



Studies on Zingiberaceae of Karnataka with Special Reference to the Western Ghats

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The Family Zingiberaceae includes about 53 genera and about 1200 species. They are distributed mainly in tropics and subtropics but majority of them are restricted to Indo-Malayan region, tropical Africa and Central and South America. In India there are about 21 genera and 135 species, mainly confined to the Western Ghats, the North Eastern India, the Eastern Himalayas and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The Family Zingiberaceae is considered to be neglected group mainly because many of them are found in inaccessible regions of dense tropical forests and are difficult to collect especially during monsoon. Herbarium specimens are of little use in this family as most of them lack underground parts and their delicate flower parts are rarely well preserved. In this context, the study of living specimens or materials preserved in spirit is essential. The Zingiberaceae, however, form an important group with considerable economic potentiality such ginger, turmeric, cardamom, mango-ginger and arrowroot. Many members of this group have been used in Ayurvedic and other native systems of medicine from time immemorial.

The Western Ghats, one of the “hottest hot spots” of biological diversity in the world, is rich in Zingiberaceae members. A section of Western Ghats, about 400 km long, passes through the state of Karnataka and about 60% of the Ghats lie in Karnataka. The present comprehensive work on the family Zingiberaceae has revealed the occurrence of 38 species, belonging to 10 genera. In addition to this, some species are cultivated in gardens and as indoor plants for their beautiful flowers. The study also aims at to discuss the distribution and ethno-botanical importance of the members of this family.