

3. Functions of Herbarium:

A modern herbarium serves numerous valuable functions. Some of the important functions of herbaria are as follows:

(a) A herbarium serves as an invaluable conservatory of plant material of flora, collected from different parts of the world. Thus, they provide at one place, basic material for study of flora and vegetation of different places or regions.

Since it serves as a permanent record of flora of those regions, collections in the herbarium provide evidence of the vegetation of a region, which may be destroyed due to some natural catastrophes.

(b) The specimens in the herbarium carry valuable data on their labels. These include data on habitat, habit, local names, colour of flowers or other characters of the plant, native uses of the plant, abundance or frequency of the species, associated plants, etc.

Such data provides valuable material for proper morphological description and range of variation of a similar plant collected from a different region, range of distribution and variation in its uses in different places. Thus, a herbaria provide data for botanical, ethno-botanical and phytogeographical studies.

(c) The herbarium serves as an aid in teaching botany to students in institutions where a herbarium is present, as it helps a teacher to show his students a plant specimen which may not be available fresh at the time of giving the course. It also helps students to identify local plants collected by them.

(d) Preserved specimens of herbaria are used in almost all types of taxonomic research. It is believed to be an essential requirement for biosystematics research today, for correct identification and nomenclature of the plant under study.

Since in biosystematics studies, a work may need material of a taxon from far and wide in studies involving '**all world species**', it may not be always possible for a researcher to visit different areas of occurrence. In such cases one has to largely rely on the resources of herbaria.

(e) The specimens in the herbaria are very often used as a source of material for anatomical, palynological and chemo-taxonomical studies.

(f) The herbaria provide important data on actual places of occurrence, time of flowering and fruiting, associated species and other data for researches in embryology, cytology and ecology.

(g) The herbaria have proved to be very valuable source of information for ethno-botanical researches as many native uses of plants are recorded on the herbarium sheets.