India.

Eighteen colour plates on habitat, habit and close ups given in the beginning make it more user-friendly. However, quality of visuals should have been better, notwithstanding the difficulties associated with photographing grasses in the field. No information about the authors is printed; I feel the details of the authors should have been provided.

The book is highly recommended for the following reasons: i) comprehensive account of about 1/3 of grasses of India with elaborate descriptions, ii) technically correct illustrations of high quality, iii) an important reference book not only on grasses but as a model for other groups (interestingly one of the very few books from India wherein author citation is according to Brummitt & Powell, Floras are quoted as per TL2 and Journals as per BPH) and iv) definitely for its low price.

This book will be a most useful addition to the libraries of research institutions, colleges and universities as well as all the taxonomists irrespective of their specialisations. I will be disappointed if this book is not triggering high quality, taxon (family or lower rank) specific investigations in the country as opposed to area specific broad floristic studies.

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