JOSEPH DALTON HOOKER

Botanical Trailblazer and the Botanical Heritage of India



October 2016 – October 2017 BSI Gallery of Indian Museum, Kolkata

This exhibition, part of a larger international, interdisciplinary AHRC network project on Indian Natural History collections, represents a repatriation of information on Indian botany from UK holding institutions, making it available for the first time to Indian audiences. The exhibition was curated by the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew as an adaptation of a previous exhibition, and included facsimiles of documents and sketches relating to Hooker's work in India. Joseph Hooker's 1847 exhibition to India and the Himalayas was of critical importance both to Indian Natural History and to botany in general. During this exhibition he collected 7000 plant species, including 25 species of rhododendrons, which subsequently became very popular among British horticulturalists and gardeners. He also frequently wrote to Charles Darwin about the distribution of fauna and became one of the first westerners to see Mt. Everest (and the first ever to sketch it). Hooker's 7 volume work The Flora of British India (1872-1897) remains the most complete record of Indian botanical species, and there have been no subsequent attempts to match it. This collection was therefore a cornerstone in India's own culture and environmental history, which had simply not been seen before in India. Prompted by this collection, the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), who were hosting the exhibition in their gallery at the Indian Museum in Kolkata, curated a number of their own exhibitions to run alongside this one, highlighting other important aspects of Indian botanical history. These included displays on the life of Nathaniel Wallich, who developed the

Calcutta Botanical Garden (now called the AJC Bose Botanic Garden) and E.K.
Janaki Ammal, a former director of the BSI and the first Indian woman to receive a PhD in Botany outside of India.
Together these exhibitions provide a detailed history of Indian botany stretching back 200 years. The exhibitions were inaugurated in October 2016 by the Secretary of the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Climate
Change, A two day conference was

Bose Botanic Gardens. These visits have been very popular with the students, and have proved so successful that the BSI has offered to continue these visits at its own expense after the completion of the project.

