Species

Revisiting taxonomy of *Litsea lancifolia var. alternifolia* (Lauraceae), a neglected element of the East Himalayas in India

Anand Kumar[1], Tapas Chakrabarty[2]*

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Author Affiliation:
[1]Central National Herbarium, Botanical Survey of India, Botanic Garden, Howrah – 711 103, West Bengal, India
[2]4, Botanical Garden Lane, Howrah – 711 103, West Bengal, India

***Corresponding author**
4, Botanical Garden Lane, Howrah – 711 103, West Bengal, India
Email: tchakrab@gmail.com

ORCID List
Anand Kumar 0000-0002-8364-3989
Tapas Chakrabarty 0000-0002-7245-0946

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ABSTRACT

Litsea lancifolia (Roxb. ex Nees) Fern.-Vill. var. *alternifolia* (Meisn.) Hook.f. replaces the typical variety in the East Himalayas of India; all Indian authors inadvertently treated this element as var. *lancifolia*.

Keywords: Taxonomy, *Litsea*, India, Overlooked variety

1. INTRODUCTION

The genus *Litsea* Lam. comprises about 350 species distributed in tropical Asia, Australia, the Western Pacific, and North and Central America (Kok, 2021). Bhuinya & Singh (2024) recognized 51 species in India. *Litsea lancifolia* (Roxb. ex Nees) Fern.-Vill., originally described from Sylhet in Bangladesh, is now known to occur in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Sumatra, Borneo, Java and Sulawesi (Kok, 2021). The species is characterized by the densely pubescent young shoots, tomentellous branchlets (hairs erect to ascending), opposite to subopposite leaves, acute to shortly acuminate at apex, pubescent on the abaxial surface (tomentellous on veins, scattered puberulous elsewhere), inflorescences (umbels) solitary or in clusters of 3–8 in leaf axils and on branchlets, often on short brachyblasts, each 3–5-flowered, and the oblong to oblong-ellipsoid or ovoid fruits (8–12 × 5–7 mm) subtended by short cupule, 3–5 mm in diameter on 1–6 mm long pedicels.

Meisner (1864) described a variety, *Tetranthera lancifolia* Roxb. ex Nees var. *alternifolia* Meisn. from Sikkim, India based on a collection by J.D. Hooker housed at G-DC. Eventually, this element was transferred by Hooker (1886) to *Litsea lancifolia*. This element clearly differs from var. *lancifolia* by the predominantly alternate leaves and less pubescent parts. In addition, the inflorescences (umbels) are often borne on short branches simulating racemes (up to 10 mm long), not as in var. *lancifolia*. Unfortunately, the occurrence of the variety *alternifolia* remained unnoticed to the subsequent authors who published floristic accounts after Hooker (1886) covering the East Himalayas in India. Bhattacharjee & Ansari (2019) as well as Bhuinya & Singh (2024), while treating L. *lancifolia*, stated: "Leaves opposite on young branchlets, alternate later". Saha & Maiti (2023) differentiated L. *lancifolia* from the remaining species by the: "Leaves at least some opposite or subopposite". It may be mentioned that both of these statements are incorrect so far as Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills of West Bengal are concerned because in these areas, L. *lancifolia* var. *lancifolia* having predominantly opposite leaves is replaced by var. *alternifolia*. The situation is clarified herein as given below.

2. TAXONOMY

Litsea lancifolia (Roxb. ex Nees) Fern.-Vill. var. **alternifolila** (Meisn.) Hook.f., Fl. Brit. India 5: 159. 1886, **Fig. 1**
Tetranthera lancifolia Roxb. ex Nees var. *alternifolia* Meisn. in DC., Prodr. 15(1): 194. 1864.

