

## **Some phyto remedies used traditionally by Gurungs in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India**

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### **Abstract**

Gurungs are the tribal people having profound knowledge in ethnomedicines and known for their age-long traditions and customs reflecting a heritage of reputation and esteem. From an ethnobotanical survey among the Gurung community in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India the present work brings into light 24 plant species which are used for medicinal purposes. The areas of utilization include their common ailments.

**Key words:** Gurung, Ethnomedicine, Darjeeling, Heritage.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ethnobotany, as a research field of science, is widely used especially in Asian countries for the documentation of indigenous knowledge on the use of plants and for providing an inventory of phytoresource content of the local flora. Plants those are used in traditional medicine in different countries are an important part of these studies for the development of new drugs and further development. India is very rich in Ethnobotanical information. The different traditions, beliefs, needs and cultures of the various tribes and the diversity of flora richly contribute to the folklore (Jain 1981). As a pride of India Darjeeling Himalayan region is bestowed with rich variety of plants (Das 2004). Gurung people represent one of the local tribes of Darjeeling. Due to the remoteness of most of the localities and the local rich vegetation, people of Darjeeling largely depend on ethnomedicines for treating different types of their ailments.

Some ethnobotanical works have been done in Darjeeling region including Rai (2002), Rai *et al* (1998), Rai & Bhujel (1997, 1999, 2002, 2007) and Das *et al* (2007). However, till date no has tried to explore the ethnomedicinal knowledge of Gurung community in Darjeeling. Realizing that there should be an immediate evaluation of their ethnobotanical potential on an interdisciplinary framework so that the programmes of conservation and management for an optimum sustainable utilization could be escalated to the brim of success, the present work was undertaken.

The major objective of this study, thus, concerns documentation of the indigenous knowledge of the Gurung community in ethnomicobotany.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Ethnobotanical surveys were conducted in the local areas of Darjeeling hills for collection of first hand information regarding the medicinal use of different plants along with its local name. A rapid resource appraisal in few local areas of Darjeeling hills was conducted during 2005-2006 with medicine men, local healers, village headmen and old experienced, knowledgeable men and middle aged women. Structured questionnaire based interviews were conducted with these people and

information thus generated about the local name of the plant species, ability to identify them in the wild, their medicinal uses and plant part(s) used. The outcome of the interrogation was documented for cross checking with at least three persons belonging to Gurung tribes from different localities and further analysis.

## RESULT

The plants used by the people of Gurung community to treat different ailments are given in Table 1 along with all relevant information.

**Table 1:** Some of the herbal remedies as used by people of Gurung Tribe in Darjeeling.

Scientific name/family	Local name	Part (s) used	Medicinal uses
<i>Aconitum heterophyllum</i> Wallich [Ranunculaceae]	<i>Bikhuma</i>	Roots	Stomachache, fever, cough & asthma
<i>Allium sativum</i> L. [Liliaceae]	<i>Lahsoon</i>	Leaves and bulbs	Antiseptic, anti-cancerous and anti-tuberculosis agent
<i>Acorus calamus</i> L. [Acoraceae]	<i>Bojo</i>	Roots and rhizome	Anti-cancerous and insect repellent
<i>Berginia ciliata</i> (Haworth) Sternberg [Saxifragaceae]	<i>Pakhamvet</i>	Stem	boils, diarrhoea, dysentery
<i>Curcuma aromatica</i> Salisbury [Zingiberaceae]	<i>Banhaldi</i>	Rhizome	An appetizer, grounded rhizome applied to wounds to heal
<i>Camellia sinensis</i> (L.) O. Kuntze [Theaceae]	<i>Chiya</i>	Leaves	Eye trouble, piles and throat irritation
<i>Cinnamomum tamala</i> (Ham.) Nees [Lauraceae]	<i>Sinkouli/ Tejpatta</i>	Leaves	In piles and heart trouble
<i>Cedrela toona</i> Roxb. [Meliaceae]	<i>Tuni</i>	Bark	Bark is a powerful astringent, cures dysentery
<i>Carica papaya</i> L. [Caricaceae]	<i>Mewa</i>	Fruits and seeds	Fruit used as astringent; seeds anthelmintic
<i>Dioscorea alata</i> L. [Dioscoreaceae]	<i>Ghar tarul</i>	Tuber and leaves	Tubers used in fever; leaves cure rashes and itch; and also against constipation
<i>Drymaria cordata</i> (L.) Roemer & Shultes [Caryophyllaceae]	<i>Abijal</i>	Whole plant	Throat pain, fever, asthma and snakebite
<i>Eupatorium adenophorum</i> Sprengel [Asteraceae]	<i>Banmara/ Kalijhar</i>	Root and leaves	Antiseptic and for blood clotting
<i>Ficus benghalensis</i> L. [Moraceae]	<i>Bar</i>	Leaves, latex, roots (aerial), bark and seeds	Ulcer, vomiting, vaginal complaints, fever, inflammation etc.
<i>Gloriosa superba</i> L. [Liliaceae]	<i>Kulhari</i>	Tubers, roots and flowers	Abdominal pain, itching, piles etc.
<i>Glycine max</i> (L.) Merrill [Fabaceae]	<i>Bhatmas</i>	Roots and seeds	Astringent property and nutritional diet
<i>Helianthus annuus</i> L. [Asteraceae]	<i>Ghamful</i>	Flower, roots, seeds and leaves	Flowers to cure ulcers, leprosy, anaemia, asthma

