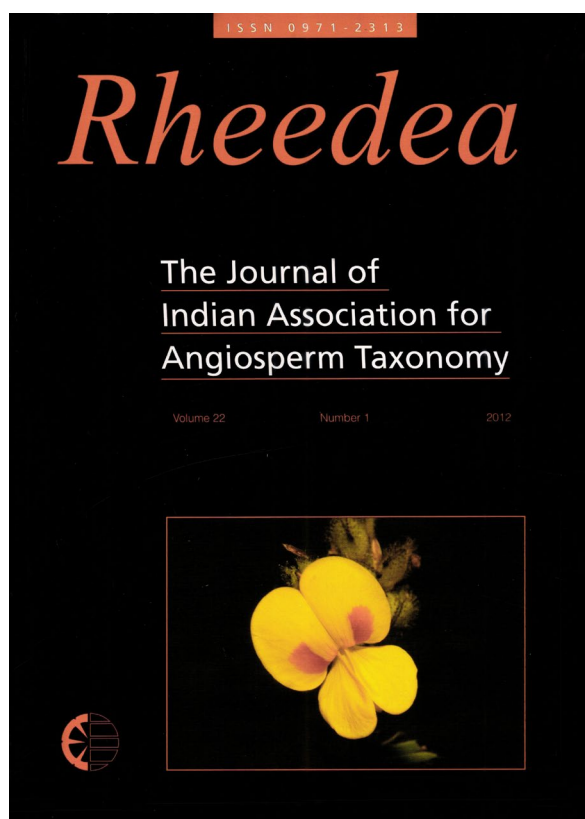




News: Netherlands honours Prof. K.S. Manilal for his interpretation and translation of Hortus Malabaricus

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Netherlands honours Prof. K.S. Manilal for his interpretation and translation of Hortus Malabaricus

Three and half decades of investigations of the flora and indepth study of 12 volumes of Hortus Malabaricus and its translation into English and Malayalam has fetched the renowned taxonomist, Prof. K.S. Manilal, the highest Civilian Award given by the Netherlands Government. Representing Her Majesty Queen Beatrix, Ms. Marijke A. Van Drunen Littel, Counsel General in Mumbai, Kingdom of the Netherlands honoured him with "Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau Award" in a glittering function held at Taj Gateway Hotel in Calicut.

Dr. K.S. Manilal, Emiretus Professor, Department of Botany, University of Calicut has been nominated for interpreting and translating Hortus Malabaricus, which is the most extensive study of the medico-botanical resources of Asia published in Europe prior to 18th century and an important part of the intangible heritage of the Netherlands and India.

Hortus Indicus Malabaricus was initiated by Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede, the then Dutch Governor of Malabar. The 12 Volumes of the Latin book was published during 1678 – 1693 from Amsterdam. The compilation and publication of Hortus Malabaricus is intimately connected with the history of India, politics of the 17th century Netherlands and the social condition of Malabar, now a part of Kerala.

An important development in the study of Hortus Malabaricus was its translation from Latin into English and Malayalam, with annotation and modern botanical and historical interpretation, a 35-year work by Dr. K.S. Manilal, Emiretus Professor, Calicut University. These 12 volumes in English were published in 2003 by the Univesity of Kerala. The information on the medicinal uses of plants described in this book is of immense importance in the context of attempts being made in several countries to recover the traditional knowledge and native wisdom related to various scientific disciplines. Scattered throughout the Hortus Malabaricus are details of aspects of life and culture in southern India. The importance given to Itty Achuthen the local physician whose knowledge



Prof. Manilal with Ms. Marijke A. Van Drunen Littel, Counsel General in Mumbai, Kingdom of the Netherlands after receiving the Medal.

forms the key pillar in the Hortus Malabaricus in spite of his lower caste origin tells us a great deal about the complex social structure of south Indian society 300 years ago. Achuthen's selection by the Dutch Governor van Rheede highlights the respect and high regard placed on merit of the individual in the ancient south India society.

Despite the unique importance of the book, Hortus Malabaricus has not been mentioned in any discussion on intangible heritage of Asia, because the entire text of the book was in old Latin and thus was not accessible to most Asians. The significance of Prof. Manilal's translation to English and Malayalam lie here. Yet, Hortus as an important intangible heritage of the Netherlands and India which still has contemporary value is not known and its translator remain an unknown entity outside a small group of academic community. The award and its publication is a tribute during the Netherlands-India heritage day celebration.

Eminent Botanists, from various institutions of the country assembled to attend the function. Minister



Dr. C. Sathish Kumar, Scientist, Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden & Research Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, presenting a photo of the new orchid species (*Arundina manilaliana*) named in honour of Prof. Manilal during the felicitation.

for Panchayats and Social Welfare Dr. M.K. Muneer inaugurated. Dr. C.K. Ramachandran, Professor (Rtd.), Calicut Medical College presided over. Prof. M.G.S. Narayanan, former Director, Indian Council for Historical Research and Dr. P.A. Indira Balachandran, Director, Medicinal Plant Research, Kottakal felicitated. Dr. M. Sabu, Professor and Head, Department of Botany welcomed the gathering and Dr. P. Sunoj Kumar proposed vote of thanks.

Prof. (Dr.) Kattungal Subramaniam Manilal started his career in taxonomic research in southern India in 1960 at Calicut University. Dr. Manilal started training a breed of young taxonomists at a time when the subject of taxonomy was being neglected. He established a strong *School of Floristic and Plant Taxonomy* at Calicut University, which is now recognized as one of the foremost of its kind in Asia. His investigations of Silent Valley helped to reveal the status of the flora there and were instrumental in taking a formal decision by the Government to conserve the forests of the Valley.

Dr. Manilal clarified the botanical identity of several traditional Indian ayurvedic medicinal plants, including establishing the correct identity of over 650 plants described in Latin in the 17th century 12-volume treatise, *Hortus Malabaricus*. The English edition of *Hortus Malabaricus* with a taxonomic commentary is one of his outstanding and internationally acclaimed contributions. During the years 1972 – 2002, he and his students discovered and described over 240 new species and new records of flowering plants. Dr. Manilal published 11 books and as many as 200 papers on various aspects of plant taxonomy. Through his timely initiative, he helped to establish the *Indian Association for Angiosperm Taxonomy* (IAAT), with over 350 dedicated Life Members on its roll now. Dr. Manilal also established an international journal, *Rheedea*, for publishing research papers in taxonomy.

He has conducted extensive studies on the social, cultural, political, historical and linguistic aspects of botanical researches, proving the relevance of taxonomy to our people and the nation. He is extremely well known for his work overseas as well. He has been a visiting scientist at various international universities such as London University, Smithsonian Institution and Leiden University. In the present context of Biological Patent Laws and Intellectual Property Rights, when our natural plant resources have assumed great economic and political importance, the significant contributions made by Dr. Manilal in nurturing, maintaining and developing expertise in taxonomy in India, contributing to the self-reliance of our country in this area of science have been recognized.

M. Sabu
Calicut