CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
The district Yavatmal is situated in the eastern part of Maharashtra between north latitudes 19°28' and 20°48' and longitudes 77°19' and 79°07'. It occupies an area of about 13,517.21 sq. km. The district is bounded on its north-west by Washim, Mangrul Pir and Murtazapur tahsils of Akola district, on the north by the Amravati and Chandur tahsils of Amravati district, on the north-east by Warora, Chanda and Rajura tahsils of Chandrapur district. On the south, it is bounded by the Kalamuri tahsil of Parbhani district, Hadgaon and Kinwat tahsils of Nanded district and by the northern tahsils of Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh (MAP 1).

The Vardha river in the north-east forms the boundary between Yavatmal and Wardha districts and Penganga in the south-east demarcates the boundary of this district with Chandrapur district and Andhra Pradesh. With the re-organisation of States in 1956, the district was transferred to the then Bombay State from Madhya Pradesh. The district forms the south-central portion of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra State. Administratively, the district is divided into five tahsils viz., Darwha, Kelapur, Pusad, Wani and Yavatmal. The total population according to 1961 census is 1,098,470.
MAP 1

MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF YAVATMAL DISTRICT IN MAHARASHTRA (INSET: INDIA)
The forest areas occupy 23% of the total area of the district. They are divided into two divisions - East Yavatmal with its headquarters at Yavatmal and West Yavatmal with the headquarters at Pusad. The forests have been grouped into various ranges for easy administration. The ranges under the east Yavatmal Division are Ghatanji, Hiwri, Jodmoha, Mukutban, Pandharkawada, Parwa, Patanbodi, Umari, Wani and Yavatmal. The ranges under west Yavatmal division are Arni, Bittergaon, Darwa, Digras, Kharbi, Pusad and Umerkhed (MAP 2).

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of the people of this district. The irrigation is through rivers, tanks and wells. There are various major and minor irrigation projects throughout the district.

The soils of the district can be classified as red soils, brownish sandy soils and black cotton soils. The latter supports agriculture.

The following crops are being cultivated in the district:

1. Cereals: *Echinochloa stagnina* (Banti), *Eleusine coracana* (Ragi), *Eragrostis pilosa* (Little millets or Kutaki), *Hordeum vulgare* (Barley), *Oryza sativa* (Rice), *Panicum miliaceum* (Vari), *P. sumatrense* (Sava), *Pennisetum americanum* (Bajri), *Setaria italica* (Italian millets), *Sorghum spp.* (Jowar), *Triticum spp.* (Wheat) and
(ii) Pulses: Cajanus cajan (Tur), Cicer arietinum (Gram), Dolichos lablab (Val), Lathyrus sativus (Lakh), Lens culinaris (Masur), Macrotyloma uniflorum (Horse gram), Pisum sativum (Watana), Vigna aconitifolia (Math), V. mungo (Black gram) and V. radiata (Green gram).

(iii) Oil seeds: Arachis hypogea (Groundnut), Brassica nigra (Mustard), Brassica spp. (Rape), Carthamus tinctorius (Safflower), Guizotia abyssinica (Nigerseed), Linum usitatissimum (Linseed), Ricinus communis (Castor) and Sesamum indicum (Sesame).

(iv) Fibres: Crotalaria juncea (Sann hemp) and Gossypium spp. (Cotton).

(v) Condiments and spices: Allium sativum (Garlic), Capsicum annum var. acuminatum (Chillies), Coriandrum sativum (Coriander), Cuminum cyminum (Cumin), Curcuma longa (Turmeric) and Trigonella foenum-graecum (Fenugreek).

(vi) Drugs and narcotics: Nicotiana tabacum (Tobacco) and Piper betle (Betel leaves).

(vii) Fruits: Ananas comosus (Pine-apple), Annona reticulata (Rambutan), A. squamosa (Custard-apple), Carica papaya (Papaya), Citrus aurantium (Lime), C. reticulata (Orange), Cucumis melo (Kharbuj), Ficus carica (Fig), Mangifera indica (Mango), Musa spp. (Banana), Psidium...
guava (Guava), Punica granatum (Pomegranate) and Vitis vinifera (Grape).

(viii) Vegetables: Abelmoschus esculentus (Bhendi), Allium cepa (Onion), Amorphophallus paeoniifolius (Suran), Brassica oleracea var. capitata (Cabbage), Daucus carota (Carrot), Dioscorea spp. (Yam), Ipomoea batatas (Sweet potato), Lyconersicon lyconersicum (Tomato), Raphanus sativus (Radish), Solanum melongena (Brinjal) and S. tuberosum (Potato).

(ix) Saccharum officinarum (Sugarcane) is also largely cultivated in the district.

The forest products can be classified into (a) major and (b) minor. The major forest products are timber and firewood.