Scientific name/family	Local name	Part (s ) used	Medicinal uses
<i>Imperata cylindrica</i> (L.) Rausch. Vaughan [Poaceae]	<i>Siru</i>	Roots, flower and stem	Root against fever, cough, internal bleeding, jaundice and kidney problems
<i>Ipomoea batatas</i> (L.) Lamarck [Convolvulaceae]	<i>Sakarkhanda</i>	Tuber and plant	Fever and skin diseases
<i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i> Miller [Solanaceae]	<i>Rambhera/ Golbhera</i>	Fruits	Headache and rheumatism
<i>Mentha spicata</i> L. [Lamiaceae]	<i>Padina</i>	Leaves and tender shoot tips leaves	Fever, bronchitis, nausea; astringent, cure rheumatic pains
<i>Nasturtium officinale</i> R. Brown [Brassicaceae]	<i>Simrayo</i>	Entire plant	Treats scurvy, antidotes to toxin
<i>Rhododendron arboreum</i> Smith [Ericaceae]	<i>Laliguras</i>	Flowers & young leaves	Fresh and dried leaves and flowers used in dysentery and diarrhea
<i>Rumex nepalensis</i> Sprengel [Polygonaceae]	<i>Hal hale</i>	Roots and leaves	Leaf infusion given in colic, applied to syphilitic ulcer; root paste applied to wounds
<i>Urtica parviflora</i> Roxburgh [Urticaceae]	<i>Sishnu</i>	Whole plant	Hemorrhages, jaundice and high blood pressure
<i>Zingiber officinale</i> Roscoe [Zingiberaceae]	<i>Adua</i>	Rhizomes	Heart disease.

## DISCUSSION

Darjeeling Himalayan region being very rich in biodiversity is one of the potential areas as sources of medicinal plants in the country. Biswas (1956) described 147 medicinal plants from the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. Yonzon *et al.* (1984) mentioned 75 plants of ethnomedicinal importance from Darjeeling. Das & Mondal (2003) have described 91 species of common medicinal plants from Darjeeling Hills. Chhetri *et al* (2005) and Das *et al* (2007) revealed the current status of ethnomedicinal plants in the Darjeeling Himalaya including foot-hill areas. It appears that work on the traditional system of medicine among Gurung's is neither exhaustive nor exclusive.

Gurungs are the tribal people found in Darjeeling and Nepal (Eden 1985). They are the ethnic people with indigenous knowledge about plants and their use as food, medicine, in daily household purposes, as animal fodder etc. They have such deep knowledge and faith in plants that they cannot even imagine a life without it. Darjeeling has been bestowed with rich vegetation where all these people utilize this boon and add to their advantage.

Gurungs are rich in the knowledge of ethnomedicine. Whenever they fall sick, they use herbal medicines. The plants which are found abundantly in Darjeeling are particularly used as medicines. For e.g. "Pakhamvet", *Bergenia ciliata* in curing boils, diarrhoea, dysentery etc.

“Banhaldi”, *Curcuma aromatica*, is used as an appetizer. “Bikhuma”, *Aconitum heterophyllum* is used in stomach ache, fever etc. “Titepati”, a local name of the plant *Artemisia nilagerica* is used in the treatment of nose bleeding, high blood pressure. “Pinasay lahara”, *Clematis buchaniana* is used in sinusitis. “Phacheng”, *Curcuma armada* is used in chronic ulcer, inflammation etc. *Rhododendron anthopogan* which they refer as “Sunpatay” in local language is used as insect repellent and tonic. Likewise *Mahonia acanthifolia* (“Chutro”) is used in treating jaundice. Other plants like “bojo”, *Acorus calamus*, is used in treating many ailments like bronchitis, cough, asthma, dysentery and even snake bites.

Since the modernization has influenced the Gurungs causing erosion in their ethnobotanical knowledge, it is very much essential at this very crucial stage to conserve the knowledge as well as the plants used by them on war-footing so that mankind can reap the harvest of the benevolence.

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