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K. S. Manilal : A Pioneer in Indian Botany

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Introduction

Kattungal Subramaniam Manilal (K. S. Manilal) was a distinguished Indian botanist and taxonomist renowned for his extensive work on plant systematics, floristics and the history of botany in India. He is best known for his pioneering efforts in translating and annotating *Hortus Malabaricus*, a 17th-century treatise on the flora of the Malabar region. His contributions significantly advanced the study of plant taxonomy in India, particularly in Kerala.

Early Life and Education

K. S. Manilal was born in Kerala, India and developed a keen interest in botany from an early age. He pursued his higher education in the subject, obtaining degrees in botany and specializing in plant taxonomy. His academic career was marked by a deep commitment to exploring and documenting the plant biodiversity of India.

Major Contributions

1. Translation of *Hortus Malabaricus*

One of Manilal's most remarkable achievements was his translation and critical commentary on *Hortus Malabaricus* (meaning "Garden of Malabar"). This 12-volume Latin work, originally compiled by Dutch Governor Hendrik van Rheede in the 17th century, contained descriptions of medicinal plants found in Kerala. Until Manilal's work, *Hortus Malabaricus* remained largely inaccessible to Indian scholars due to its Latin text. His English and Malayalam translations, along with botanical and historical annotations, brought the text to a wider audience, enhancing research on India's traditional plant-based medicine.

2. Floristic Studies and Plant Taxonomy

Manilal conducted extensive field studies on the flora of Kerala and contributed significantly to the taxonomy of Indian plants. His work involved identifying, classifying and documenting various plant species, many of which had not been thoroughly studied before.