New appointments

Dr Vasant R. Gowariker, 62, has been appointed and has taken-over as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Pune. He was Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Science and Technology during 1986–91. Gowariker was designated as the Adviser to the Prime Minister on Science and Technology during 1991–93. He was earlier Director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

Dr Abraham E. Muthunayagam, 56, has been appointed and has taken-over as Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Ocean Development. Muthunayagam has made distinguished contributions to the early development of the propulsion systems for India’s launch vehicles and satellites and subsequently to the organization of the much larger efforts. Muthunayagam’s last-held position in ISRO was that of Director, Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

SCIENTIFIC CORRESPONDENCE

Comments on ‘Endemic, rare and threatened flowering plants of South India’


The geographic demarcation of the study area of Ranjit Daniel et al. left this author somewhat confused: South India (the very title and p. 494, 2nd para), Tamil Nadu (p. 494, 1st para), Southern peninsula equated to ex-Madras Presidency3 (p. 494, 1st para). Gamble5 Flora of Madras Presidency covers a far greater area (encompassing Kerala, Karnataka, up to Shimoga and Andhra Pradesh up to Ganjam) than that of Tamil Nadu.

This author is not a statistician but wonders whether restricting the family size of the ten critical families to Tamil Nadu proper rather than to the erstwhile Madras Presidency would alter the conclusion about the threatened species being confined to certain families.

One cannot help feeling that a reference to Nair et al.’s6,7 floras of Tamil Nadu would have yielded more relevant information than to Gamble’s5. The former flora has the added advantage of indicating the endemic, endangered, rarity status of the species on a platter without referring to Nayar and Sastri’s6,7, who made a brilliant, pioneering effort in identifying the threatened plants.

Field surveys yield data that are accurate but very time-consuming. The next best alternative is to have recourse to literature survey, which in all cases does not prove to be ‘Alladin’s lamp’. Thus, the unknown entities range in number from 2 (out of 171) in Table 1 (p. 494) on life-forms to 47 in Table 3 on latitudinal range, 55 in Table 4 on physiognomy and a whopping 108 (64%) in Table 5 on habitat.

Species not collected in herbaria for several decades have been one of the yardsticks for judging the rarity status of the species, but what about the new finds, species described for the first time! This in a way may also point to the rarity of the taxa, what failed to be collected and identified over decades and even a century. On the other hand, it may also express the enthusiasm of the botanist to probe the plant material into greater depths and unveil the critical characters unscrambled earlier to witness the birth of a new species. The Botanical Survey of India since its reorganization and dedicated taxonomists have done yeoman service in bringing new taxa to light inspire of the receding forest cover of the country and dwindling plant resources.

4. Nair, N C, Henry, A N, Kumar, G R and Chithar, V. Flora of Tamil Nadu, India.