

Notes & Topics

THE NOBLE FLOWER

[From time to time we have enquiries about the soft chiffon like seeds which the Buddhists of the Himalayas and the Trans-Himalayas offer at the altars and present to honoured friends and visitors. Two notes, one on the legend about its sanctity and the other on its botanical merits, are presented here. —NCS]

I

There is an Indian flower which the Tibetans call Tsampaka; it is also called Metog Zangpo (མེ་རྩོག་བཟང་པོ་) which is the same as Bhadrapuspa in Sanskrit (भद्रपुष्प). The flower is popular all over Tibet and Mongolia; it is held in highest respect by monks and scholars as well as lay people. It is used as offering in rituals and no initiation ceremony (དབང་) is complete without this flower. This flower is a substitute for the holy lotus called Udumbara (cf. Das: *Dictionary*, p 1350). Because in the initiation the Guru presents this flower to the initiate with the Mantra Akhamvirahum (आखँ-वीरहूँ) the flower is also called Akhamvira by many.

The oral tradition about the sanctity of the flower is this. This flower grew in the paradise of Indra where there were many flowers. When Indra visited the garden all flowers bent their heads down in respect. It so happened that one day when Indra came to the garden, while all the flowers bowed, this flower refused to do so. Indra was angry and cursed that the flower should never blossom in the heavens again. The flower then fell to the earth and grew in a city of India which was called Tsampaka.

According to Naronyenjüd Kabum (ར་རྩོག་མཚོ་བཟོད་པའུམ་), the Srutis of Naropa, the volume on crops and medicinal plants (ལུ། ར་རྩོག་མཚོ་བཟོད་པའུམ་གྱི་བྱུང་བ་བརྗོད་པ་གཞིན་པའི་ལོ་གསལ་སེམ་གྱི་རྩ་ལག་བརྒྱགས་མོ།), the lovely flower Tsampaka descended from the world of gods to the world of men and was offered to the Buddha by a lay

devotee called Srija. The Buddha was most delighted. He not only gave his blessings to the devotee but also esteemed the flower as the most auspicious to all living beings
 (ཡི་ཤེང་ཚམས་ལ་ཀའི་མེ་རྩྭ་ལྟེང་། ལྷ་ལ་མ་མེར་བུང་བྱིས་པ་དྲུག་དཔལ་རྒྱེ་གྱིས། ལྷུང་པར་ལྷུང་པར་ལྷུང་པར་མ་གཞི་བཞེ། རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ལོ་བཞི་བ་ཀྱང་གིས་ཆེན་པོ་མཛེད།)

It is said that when the Lord passed away the trees and plants in and around Kushinagara stooped and bent in grief but this flower never again arose, it is still bent down in grief. There is another story that when the Lord was entering Nirvana this flower was the first to know and she bent in grief before others including his disciples came to know what was happening.

Among Tibetans it is a high honour to offer this flower to a guest, a visitor or a friend; sometimes it is despatched along with a letter to a respected man.

There is reference of this flower in Kanjur (ཀའ་དགོས་པའི་གསུང་པོ།)

DEGE ZONGSAR NGARI TULKU

II

A short note on *Oroxylum indicum* (Totala in Nepali) and its usefulness.

OROXYLUM INDICUM comes under the family of BIGNONIACEAE. It is a small tree with few branches and a small open crown; bark soft, light brownish grey and corky outside. It is soft wooded and deciduous glabrous tree. Leaves opposite, 3-pinnate near the base, 2-pinnate about the middle and simply pinnate towards the apex, 4-6 feet long; pinnae 3-4 pairs, 2-3 lower pairs bipinnate at the base, the pinnules being 3-5 foliolate. Ultimate leaflets 3-5 by 2-3 inches, broad-ovate acuminate, entire, glabrous.

Flowers large, fleshy, in lax terminal racemes, peduncle 2-3 feet, pedicels 1-1.5 inch long. Calyx 1 by .5 inch leathery, thimble shaped. Corolla campanulate; tube green outside; limb 2-3 inch across, lobes 5, dark red. Stamens 5. Capsule septicidally two valved, shortly stipitate 15-30 inch long by 2-3 inch broad; scabbard-like; seeds surrounded by a broad transparent white papery wing, 2-2.5 inch across, including the wing.

