

CURCUMA PEETHAPUSHPA, A NEW SPECIES OF ZINGIBERACEAE FROM INDIA

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ABSTRACT. A new species of *Curcuma* L., *C. peethapushpa* is described from Western Ghats of India.

The genus *Curcuma* is a difficult subject for taxonomists and plant explorers owing to its occurrence in remote and inaccessible areas and its short flowering period. Consequently, we do not have a realistic estimate of the diversity of the genus except for the information provided in the earlier Floras. Recent exploration along the Western Ghats of Peninsular India has amply demonstrated that there is considerable scope for observation, collection and detailed taxonomic study of the species available there (see Ansari *et al.*, 1982; Sivarajan & Balachandran, 1983; Bhat, 1987).

During one of our recent explorations of the Peechi forests in Trichur (Kerala) along the Western Ghats, we encountered an interesting weedy species which grew abundantly on the forest floor. It closely resembled *C. oligantha* Trimen (syn. *C. cannanorensis* Ansari *et al.*) but was easily distinguished by its much smaller, non-exserted flowers and the short, straight basal appendages of the anther. The material is described below with the name, *C. peethapushpa*, the specific epithet meaning 'yellow-flowered' in Sanskrit.

***Curcuma peethapushpa* Sasidharan & Sivarajan, sp. nov. Fig. 1.**

Curcuma oligantha Trimen affinis sed in floribus multo minoribus, calyce glabro, antherae appendicibus basalibus brevibus rectis differt.

Rhizomatous herb. Rhizome short. Roots fibrous, some of them terminating in tubers; tubers ovoid or oblong, white or yellow inside, to 2 × 1.5 cm. Leaves 3-5; petiole above the sheath 8-12 cm; lamina 12-15 × 4-8 cm, oblong-acuminate, glabrous. Spikes terminal on the leafy shoot, peduncle 4-5 cm, 5-7-bracteate; bracts green, ovate-orbicular, fertile ones c. 2 cm across, coma absent. Cincinni few-flowered, shorter than and included in the bracts. Calyx glabrous, tube 3-4 mm long, lobes subequal, obtuse. Corolla funnel-like, dorsal lobe 6 × 5 mm, concave, hood-like, laterals slightly smaller, ovate-oblong; lateral staminodes 5 × 4 mm, spatulate or obovate-oblong, pale yellow; lip yellow, 8 × 6 mm, fan-shaped, crenulate on margins, shortly 2-fid at apex, pubescent below; filament 2 mm long, anther white, longer than filament, basal appendages short and straight. Fruits oblong, c. 1 cm long, crowned by the persistent calyx; seeds 8-10, smooth, shining, aril white, lacinate, covering the whole seed.

Type: India, Kerala State, Peechi, c. 250 m alt., Sasidharan & Sivarajan 4975 (holo. E, iso. KFRI); 4984 (Para. E, KFRI).

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FIG. 1. *Curcuma peethapushpa*. a, habit; b, flower; c, lip with lateral staminodes; d, dorsal petal; e, lateral petal; f, stamen; g, pistil.

As undergrowth in moist deciduous forests at about 250m. Flowering and fruiting from July to September.

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Footnote

It had been Dr Sivarajan's intention to visit Edinburgh prior to the publication of this paper, but he was unable to do so and, consequently, did not examine our material of *Curcuma*. The following collection matches the holotype of *C. peethapushpa* well: India; Malabar, without precise locality, vi 1836, *Wight* 1067 (E).

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