

Another great botanist, another great-niece and her rose 'Lady Jane Hooker'

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The name J.D. Hooker (Joseph Dalton Hooker in full so it is not mistaken for his father, also a great plantsman) 1817-1911, needs no introduction to Indian plant lovers. He was a British botanist and explorer in the 19th century. He was a founder of geographical botany and Charles Darwin's closest friend. For twenty years he served as director of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, succeeding his father, William Jackson Hooker, and was awarded the highest honours of British science.

He first came to India, to Sikkim State in 1847, spending 3 years exploring and plant collecting, despite great hardships, even being imprisoned by the king of Sikkim for trespassing. He was the first European to collect Himalayan plants. His 'Himalayan Journals' dedicated to Charles Darwin, was published in 1854. His greatest botanical writing was the Flora of British India (7 volumes) written from 1872 to 1897 and in 1904 he wrote A Sketch of the Vegetation of the Indian Empire.

The Kew Herbarium owes much to him.

The year 2017 was his Bi-centenary and a year long exhibition on him, curated by Kew, was organised in the Botanical Survey of India Indian Museum in Kolkata.

In one of his Himalayan Journals, he writes:

"On the 7th of May (1850), about 80 miles in a straight line from the foot of the Himalaya, we found the stratified sandy banks, which had gradually risen to a height of thirteen feet, replaced by the hard alluvial clay of the Gangetic valley, which underlies the sand: the stream contracted, and the features of its banks were materially improved by a jungle of tamarisk, wormwood (Artemisia), and white rose bushes (Rosa involucreta), whilst mango trees became common, with tamarinds, banyans and figs. Date and caryota palms, and rattan canes, grew in the woods, and orchids on the trees, which were covered with a climbing fern (Acrosticum scandens), so that we easily doubled our flora of the river banks before arriving at Maldah'.

Rosa involucreta was the earlier name for *Rosa clinophylla*.

Now you will understand our preoccupation with Hooker and his writings – for (apart from his horticultural knowledge which enabled him to identify a wide variety of plant species) in his Flora of British India Vol. 2, page 365, he writes, most cryptically indeed, of *Rosa involucreta*, 'collected by Munro in Mysore'. As you know Viru's rose hybridising has focussed on this rose species (apart from *Rosa gigantea* and

recently other species like *Rosa laevigata rosea*, *Rosa hirtula*, *Rosa chinensis spontanea*) and we have been collecting clones of this species from Bengal, Bihar and Rajasthan (Mt Abu). For the last many years we have been looking for this southern clone. 'Mysore' is a wide area, it could include all of the erstwhile Mysore State..... so far, despite our many forays to different areas of the region, we have been unsuccessful.

A few years back, at a plant friend's home, we met his friend, Lady Jane Barran, and when, as happens with us, we began to discuss plants, she mentioned to us that she was a great niece of J D Hooker, expecting us to look blank . When instead we excitedly told her that we knew him well, in fact Viru had just written an article entitled 'Sikkim and its Rhododendrons – 161 years after J. D. Hooker' (for the 2011 Yearbook of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia group of the Royal Horticultural Society of the U.K.), had all his books on India and that we were hunting , from a reference he made , for a rose species , in Mysore, she was so taken aback that someone in India still knew of him , that she became teary eyed.

She has become a good friend visiting us from the U.K, on a couple of occasions. When she came, in February 2018, with large group of plant enthusiasts, our plant of (*Rosa longicuspis* x *Rosa gigantea*), was in full and exuberant bloom, scrambling over two very tall and wide trees, making a curtain of blooms 20 feet x 30 feet!! She fell in love with this and requested Viru, "Could you possibly name it for me... as 'Lady Jane Hooker', my maiden name?" This plant has been grown by us from open pollinated seeds we had got many years back (in 2000) from and Peter Knox Shaw's garden in Elgin near Cape Town South Africa. When Becky and John Hook visited us in 2008, they were struck by this plant too and took cuttings, which John calls 'Kodaikanal".

We happily agreed to Lady Jane's request, so now this inter-species crossed seedling is registered as 'Lady Jane Hooker' - a small way to honour a botanist and plant explorer of the 19th and early 20th century to whom all Indian horticulturists should be grateful.