

Development of Botany in Ancient India

The beginning of relationship between humans and plants can be traced back to the prehistoric times. The Indus Valley people used to live in villages, cities and towns, wore clothes, cultivated crops including wheat, barley, millet, dates, vegetables, melon and other fruits and cotton; worshipped trees, glazed their pottery with the juice of plants and painted them with a large number of plant designs. They also knew the commercial value of plants and plant products. There are sufficient indications to show that Agriculture, Medicine, Horticulture, developed to a great extent during the Vedic Period. In the Vedic literature we find a large number of terms used in the description of plants and plant parts, both external features and internal structures; a definite attempt at classification of plants and evidence that use of manure and rotation of crops were practiced for the improvement of fertility of soil and nourishment of plants. Even Rgveda mentions that Vedic Indians had some knowledge about the food manufacture, the action of light on the process and storage of energy in the body of plants. In the post-Vedic Indian literature there is enough evidence to show that botany developed as an independent science on which was based the science of medicine (as embodied in the Charaka and Susruta Samhitas), Agriculture (as embodied in the Krsi-Parasara) and Arbori-Horticulture (as illustrated in the Upavana-vinoda as a branch of Botany). This science was known as the Vriksayurveda, also compiled by Parasara.

References