

## Bamboo and famine

Bamboos are found in several parts of the tropical, subtropical and mild temperate regions of the world with elevations from sea level to as high as 4000 m. They cover more than 18 mha area of the globe, of which 75% is in the Asian continent. Next to China, India has the richest bamboo genetic resources, with 136 species. Due to its strength, multiple uses and low cost, bamboo is almost a household plant and hence is dubbed as 'poor man's timber'. The National Mission on Bamboo Application was started by the Government of India under the Department of Science and Technology and more recently, the National Bamboo Mission under the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India in 2006–07, with an outlay of Rs 568.23 crore, for increasing the area under bamboo, employment generation, etc.

Bamboo has a peculiar phenomenon of flowering. Some species flower after a long period of time and gregariously, some flower sporadically while others flower annually. Flowering gregariously is the most dominant behaviour in bam-

boo. It is a genetically programmed clock for each species, rather than a response to environmental factors. Flowering in bamboo draws attention, as it dies after flowering and is believed to cause famine. Gregarious flowering occurred in 1958, which was followed by the 1959 famine<sup>1</sup>. John and Nadgauda<sup>2</sup> showed that there is a connection between the incidence of bamboo flowering and famine, and that it may not be a myth, but a reality. The famine is related to the fact that seeds of bamboo contain high protein. Due to plentiful availability of bamboo seeds, the reproductive rate of rats increases. When all the seeds are consumed, these rats move towards agriculture fields and destroy all the crops leading to famine.

Panwar had predicted that about 18,000 km<sup>2</sup> area of bamboo will flower in Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and parts of Assam with its epicentre in Mizoram in 2006–07, and necessary steps need to be taken to make it an opportunity rather than disadvantage to our society. Khadkar<sup>4</sup> had also expressed his concern regarding this. However, the bamboo flowered, died and there was a famine in

2007. It was because of this that the Central Government had to allocate Rs 8.81 crore from the National Calamity Contingency Fund to Mizoram<sup>5</sup>. Had the intervention been made at the appropriate time with funds allocated and extraction of bamboo planned, the revenue earned from bamboo extraction would have been several-fold more, besides providing employment to the locals, and would have created excellent regeneration condition for the bamboo.

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2. John, C. K. and Nadgauda, R. S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **82**, 261–262.
3. Panwar, P., *Indian For.*, 2004, **130**, 1343–1344.
4. Khadkar, M. H., *Indian For.*, 2005, **131**, 1512.
5. *The Statesman*, 23 March 2008.

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## Internet access at SKN College of Agriculture

The Internet has become one of the most effective electronic media for selection, collection, storage, management and dissemination of information in the gamut of knowledge. It can be useful for social, economic, scientific, industrial, academic and research development of any organization or country. No doubt, it is one of the important services of the information storage and retrieval process, which has reached millions of people. Both the scientific and the non-scientific communities make use of this knowledge to a large extent in their socio-economic, re-

search and academic developments. In India, almost all the academic institutions use Internet. The Internet CDROM unit of this college was established in 2004 with the objective to impart Internet as education among the scientific community and make them aware of the extent and use of the Internet, motivate learning habits of Internet access, impart training for proper use of e-resources like databases, on-line journals and audiovisual education. The users are now able to deal with new concepts of Internet technology along with latest trends of e-resources.

Data representing scientific users have been tabulated (Table 1) for the analysis and interpretation. The analysis revealed that out of 8491 users, M Sc students have used maximum Internet facility with 3472 (41%), while the rest of the users are: B Sc students 1924 (22%); faculty 1433 (17%); Ph D students 1278 (15%), girls 342 (4%), and others 42 (1%). The study also showed that there is gradual increase in the use of Internet during 2004–07. In 2004–05 only 15% of the users were conversant with the use of Internet, which has increased to 33% and 52% in 2005–06 and 2006–07 respectively.

The study shows that the users of this college are now using e-resources on-line journals, databases and other audiovisual devices for information access.

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**Table 1.** Study of Internet users

| Period    | Types of Internet users |           |           |           |         |        | Total (%)  |
|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------|------------|
|           | M Sc                    | B Sc      | Faculty   | Ph D      | Girls   | Others |            |
| 2004–05   | 596                     | 163       | 150       | 271       | 72      | 10     | 1262 (15)  |
| 2005–06   | 914                     | 761       | 665       | 392       | 80      | 12     | 2824 (33)  |
| 2006–07   | 1962                    | 1000      | 618       | 615       | 190     | 20     | 4405 (52)  |
| Total (%) | 3472 (41)               | 1924 (22) | 1433 (17) | 1278 (15) | 342 (4) | 42 (1) | 8491 (100) |