Kavaka

being
Transactions of the
Mycological Society of India

Volume 61, Issue 1
March 2025

VOLUME 61, ISSUE 1
(March 2025)

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The name of the journal KAVAKA *is a Sanskrit word which means Fungus.*

ISSN 0379-5179
ISSN-L 0379-5179

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http://www.fungiindia.co.in
http://www.kavaka.fungiindia.co.in
(All back volumes are available on the website)

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From the Editor's Desk

It is with immense pride and enthusiasm that we unveil the first issue of the 61st volume of KAVAKA, the esteemed journal of the Mycological Society of India (MSI). This milestone not only marks about five decades of unwavering commitment of MSI to mycological research but also accentuates our collective dedication to advancing the understanding of fungi in all their diversity and significance.

Like a common mycelial network weaving beneath the forest floor, fungi connect different worlds – biological and ecological – in ways that are often nontangible, yet fundamentally indispensable. The reach and relevance of fungi extend across ecosystems and epochs. In the current issue of *KAVAKA*, we delve deep into these fungi that link discovery, diversity, and applied potential across the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

The documentation of fungal biodiversity continues to be the cornerstone of mycology. In this context, the contribution detailing **new records and a checklist of *Xylaria* from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands** stands as a vital addition to fungal biogeography. These records enrich our taxonomic inventories and also open avenues to explore the evolutionary processes in such insular island ecosystems. Complementing this exploration is the report on ***Irpex laceratus***, a basidiomycete recorded for the first time in India. The discovery of this wood-decaying polypore underscores the growing importance of surveying underexplored habitats, which harbour unique saprophytic macro- and microflora contributing to nutrient cycling in forest ecosystems.

From macrofungi to microscopic allies, the current issue also examines a newly added species to the Indian fungal inventory, ***Aspergillus insuetus***. Such studies strengthen the understanding of xerophilic fungal communities and connect taxonomic understanding with physiological adaptation of a species, where ecology subtly drives evolutionary divergence. Along similar lines, the subsequent article on the **halophilic strain of *Aspergillus niger* that produces biosurfactants** exemplifies how fungal life persists and even thrives under saline stress. The metabolic capabilities demonstrated in the article hold immense promise for biotechnological applications, especially in sustainable remediation of saline and hydrocarbon-polluted environments.

The dialogue of fungal adaptability continues with the investigation on **congo red degradation by fungi isolated from the Kolli Hills**, where enzyme production, dye degradation efficiency, and the influence of silver nitrate were critically assessed. Apart from highlighting the degradative versatility of fungal consortia this study pushes the frontiers of green technologies for wastewater treatment. Pathogenic interactions receive equal scientific attention in the phyto-pathological study on ***Colletotrichum siamense* causing foliar blight in teak seedlings** in Kerala. This contribution highlights the growing need for molecular detection in forest pathology, especially when emerging fungal pathogens threaten economically and ecologically important species like *Tectona grandis*. The study serves as a reminder that fungal biodiversity is not always benign, it can also be disruptive when ecological balances are tipped.

The balance between mutualism and parasitism is explored through the lens of endophytic fungi. The **seasonal study of endophytic diversity in *Plagiochasma appendiculatum*** reveals a dynamic and temporally regulated colonization pattern. This not only enriches our knowledge of bryophytic microbiomes but also lays the foundation for understanding how climatic cues shape endophyte assemblages. Adding another layer to the functional diversity of endophytes is the study that reports **antifungal, enzymatic, and plant-growth promoting traits of fungi from *Chromolaena odorata***. These endophytes exemplify the potential of hidden symbionts to function as bioresources in agriculture and medicine, bridging microbial ecology with applied sciences.

In the face of expanding fungal records, taxonomic clarity remains crucial. The contribution discussing **the genus *Apiospora* vis-à-vis *Arthrinium*,** apart from revising the status of Indian species also provides a critical synthesis of host specificity and distribution. Such rigorous phylogenetic and morphological scrutiny is essential in resolving long-standing ambiguities in fungal systematics. Likewise, the study offering **morphological and molecular insights into two russulaceous mushrooms from Jammu and Kashmir** adds a layer to the understanding of ectomycorrhizal fungi, which are vital to forest health and regeneration.

Together, these articles form a unified narrative, right from uncovering fungal identities to probing their ecological roles and technological potentials. Whether decomposers, pathogens, or symbionts, fungi demonstrate an astonishing range of functions and forms — and the same is celebrated by the 61st issue of KAVAKA, wherein each study simulates a hyphal strand in the expanding mycelial network of fungal knowledge and understanding.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and editorial team whose dedication and expertise have made this publication possible. Their collective efforts ensure that KAVAKA continues to disseminate knowledge in mycological research at the turn of every quarter. With this, we invite our readers to delve into this issue and urge them to join us in celebrating the remarkable world of fungi.

Best wishes

31st March 2025

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Printed by Arun Thesis, 39B, Christian Colony, University of Delhi – 110 007; (M) 9873335438
Edited and Published for the Mycological Society of India by Professor Rupam Kapoor
Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India under No. R. Dis. 1757/74