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The botanical art collection at the Lalbagh Botanical Garden, Bangalore, India

James J. White

Abstract

The Lalbagh Botanical Garden in Bangalore, India, contains over 1,000 original artworks, some from the late 19th century, which have been photographed for a forthcoming CD-ROM.

The Dr. M. H. Marigowda National Horticultural Library at the Lalbagh Botanical Garden in Bangalore, Karnataka, India, contains over 1,000 original artworks of which approximately 700 are watercolors, 300 are pencil drawings and 12 are ink, and none of these has been published as far as we can determine.

Annual reports published by the Lalbagh between 1884 and 1904 describe the collection as it was being formed. In 1894, 14 plates were forwarded to the Chicago Exposition. In 1899 almost 400 of the drawings were forwarded to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and acknowledged by botanist Sir William T. Thiselton-Dyer, who responded to John Cameron, superintendent of the Lalbagh, that a selection might well be published in Bangalore. The drawings then were forwarded to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Calcutta, where Superintendent Major D. Prain made authentications, corrections, and additions. Eventually the drawings were returned to Bangalore. In 1907 Cameron authored a 56-page *List of botanical drawings, in water colours, in the collection of The State Botanical Gardens, Lal Bagh, Bangalore*, stating that the Garden now possessed a fine collection of 750 colored drawings.

Of the 1,000 plus artworks in the collection, we only can attribute work to a few artists;

others remain unidentifiable. K. Cheluviah Raju was the best and chief artist who worked between 1884 and 1923. Wasan (full name unknown) is said to have worked at the Garden between 1925 and 1943, but we have seen no works signed or attributed to him. Vishudas Ramdas worked between 1943 and 1965 or 1967, and only three artworks are initialed "VR."

In the fall of 1996 I spent two months as a Fulbright scholar at the Lalbagh cataloguing the art collection. I was accompanied by Lugene Bruno, assistant curator of art at Hunt Institute, who photographed the collection for a forthcoming CD-ROM. Botanists who would like to examine these images now and might provide determinations are invited to contact the author for information.

Acknowledgments

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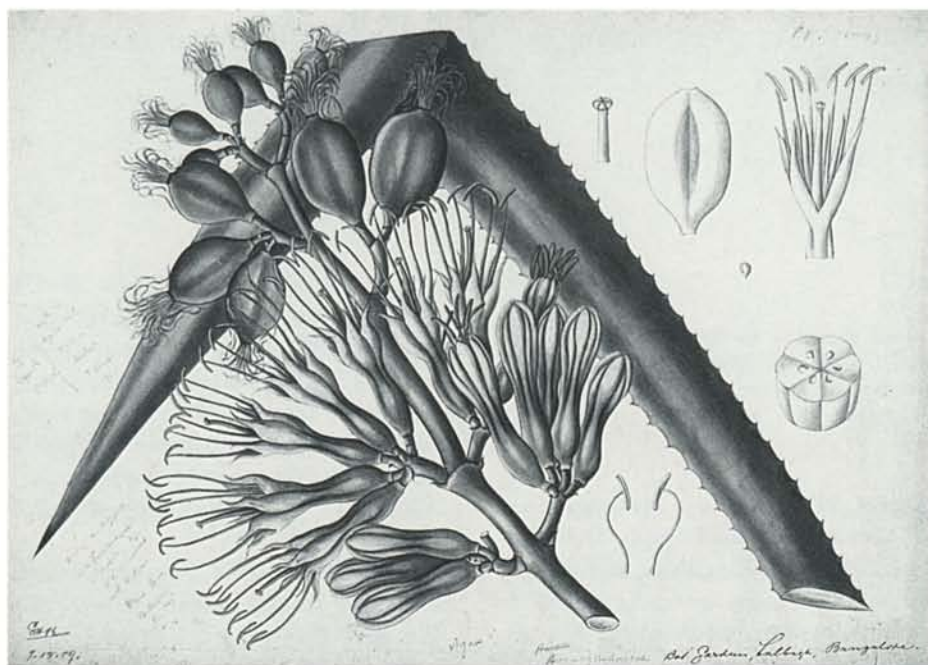


Figure 1. Watercolor of "Agave?" dated 17 July 1909 (cat. no. 342).

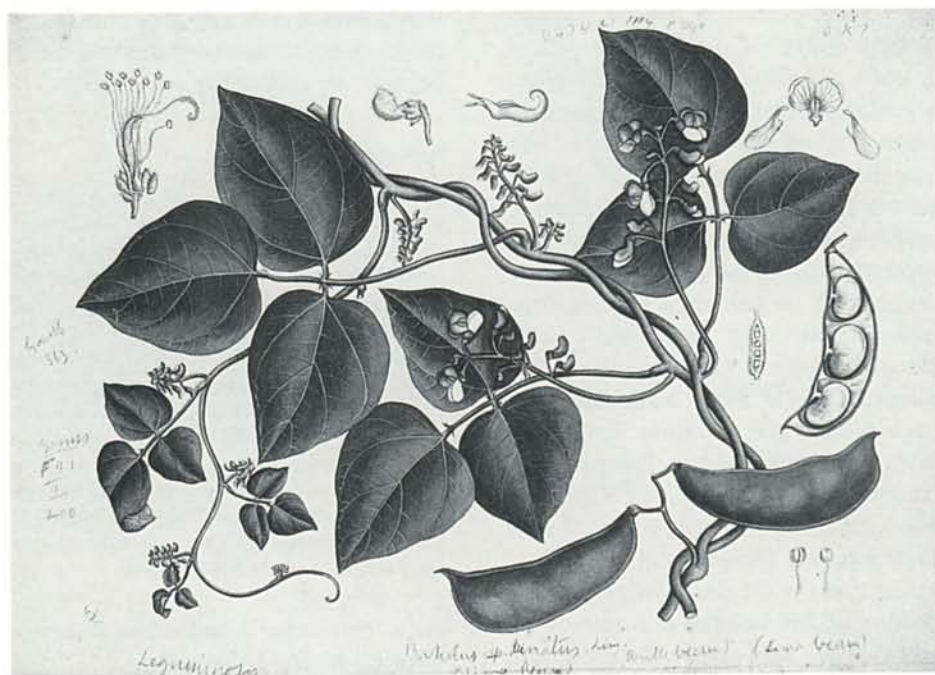


Figure 2. Watercolor of "Phaseolus lunatus L." (cat. no. 863).



Figure 3. Watercolor of "*Ammonium hemisphericum*" (cat. no. 343).



Figure 4. Watercolor of "*Casimiroa edulis*" (cat. no. 46).