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Chapter 1

Introductory Chapter: Plant Ecology

Zubaida Yousaf and Habiba Ramazan

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Plants are one of the densest ecotypes with vicariate diversity in their life history depending on their mores. The ecology of land entirely depends upon plants as they are practical pioneers of the planet earth. Initiating from microorganisms to the macroorganism, they meet their living requisites expending plants. Admitting this, different vegetation types, such as grassland and timberland, are major biomes which help to flux the environmental shifts under global impact. The day-by-day advances in science and technology and ever-emerging needs of living organisms are some anthropogenic activities which had entirely changed the scenario of green systems of the world. Such drastic changes in plant ecology are harmful for all the beings and other respective factors. These substantial amendments occurred due to the earthquakes, industrial effluents, forest fires, carbon ignition, destruction of vegetative and agronomic landforms, etc.

1. Traditional ecology

Broadly stating the relationship of plants with the other living organisms and environmental factors is called plant ecology [1]. But elaborating the term, plant ecology is the study of the relationship of plants with the biotic (living organisms such as animals and other plants, bacteria, and fungi) and abiotic factors such as moisture, temperature, sunlight, soil (nutrients and salinity), and water (rainfall and water table) surrounding them. By the passage of time, the addressed issues regarding biosphere came into consideration. Though from the time of Alexander Von Humboldt (father of ecology) the known species of plants were about 20,000, now the number increased up to 40,0000, but the changes in elements of biosphere are increasing the issues such as loss of habitat, plant, animal, microflora, mutation, pollution, and soil sickness [2–4]. Due to these issues, the most affected living organisms are plants which urged the scientists to investigate the root causes of such drastic changes and commotion to the plant ecology. According to the climate, human and animal interaction, flora, and fauna, the planet earth is categorized into biomes. There are about six major biomes with cutting clarity of subcategories. The largest biome is boreal/coniferous forest; however, the second largest biome

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is grasslands that are ubiquitous as compared to other biomes; tropical rainforest covers only 6% of the world, but they have the richest biodiversity; however, the hottest biome is desert with the minimal biodiversity; in contrast the coldest biome is alpine forest merely with considerable biodiversity [5]. Specifically, the plant populations have dominantly occupied this globe; according to an estimation, 99.9% area of planet earth is covered with flora [6]. About 350,000 species of plants excluding ferns, bryophytes, and algae are known and documented yet. Among them approximately 20% are under the risk of endangerment [7]. The risk of endangerment or extinction due to natural and unnatural disasters has disturbed the whole food chain and web and is continually pushing toward the worst conditions [8].

2. Phylogenetic ecology

Whenever ecological drift and loss in biodiversity of living organisms are discussed, it is generally apprehended that plants are vanishing due to overgrazing and animals are dying due to the inaccessibility of plants. But this whole globe is alive and functional on a single principle named balanced metabolic dynamics ratio between autotrophs (plants, producers) and heterotrophs (animals and microbes, consumers and decomposer) [9]. Basically, this trophic dynamics between producer and consumer within the biosphere is regulated by the transfer of energy from one part of the ecosystem to the other and even within the same ecosystem also known as energy flow in ecosystem. Except solar radiation (external source of energy), all the other energy systems are recycled and balance the dynamics of trophic level followed by complex metabolic mechanisms within the biosphere [10].

Drafting the origin of plant, their functional types and phylogenetic/evolutionary patterns are the most needed steps to timely track and record the drifts and risks to the ecosystem and biosphere [11–14]. As the current dynamics, composition and distribution of plants are altered thence, elaborating and redefining the relationship of plants with the factors encompassing them had led the flora and environment on the verge of endangerment are also expatiated, and many successful solutions to indemnify these issues are contributed by the scientists. Sustaining to this several concepts such as phylogeny, phenology, phytosociology, physiology, and anatomy of plants were used for modeling and surveying [15].

Terrestrial vegetation plays a phenomenal role in management of landscape and hydrological regime. Also the climatic change can be ameliorated by them as they could better regulate biogeological water cycle and sequestrate carbon cycle [16]. The provision of protection against water resources by surface runoff leading toward flood attenuation, aquifer recharging, sea water leveling, water table leveling and fresh water management. Increase in temperature, variation in precipitation, and extreme events have potentially manifested the natural conversational and agricultural management regimes including an indirect risk that was constrained for social and human livelihoods [16, 17]. Although most of the commotion was inflicted due to water regime mismanagement, actually the fraction has been completed by burning practice, by grazing, or by harvesting hay/fodder (directly and indirectly, respectively). Such climatic changes and management conflict of water and vegetation regimes grounded the grasslands

toward threats which were also highlighted by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2014 in their report [18]. Hence, the study of plant ecology is a fountainhead step toward the investigation of cause and solution of biological metabolism and their functioning in the biosphere.

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