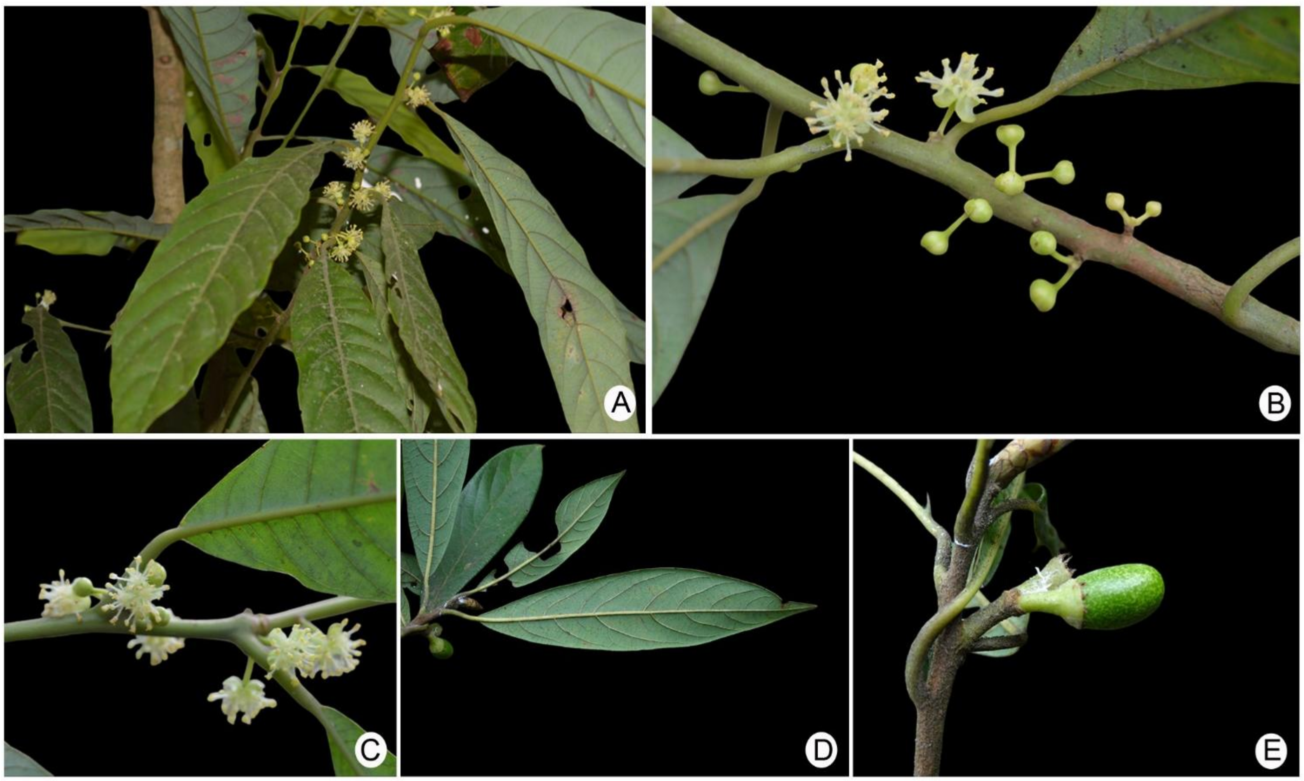

Figure 1. A-E. Field images of *Litsea lancifolia* var. *alternifolia.* **A-C.** Twigs with male infrorescences; **D-E.** Twigs with fruits.

Holotype
India, Sikkim, 0–1000 ft, s.d., *J.D. Hooker s.n.* (*Tetranthera* 15) (G-DC barcode G00694509, image!; isotypes K000793177, K000793178, K000793179, P02003189, P02003190, images!).

Flowering & fruiting*:*
May–October.

Habitat:
Occurring between 1500–2100 m asl.

Distribution:
India (Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong hills of West Bengal) and Vietnam.

Specimens examined:
India. Sikkim: Burmiak, 7 Oct. 1940, *K.Biswas* 4612 (CAL) – female fl. Tukvar, 11 May 1914, *G.H. Cave s.n.* (CAL herb. acc. no. nil) – fr. Tukvar, 20 May 1914, *G.H. Cave s.n.* (CAL herb. acc. no. 386508) – fr. Without locality and date, *R.S. Rao* 1109 (CAL) – fr. West Bengal:

Darjeeling dist.: Tonglu to Sandakphu, 8 Oct. 1941, *K.Biswas* 5852 (CAL) – fr. Kalimpong dist.: Lava to Rissioom, 14 Oct. 1902, *J.H. Lace* 2417 (CAL) – male fl. Vietnam. Lo Fou, Aug. 1909, *A.Cavalerie* 3883 (L.1805966) – male fl. Lam Dong Prov., Lac Duong dist.: Municipalite Da Chay, 31 km to NE from Dalat City, 30 Apr. 1997, *L.Averyanov, N.Q. Binh, N.T. Hiep, P.K. Loc & P.Lowry* VH 4436 (P00275695) – fr.

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Authors contributions

Both authors have equally contributed in the planning of the research and preparation of manuscript.

Ethical approval & declaration

The authors declare that the present contribution in their original research, being part of their ongoing studies on the Indo-Burmese Lauraceae. India. The ethical guidelines for plants & plant materials are followed in the study for species collection & identification.

Informed consent

Not applicable

Conflicts of interests:

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

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Data and materials availability

All data associated with this study are present in the paper.

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