

I. INTRODUCTION

People are using mushrooms as one of dietary items since long time. People are generally habituated to collect the wild naturally growing mushrooms during rainy season and to consume them as one of the items of their food. The screening and selection of any species has been on the basis of trials. Later the cultivation techniques of some of these edible mushrooms have been developed. Now the mushroom cultivation is a highly sophisticated technology in European and American countries.

In India, mushroom cultivation is now gradually gaining importance but still the industry is in its infancy state in comparison to other foreign countries.

In West Bengal the local people are also gradually becoming habituated to consume mushrooms as one of the dietary items. The demand is gradually increasing and it is high time that proper steps should be taken for its commercial cultivation.

Paddy straw mushrooms, namely Volvariella diplasia, V. volvacea and V. esculenta are cultivated in India at present, though there is a controversy about the three species whether they are really different or belong to the same species i.e., V. volvacea, Pleurotus ostreatus, P. flabellatus and

P. sajor-caju are also cultivated in India. Beside Agaricus bisporus is also cultivated in the hilly areas of India.

The technology of modern day mushroom cultivation has developed tremendously in foreign countries. But this industry will involve a huge amount of money if the modern technologies of foreign advanced countries are taken up as the cultivation practices. As such the development of this industry has not taken place in the expected speed upto now.

In the present investigation an attempt has been made to find out suitable for cultivation practices for the three common edible mushrooms namely Volvariella, Pleurotus and Agaricus in order to popularise the cultivation of these mushrooms among the rural people of West Bengal. Obviously during the entire period of investigation the salient point which has been kept in view is to develop such practices which will involve minimum financial involvement and also to develop the industry in a small scale industry basis. This will help the low income group people to take up the mushroom cultivation in huge number.

The findings are presented in the subsequent pages.