The minor forest products are Madhuca longifolia var. latifolia (Mahua) flowers; fruits and leaves of Buchanania lanzan (Char), Diospyros melanoxylon (Tendu), Mangifera indica (Amba), Semecarpus anacardium (Biba), Tamarindus indica (Imli), Ziziphus mauritiana (Bor) etc.; tubers of Dioscorea spp.; honey, wax, hides and horns; roots, fruits, bark and leaves of Anogeissus latifolia and Terminalia bellirica; leaves, flowers and bark of Barringtonia acutangula, Butea monosperma, Lannea coromandelica and mesocarp of Balanites aegyptiaca which is used for fish poisoning.
Yavatmal district is served by a meter gauge railway route, from Yavatmal to Murtazapur on the Bombay - Nagpur - Howrah line. However, the Yavatmal town is connected by good highways to almost all the important places in Vidarbha region.

There are quite a few large and small scale industries in the district. They are cotton ginning and pressing, dal mills, saw mills, oil mills, bidi making and mining for coal and lime.

The important cottage industries in the district include handloom, Khadi and Village Industries, Handicrafts, cane and bamboo works, oil crushing, brick making, pottery, leather tanning, carpentry and smithy. The Khadi and Village Industries in the district comprise various industries such as oil, pottery, soap, lime-stone, leather, khadi, tad-gul etc.

There is no forest based industry other than some saw mills.

2. HISTORICAL NOTE

Since no archaeological excavations have so far been made in any part of the Yavatmal district, it is not possible to throw light on the pre-historic period (Anonymous, 1974).

According to available literature, when the Aryans penetrated to the Deccan, the whole region was covered by thick jungle, which extended southwards from Central India.
In course of time a large kingdom was founded north of the Godavari by Vidarbha, the son of Rishabadeva. His capital was Kundinapura in the adjoining Amravati district. The 'country' has since then become known by the name of Vidarbha.

Later this area was included in Berar and under Moghal rule after the treaty of Ahmednagar around 1596-97 AD. The name has been derived thus: Yot: being the Urdu or Persian corruption Yevata, the original name of the town. The suffix 'mal' is a corruption of mahal (par.gana-town).

Subsequently, Berar came under the rule of Nizams of Hyderabad and ultimately passed on to the hands of British. Wani district - which later became Yavatmal - was formed in 1864. In 1903, Berar was added to Central Provinces by Lord Curzon. Thus the Central Provinces and Berar came into existence under the British rule.

Since independence in 1947 to 1956, the district Yavatmal along with the other districts of Vidarbha region (Akola, Amravati, Bhandara, Buldhana, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Nagpur and Wardha) continued to form part of Central Provinces. With the re-organisation of States in 1956, Yavatmal along with other districts of Vidarbha was transferred to the bilingual State of Bombay which came into existence in that year. In 1960 with the formation of State of Maharashtra it formed part of that newly created State.
IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT UNDERTAKEN

In consonance with the objectives of the re-organised Botanical Survey of India, intensive and extensive botanical explorations have been conducted vigorously in various parts of India, by this organisation since 1954. Under the auspices of the Western Circle of Botanical Survey of India various areas in Maharashtra have been botanically explored.

From the fundamental point of view, a floristic account is not available for this district as also for the whole of Vidarbha. Consequently, the floral wealth could not be efficiently used by the people at large. It was important to intensively explore and identify the economically and medicinally important plants in these areas. Further, the knowledge about the plants in any region is essential with the increasing consciousness of people about the environment and its impact on living organisms in general. It is needless to point out how important it is to take stock of the dwindling forests and their components. An inventory of floristic components help in assessing the trends in the degradation and depletion of natural resources. This will enable us to initiate suitable remedial measures to reverse the trend. In areas like Yavatmal district the need becomes all the more greater since the natural forests are being cleared to plant teak, which has a great commercial potentiality.
Further, one of the aims of Botanical Survey of India, Western Circle is to prepare a comprehensive flora of the State of Maharashtra. The existing flora – Cooke’s *Flora of the Presidency of Bombay* (1901 – 1908) – though a very fine one of its kind, is inadequate in certain respects. Primarily the flora in the area covered by the present day Maharashtra has not been accounted for by Cooke – the areas under Marathwada and Vidarbha regions have not found place in his work as they were not in the political boundary of the then Bombay Presidency.

Therefore, studying the Flora of Yavatmal district has gained importance and the same has been done to fill up the gap in our knowledge of the present day Maharashtra and to properly assess the natural wealth of this State. The present study reveals that Yavatmal district harbours numerous medicinally and economically important plant species. A judicious utilisation of this forest wealth, replantation and propagation efforts will uplift the economy of the area by way of employment and providing indigenous raw materials for various industries.

It cannot be overemphasised that no meaningful effort can be made to fully utilise the plant resources of any area without the basic data on their availability. From this angle, the present Flora of Yavatmal district gains importance as it is a pioneer attempt in cataloguing the plants of this part of Vidarbha region. The information presented here will help nature lovers, naturalists, teachers, students, foresters and professionals alike who are concerned with the botany of the area.