

## BIOGRAPHIC NOTES ON EARLIER OVERSEAS FISH TAXONOMISTS OF SOUTH INDIA

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**ABSTRACT :** Many foreign taxonomists conducted extensive biodiversity surveys in various parts of south India. They procured many rare marine and freshwater fishes, given scientific names and described them; as it was the budding stage of fish taxonomy in India they had to toil to trace out the details of various species of their selected genera; preservation and transportation of specimens were also a trying endeavour. Knowledge of the early fish taxonomists of south India and their works is an impetus to budding Indian taxonomists. It is an endeavour to abridge the history of foreign taxonomists and their research works on the freshwater fishes of south India.

**Key words :** Taxonomy, new description, Cuvier, Günther, Day.

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### INTRODUCTION

Most of the freshwater and marine fishes of Kerala were discovered and described by Valenciennes (1839-1844), Jerdon (1849) and Francis Day (1865, 1878, 1889). Even though their descriptions were short and inadequate to the current taxonomic standards, they were instrumental in building the foundation of fish taxonomy in Kerala and adjacent states. Contrary to the present age, communication between taxonomists and exchange of scientific information between scientists was considerably scarce in earlier periods; due to same reason latest changes occurring in the taxonomic world were inaccessible to other experts in the field; Many taxonomists including Valenciennes described and named many different freshwater fishes based on slight morphological variations in colour and minor difference in length of barbels of catfishes; it resulted in a large number of species, but many of them were proved to be same and similar species. Some of them were treated as synonymic species while others are still considered as forgotten fish; many of these insufficiently known fish are being rediscovered and redescribed every year by the Indian taxonomists. Unfortunately, many of the so called synonymic fish species remain concealed in south Indian freshwater bodies. Most of the overseas fish taxonomists of south India were medical surgeons; some

of them were also entrusted with administrative and political responsibilities. They worked hard for identifying and describing freshwater fishes amidst their persevering service in medical field. Articles and textbooks of many earlier foreign scientists are authentic reference books for many budding taxonomy researchers of India.

### BIOGRAPHIC ACCOUNTS

#### Achille Valenciennes

Valenciennes (1794-1865) was a French fish taxonomist; he worked with his mentor Cuvier on his 22 volumes of 'Natural History of Fish' entitled "*Histoire Naturelle des Poissons*" (1828-1848).



Fig. 1 : Achille Valenciennes.