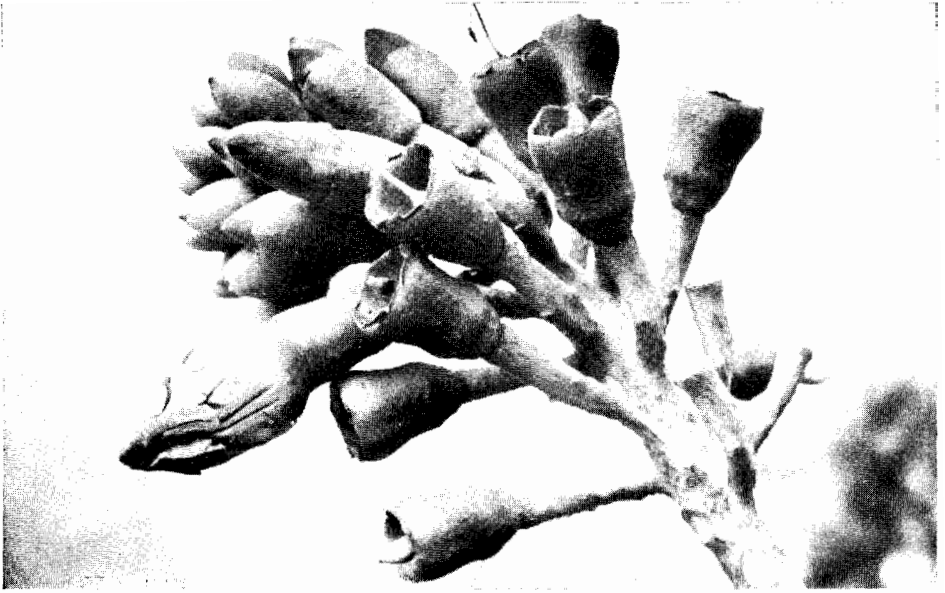


FIG. 1
OROXYLLUM INDICUM: FLOWER BUDS



FIG. 2
BLOOM OF BIG BUD FROM FIG. 1

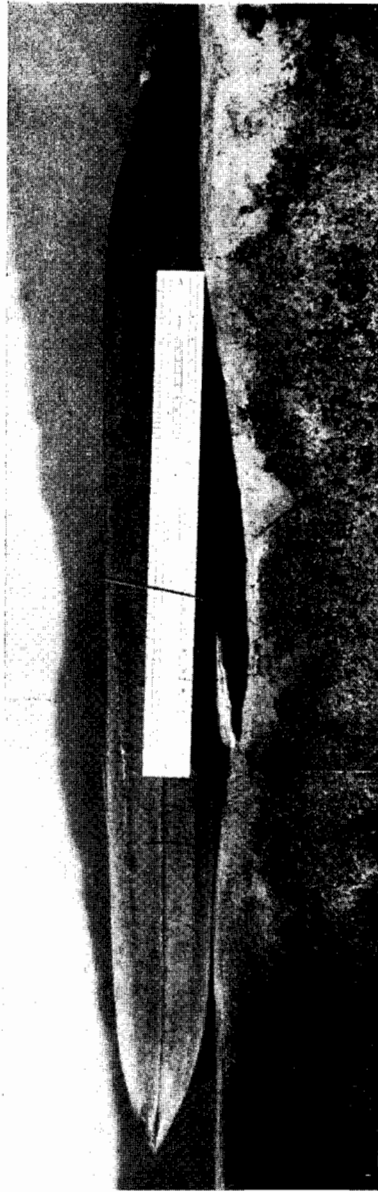


FIG. 3
MATURED POD CONTAINING SEEDS
(Note size from 12" ruler)



FIG. 4
CHIFFON LIKE SEEDS
(Natural size 2" to 2.5")

Leafless March-April: Flowers. June-July. Fruit. Cold season. Occurs below 3500 feet elevation. Economic use. Root bark. astringent, tonic useful in diarrhoea and dysentery.

Bark made into powder along with haldi (turmeric) is a useful cure for sore-backs of horses; in powder or infusion diaphor useful in acute rheumatism; bitter tonic. Tender fruits—carmin, stomach, seeds—purgative. Stem in scorpion sting. Quoted from Chopra's *Indigenous Drugs of India*, p.518.

The bark and fruit are used in tanning and dyeing and the winged seeds are used to line hats and placed between two layers of wicker work to make umbrellas. Sir Detris Brandis.

The paper like seeds are used by the Lamas in ceremonial worship of the deities and are also enclosed with letters as substitute for scarf.

BHIM BAHADUR PRADHAN

Relon Athing Sonam
Dadul, a Founder Mem-
ber of the Namgyal
Institute of Tibetology,
passed away at the capital
on 10 November 1965.

An obituary will appear
in the next issue of this
Bulletin.