

We need taxonomists not taxa-Namists

'The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names', thus goes a Chinese proverb and only rare personalities are endowed with such wisdom. Linnaeus, a star among the rare, proposed the universal code of binomial nomenclature for all living beings and extinct organisms. In his 'two-name' system he proposed that the two components, viz. the generic and specific components of the name, shall hierarchically describe the characters of the organism such that the users anywhere in the world shall have no ambiguity in referring to the specific organism. Linnean system of naming organisms has obviously done a great service to science in general and biology in particular. But taxonomists, the professional heirs of Linnaeus, somewhere along their lineage, have taken some liberties that have led to both useful and disastrous consequences.

Today we know that the binomial nomenclature has become almost tetranomial system (e.g. *Homo sapien sapien* var *caucassia* (L?)) and

this change is understandably to accommodate the necessary details. But a few other trends speak very differently of the way the taxonomists have taken to the philosophy of Linnaeus. For instance, often the generic and specific names of a newly described organism, are ascribed in order to offer credits (often undue and for non-scientific reasons) to the bosses or to pay dues to the wife, son, daughter, parents and even to their religious leaders and Gods and not to describe the features of the organisms. This trend of 'taxa-Naming' rather than 'taxonoming' the organisms has disastrous consequences. Imagine naming *Drosophila melanogaster* (meaning a fruit fly with black abdomen) as *Lamarckiana punyii* (one of my heroes in evolutionary biology, and my daughter) – certainly a useless, costly and perhaps even an irritating trend indeed. Useless because this name does not indicate whether the organism being described is fruit fly or a mould; costly because the field workers have to invest more energy and time relating these two names to the species they study; and irritating for

obvious reasons. Attributing credits to the great personalities is of course in vogue and we do have *Oenothera lamarckiana* for instance. But this should not be stretched to the extent that it proves costly to the very philosophy of taxonomic naming.

Obviously disturbed by such a tendency of recent taxonomists, Ajit Kumar (page 426) traces the development of this trend and finds that the taxonomists are increasingly afflicted with this bug of *Naming* the taxa after their bosses and others in order to please them at the cost of descriptive features of the organisms. With the interesting data to support this changing trend, he appeals to the nomenclaturists to be professional taxonomists and not taxa-Namists. Further, he observes that while translating such scientific names to common names, some authors carry on this legacy, thus further complicating the already difficult life of field biologists. Let us hope that some introspection among taxonomists would make our life in the field more enjoyable.

K. N. Ganeshiah