Melochia corchorifolia L. of family Sterculiaceae: An addition to the flora of Pakistan

MUHAMMAD AJAIB & ZAHEER-UD-DIN KHAN

Department of Botany, GC University Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

During the field survey of District Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir as a part of PhD studies a naturalized herbaceous weed found growing in corn (Zea mays L.) fields was identified as *Melochia corchorifolia* L. (Chocolate weed) of family Sterculiaceae. The inhabitants of the area reported that the weed was growing for more than 50 years and has ethnobotanical significance. The voucher plant specimen was deposited in Dr. Sultan Ahmad Herbarium, GCU Lahore, Pakistan. The present report on this weed is an addition to the Flora of Pakistan, as it was not reported previously.

**Key words:** *Melochia corchorifolia*, Chocolate weed, Family Sterculiaceae, District Kotli, AJK

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Melochia* of family Verbenaceae was first described by Linnaeus during 1953 in *Genera Plantarum* (Abedin & Ghafoor 1976). *Melochia corchorifolia* L. is the native to Americas but naturalised in tropical Africa, Madagascar, south, south east and east Asia, Malesia, New Guinea, northern Australia and some Pacific islands (Goldberg 1967). The chromosomal count no. is $2n = 36$ (Matoba & Uchiyama 2009).

District Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir is divided into Kotli, Sehnsa, Khuiratta, Fatehpur and Nakiyal Tehsils. The area is rich in plant diversity and represents sub-tropical Pine vegetation and *Melochia corchorifolia* is found in and near corn fields of plains in throughout the District. The District is bounded on the eastern side by Occupied Kashmir, Western side by Rawalpindi (Pakistan), Southern side by Mirpur and Northern side by District Poonch its population is 0.558 million, according to census 1998. Its area is 1862sq.km. The investigated area lies between longitude 73° 6’ to 74° 7’ East and latitude 33° 20’ to 33° 40’ North (Topo sheet No. 43G/15). The annual rainfall of District Kotli is 1227.91 mm, maximum during July to August, i.e. 306.93 mm and 256.53 mm, respectively, while low during winter. Thus average monthly rainfall is 102.32 mm. Humidity is low during the day time as compared to night. January, February, August and September are more humid months than May and June (Ajaib et.al., 2010).
DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIES

_Melochia corchorifolia_ L. (Syn.: _Melochia affinis_ Wall.) A coarse, erect or decumbent herb or subshrub up to 1m high with fistular stem. Leaves ovate-oblong, petiolate, pubescent with stellate hairs beneath, serrate, acute, up to 8cm long, up to 4cm broad, 5-nerved at base. Flowers white, pink or yellowish in congested terminal clusters, bracteate; bracts ciliate, linear; calyx pale green, united; corolla usually white or pink, petals spathulate; stamen 5-10, isomerous with perianth; anthers yellow, bilocular, dehiscing via longitudinal slits; carpel 5, syncarpous, isomerous with perianth; pistil 5-celled; ovary superior, pubescent 5-locular; ovules 2 in each locule; style 5, free; stigma 5, united at the base; placentation axile; capsule up to 6mm long, dehiscent, septicidal, black or purplish 5mm in diameter; seeds black (Pl. 1).

Fairly common in corn fields during rainy season. _Fl. Per._ July-September. _Vern._ Dhamni, Bundava, Chocolate weed. _Voucher No._ SAH 1113. _Melochia corchorifolia_ L. is looking natural and adapted well in this climate. This species has not been reported by Parker (1956), Chaudhary (1969), Stewart (1972) and Abedin & Ghafoor (1976) in Flora of Pakistan.

**Ethnobotany.** It is used as a fodder for cattle. Leaves are sometime used as vegetable. Fruit powder is used for ear problems, anthelmintic, dysentery, abdominal swellings and snake bites.

Plate 1. _Melochia corchorifolia_ L.

a. Plant in natural habitat

b. Flowers and Fruit
REFERENCES


