

Ficus virens Aiton var. *dispersa* (Moraceae): a new record for India

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Abstract. An interesting specimen of *Ficus* L. was collected from the Idukki district of Kerala. Based on detailed examination with protologues, literatures and type specimens, the plant was identified as *Ficus virens* Aiton var. *dispersa* Chantarar. This is the first report on the occurrence of this taxon in India. A detailed description, photographs, illustrations, comparison with allied taxa and identification key are provided.

Key words: *Ficus*, Idukki District, Kerala, new addition, *Urostigma*

1. Introduction

The genus *Ficus* L., belonging to the family Moraceae has a world-wide distribution, mainly in the tropics and subtropics (Berg & Corner 2005). *Ficus* is the most abundant and diverse genus in the family Moraceae. Its representatives are commonly called figs or fig trees. They support a large number of animals, due to their nutrient rich fruits available all throughout the year as a source of food, and are hence considered to be keystone species (Vanitharani *et al.* 2009; Kumar *et al.* 2011). The global diversity of figs accounts for about 750 species. In India, the genus is represented by 91 species and 24 infraspecific taxa (Chaudhary *et al.* 2012).

The genus is divided into six subgenera, among which the subgenus *Urostigma* is the dominant one with about 280 species (Berg 2004). *Ficus virens* Aiton, belonging to the subgenus *Urostigma*, is a species with worldwide distribution. This species is highly variable in terms of its vegetative and floral morphology. *Ficus virens* var. *dispersa* is a new variety of *F. virens*, distinguished from *F. virens* complex (Chantararuwan *et al.* 2013).

During the field explorations in the forests of Idukki district in Kerala, the authors collected an interesting specimen of *Ficus*. The plant differed from the known varieties of *F. virens* reported so far from the country and was similar to *F. prolixa*. Based on detailed observations, literature reference (Gamble 1925; Corner 1965; Sasidharan & Sivarajan 2004; Chantararuwan *et al.* 2013; Nair *et al.* 2021) and herbarium references in K, L, MH, KFRI, TBGT and CALI, the plant was identified as *Ficus virens* var. *dispersa*. The acronyms are according to the NYMG Index Herbarium. This taxon has not been so far reported from India and is a new record for the floristic diversity of the country. A detailed description, identification key, photographs, illustrations, and comparison with other varieties of *F. virens* reported from Kerala and with the similar taxon *F. prolixa* are provided in this article.

2. Taxonomic treatment

Ficus virens Aiton var. *dispersa* Chantarar. Syst. Bot. 38(3): 681. 1913.