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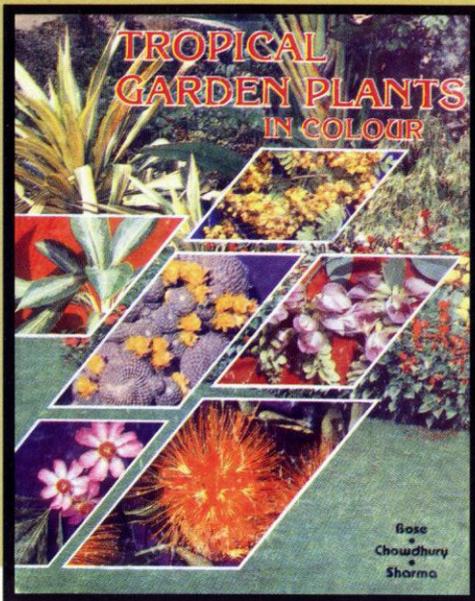
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Tropical Garden Plants in Colour

Edited by **T. K. Bose, B. Chowdhury and S. P. Sharma**
 Publishers **Horticulture and Allied Publishers, Kolkata**
 Publishing Year **1991, reprinted 2001**
 Price **Rs. 2000.00 | \$125.00**

Review by **Samir Mathur**

The title itself seems very clear about the contents of this book. This book is about plants essentially of the Indian subcontinent, though it also includes plants beyond the strictly 'tropical' climatic zone. At the time I was asked to review a book that was published over thirteen years ago, I did feel that perhaps it was not entirely proper to merely do so. It does seem appropriate to use this opportunity to review the planting related texts available in India, and therefore to understand the value of this work.

There seem to be three different genres of writing about plants in our country. First are scholarly tomes written by colonial (and a few native) writers for over a hundred years. Percy Lancaster's "An Amateur in an Indian Garden", and Cowen's "Flowering Trees and Shrubs of India" are well known examples. These contained botanically accurate descriptions and line drawings of plant life, and may be valuable in establishing a taxonomical base for further research. Other later volumes are of significance viz., Maheshwari's "The Flora of Delhi" and Randhawa's "Flowering Trees", both of which were written in the mid-sixties. It is important to understand that these authors were focusing on only geographical areas, despite the all embracing India mentioned in the title.

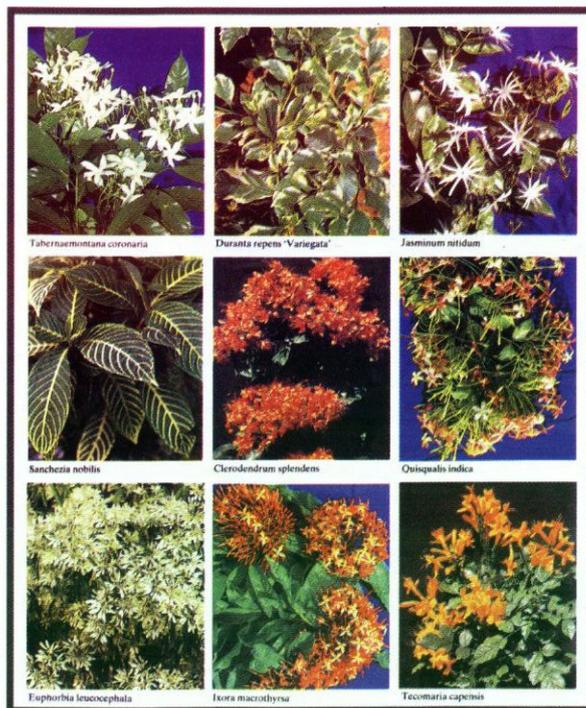
Maheshwari's work was largely about the Delhi region, which is both hot and dry for six months and then humid for the next three and cold for the last three months. Dang has written on flowering plants of the Himalaya region in the nineties. It is clear that plants recognized by the author would be suitable for use in similar climatic areas.

The second type of writings expanded on the works related to plant identification. The authors sought to combine plant character-

istics with application of the plants into a garden or landscape. The seminal work on plant listing as well as establishment of gardens - K. S. Gopalswamiengar's "Complete Gardening in India", was first published in 1935. Unfortunately, this wonderful book is difficult to source, being intermittently reprinted from Bangalore. This is almost akin to the bible for a lot of the landscape architects.

Third are works about more defined areas of planting design. Jindal's work on lawns, P. P. Trivedi's writings on shrubs and Dr B. P. Pal's writings relating to roses as well as Randhawa's "Flowering Trees" based upon the experience of tree planting in Chandigarh address specific areas of the canvas of design with plants. Two other books deserve a mention in this genre: School of Planning and Architecture's compilation of "Trees of Delhi" is most hard to find in original form. This is a work that deserves to be reprinted, as it is extremely valuable to any designer. Another beautifully photographed book (reviewed in an earlier issue of this Journal) is "Trees of India" by Bagla and Menon.

Tropical Garden Plants in Colour is a book that fits into the first category of writings in India. Plants are listed



> book review

into five sections: Trees, Shrubs, Climbers, House Plants, and lastly, Cacti and other succulents. Each plant has a description of its physical form along with gardening requirements to grow the plant. Colour illustrations are placed in bunches and are cross-referenced with the text.

Let us briefly address a few other questions about the book: Is this book valuable to a designer? Undoubtedly. It is essential reading for both students as well as practitioners of landscape planting design. Is it entirely accurate in the information? Yes. Nonetheless, it is also evident that the focus is on eastern India. Are all the sixteen hundred pictures (in colour) the best possible illustrations? Frankly, no. The quality of the plant material photographed could have been at its maturity.

It is important to understand that readers of books about plants are seeking more information - written or graphic about a plant they have seen and are trying to identify or the suitability of using a certain plant in a given context. Landscape designers may be more interested in the detailed habit and growth requirements of plants - trees, shrubs, ground covers, climbers, ornamentals or annuals for a particular climatic region and context. It speaks for the enduring value of this familiar book that still appears fresh when one peruses it.

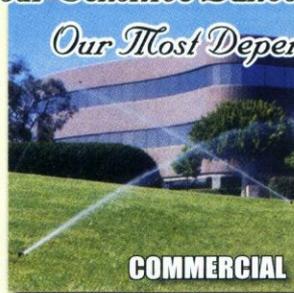
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