

The Rediscovery Of India: A New Subcontinent

Acta Phytotaxonomica Sinica

THE MYTH OF 'MINIMA' AND 'MAXIMA', THE SPECIES OF *PHYSALIS* IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

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Abstract The status of the names, *Physalis minima* and *Physalis maxima* (Solanaceae), and their alleged presence on the Indian subcontinent are discussed. The issues of nativity and identity of Linnaean *Physalis minima* are long-debated while the use of the name *P. maxima* Mill. and its report from India are recent. The available evidence indicates that the name "*P. minima* L." is misapplied to two different elements, viz. *P. angulata* L. and *P. lagascae* Roem. & Shult. The name *Physalis minima* L. may be rejected as *nomen confusum*. As on today, it is submerged under the synonymy of *P. angulata* L. The correct name for the widely known *P. minima* is *P. lagascae*. The name "*P. maxima* Mill." applied to the escape and naturalized weed in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere, on the other hand, is to be substituted by *P. pruinosa* L., the name which is misapplied to *P. grisea* (Waterf.) M. Martinez.

Key words Indian subcontinent, nomenclature, *Physalis*, *Physalis angulata*, *Physalis grisea*, *Physalis lagascae*, *Physalis maxima*, *Physalis minima*, *Physalis pruinosa*.

The uncertainty in the number of species of *Physalis* occurring in India and their improper distinctions are due to: (i) introduction as weeds and cultivated species, and (ii) the problem of hybridization amongst some of these species, a reality outside their native habitats and beyond the experience of those who bred them under captivity. Thus, several of the *Physalis* species and their natural hybrids are now well-established invasive weeds of disturbed landscapes and crops throughout the tropics, including Asia. According to Deb (1979), six species of *Physalis* L. occur in India, viz.: (i) *P. alkekengi* L., (ii) *P. angulata* L., (iii) *P. ixocarpa* Brot., (iv) *P. longiflora* Nutt. and (v) *P. peruviana* L. as cultivated species and (vi) *P. minima* L. as common weed. While the identity of *P. longifolia* Nutt. (*P. virginiana* Mill. var. *sonorae* Torrey) of the collections from India is certainly doubtful, Singh & Pandey (2002) added *P. maxima*

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