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## Vigyan kshetras

Each year several scientists in India are superannuated at 58 or 60. Some of the good scientists are given opportunities to continue their work as 'scientists emeritus' by organizations like CSIR, UGC, INSA, etc. However, there is a large number of superannuated scientists whose wisdom and experience are not put to any good use in India. Many of them would be willing to serve the country in an honorary capacity, as they have their pensions and some savings. In the UK the age of superannuation is 70, and in the US a scientist retires only when he wants to do so. But the unemployment situation in India does not permit us to adopt the UK/US system of delayed superannuation in India.

I suggest that this valuable human

resource be used through the setting up of a few *vigyan kshetras* at a few cities in India. Pune and Bangalore are two of the smaller cities where the climate attracts retired scientists. To begin with the *vigyan kshetras* may be set up at these two places. The *vigyan kshetras* should act as 'umbrellas' under which scientists who wish to do honorary work can gather and work individually or collectively. The *kshetra* can provide facilities for writing articles and books, popular or professional, on scientific subjects. The scientists could interact with younger scientists and various social organizations that seek scientists' opinions and advice. They could, on request, deliver lectures at universities, colleges, schools, or on public platforms. In short, the *vigyan kshetras* would be 'think tanks' in the cities where they are set up.

The initial outlay can be modest: a

building (hired or donated), with its rooms modified with a few temporary partitions as cubicles in a library; a common hall for group discussion and for housing books; some minimum furniture—chairs, writing tables and book racks; a caretaker; and a small canteen run by a contractor would be all that is needed besides the facilities of electricity and water. It is most likely that the scientists who offer to serve in an honorary capacity would donate their personal collections of books.

I suggest that the government set up such *vigyan kshetras* in a few cities and use the human resource available in good, capable and willing scientists belonging to the superannuated class.

P. R. PISHAROTY

Bhagya Nivas  
Modi Baug  
Pune 411 016, India

## SCIENTIFIC CORRESPONDENCE

### 'Extinct' orchid rediscovered

Several Indian orchids were described in the nineteenth century by European civil administrators and physicians employed by the British government and trading companies in India. They worked for their own interest rather for any other reason and without much botanical knowledge. In many cases the new taxa were described on the basis of observation of plants and information supplied by nurserymen. As competition increased in the trade of horticulturally important orchids misleading information was deliberately published to confuse competitors. Such confusions are still being sorted out. During floristic explorations in northeast India

I encountered many such cases. One such interesting and poorly known rare orchid is a species of *Bulbophyllum*, which I encountered in a forest patch in Nagaland. The species was identified as *B. rothschildianum*. This orchid, the most beautiful and horticulturally attractive among the *bulbophyllums*, was first identified as *Cirrhopetalum rothschildianum* O'Brien<sup>1</sup>. Recent taxonomists consider *Cirrhopetalum* Lindl. as synonymous to *Bulbophyllum* Thou. The orchid was therefore renamed *B. rothschildianum* (O'Brien) J. J. Smith<sup>2</sup>.

There is only one report<sup>3</sup> of the species based on plants and information regarding locations etc. supplied by a

nurseryman from somewhere in the hills beyond Darjeeling. The report is silent about the actual place of its occurrence in nature. The habitat of origin of this taxon is unknown<sup>1,3</sup>. Even *Index Kewensis*, the only authentic reference work for all botanical names of phanerogams, with their authors' names, the work in which these names were first published, their native country and their synonyms, mentions nothing about the native country and habitat of this taxon but puts a question mark ('Habitat?')<sup>4</sup>.

Although a number of botanists from the Botanical Survey of India, universities, colleges and forest departments are engaged in floristic explorations in the region, there is no record of its collection from nature. The species has not been seen in nature for over a



Flowers of *Bulbophyllum rothschildianum* (O'Brien) J. J. Sm. Inset Central part of 5-flowered umbel depicting cuculate dorsal sepals with fringed margin and sensitive plume at apex and tongue-like lip (labellum).

century. Even the two compilations of Indian orchid flora<sup>5,6</sup> mention nothing about this orchid. This species was therefore supposed to be 'extinct'<sup>7</sup>.

My efforts to locate the taxon in and around Darjeeling Hills proved futile.

There are several such examples of orchid species where locations had to be corrected. All the information available and my field investigation lead to the conclusion that the hills beyond Darjeeling may not be the type locality and natural habitat of this species.

I discovered and located this taxon in nature thrice, in 1987, 1989 and 1990, but only in one humid broad-leaved mixed evergreen forest patch of Longsa village in Mokokchung district in Nagaland. Until my discovery nothing was known about its habitat, although some herbarium specimens made out of nursery plants based on which it was described as a new taxon for the first time<sup>1,3</sup> exist.

Thus:

- (i) The taxon still exists. It is not extinct as thought to be by many botanists<sup>3,7</sup>.
- (ii) Its natural habitat is the hills of northeast India.
- (iii) It is endemic to northeast India, specifically in contrast to two Indian reports<sup>7,8</sup>.
- (iv) Its occurrence in nature is very rare. It is endangered because of deforestation, habitat destruction, and illegal and indiscriminate exploitation. The species had been used as parental source for producing outstanding hybrids that have received awards of merit from horticultural and orchid societies<sup>1,9</sup>.

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YOGENDRA KUMAR

Botany Department  
North-Eastern Hill University  
Shillong 793 014  
India