STUDY AREA
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The State of Jammu and Kashmir is situated between 32.17 degree and 36.58-degree north latitude and 37.26 degree and 80.30-degree east longitude; the total area of the State of Jammu and Kashmir is 22,22,236 square kilometers. The geography of the Kashmir valley, stretches for about 84 miles from the northeast to the southwest and is approximately 20 to 25 miles broad. Its height above the sea level is over 5,000 feet. The topography of the state is such that, low-lying valleys surrounded by mountain ranges characterize it; the most important of them all is the Kashmir valley that lies 1700 metres above the sea level, encompassed by the mighty Himalayas (northeast) and the Pir Panjal (southwest) in northwestern India (Fig. 1). The State of Jammu and Kashmir has many Himalayan rivers flowing through it; the most significant among these are the Indus (sind), Jhelum and Chenab. Due to the geography, location, climate, soil, rainfall and altitude, the vegetation in the area ranges from tropical deciduous forests to temperate and coniferous forests. The Jammu and Kashmir region has loamy soil rich in magnesia, in most parts. The other varieties of soils found in the region are clay, sandy and peats. As far as the regional flora is concerned, the area is rich in pines, conifers and medicinal herbs. The climate in this part of India, as any other depends upon the time of the year and location, the area is naturally cool and extremely cold depending upon the altitude and mountainous geography. Physiographically, the region comprises a number of zones consisting of the vale of Kashmir or Jhelum valley floor (rice bowl of Kashmir) rich in alluvium, Karewas ("Wuduras") composed of clays, sands, silts and side valleys, accordingly there is a variety of landforms having tremendous influence on the vegetation of the state. Complex geography and vegetation as well as diverse climatic conditions provide a variety of natural habitats for a rich resource of mushrooms.

About Kashmir famous Kashmiri saint Sheikh Noor-Ud-Din Wali (RA) has said, "Aan Poshi teli yeli wan poshi" meaning “Food is subservient to forests”. Despite remarkable progress in laboratory drug development at present, the earth’s flora and fauna are still the most important source for potential drugs. Linnaeus (1754) has wrote that “Man, ever desirous of knowledge has already explored many things, but more and greater still remains concealed perhaps reserved for far distant generations, who shall prosecute the examination of their creators work in remote countries and make many discoveries for
Fig. 1. Location of Jammu and Kashmir in India
the pleasure and convenience of life”. Being a mountain girdled, primarily agricultural province, the people living in Kashmir have always remained in close association with and dependent on its Biodiversity, so much so that Khoshoo (1997) aptly referred to it as a “Biomass State”.

The climate in the valley of Kashmir has its own peculiarities. Winter is very cold. It lasts from Nov. to March. During these months strong winds bring snow and rain from the Mediterranean depressions. Spring begins after 15th of March when rain falls heavily causing landslides. But for sowing crops this rain is extremely useful. Rainfall in July and August is as high as 70% and with summer temperature it causes discomfort. The seasons are marked with sudden change and the year is divided into six seasons by local practices of two months each starting from 15th March; Sonth (spring), Rainkol or Grisham, (Summer) Wahrat (Rainy season) Harud, (Autumn) Wandhi, (Winter) and Sheshur (Ice cold or severe cold). Due to the wide variations in topography, the region has a large variety of plant species. There is no wonder that its flora ranges from the thorn bush type of the arid plains to the temperate and alpine flora of the higher altitudes. Prominent among the trees are maple, horse chestnuts, silver fir, etc. At the higher altitudes there are birch, rhododendron, Berbers and a large number of herbal plants. Undoubtedly the most important of the trees found in Kashmir is the Chinar called “Booune” in the local language, which is grown throughout the length and breadth of the valley. Mountainous region in the state are covered with dense deodar, fir and pine. Almond, walnut, willow and cider are some of the other tree species, forming the part of the rich flora of Kashmir.

Places namely Shalbug, Kangan, Gaganghir, Yousmarg, Sonamarg, Rawalpora, Sanat Nagar, Wanabal, Rangreth, Doodipathir from District Budgam and Srinagar were selected for survey and regular field trips to these areas covering different season were made between 2003-2005 to collect different mushroom samples (Edible and Medicinally important). Besides, above areas some of the special patches like Gulmarg, Barsu, Halan, and Khilanmarg etc. were also surveyed. There is remarkable diversity of vegetation in these regions, which is dominated by coniferous softwood (Pine) that includes Fir (*Abies pindrow*), Kail (*Pinus wallichiana*), Chir (*Pinus longifolia*), Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*) and the deciduous vegetation of Chinar (*Platanus orientalis*), Poplar (*Populus spp.*), Mulberry (*Morus alba*), Walnut (*Juglans regia*), Almond (*Prunus amygdalus*), Apple
(Malus pumila), Peach (Prunus persica) Apricot (Prunus armeniaca) Plum (Prunus domestica), Cherry (Prunus avium) and other fruit trees. The wood of live and dead trees and the abundance of other organic debris on the forest floor provide rich resources for numerous saprobic fungi (decomposers) and parasitic fungi. Fungi feature prominently in the complex forest food web, providing sustenance for organisms from microbes to mammals (mycophagy) and also form beneficial root symbiosis (called mycorrhizae) with trees that obtain their carbohydrate nutrition via the roots of host trees.