



## INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE OF WILD EDIBLE PLANTS: A STUDY AMONG THE MISHING TRIBE.

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**ABSTRACT** The indigenous communities maintain a profound relationship with the natural environment and have inherited traditional knowledge regarding the utilisation of wild plants and their various components, such as tubers, shoots, leaves, and fruits, as food sources. Different tribal groups in India are repositories of rich knowledge about diverse applications of plant-based hereditary resources. Wild edible plants significantly contribute to fulfilling the nutritional requirements of the tribal communities. The Mishing people, an ethnic group of Indo-Mongoloid and East Asian origin, have their roots in the eastern Himalayan areas of Tibet. Over time, they settled in the fertile Brahmaputra valley in the Indian state of Assam. The Mishings community are known for their utilisation of a variety of wild plants in their traditional dietary practices, and they are also known to be highly passionate about cooking traditionally unique food items. The present research study aims to comprehensively document the traditional wild food plants used by the Mishing tribe residing in Moinapara village, Dhemaji district of Assam.

**KEYWORDS :** Indigenous, wild, food plants, utilisation, Mishing tribe.

### INTRODUCTION:

The tribal people have a close connection to the natural world and have inherited traditional knowledge of consuming wild plants and plant parts, viz., tubers, shoots, leaves, fruits, etc., as a source of food. Different tribal sects in India are repositories of rich knowledge on various uses of plant-based hereditary resources [1].

Wild edible plants play a major part in meeting the nutritional requirements of the tribal population. Among the different kinds of plants, food plants received the earliest attention of mankind and reflect man's search to know more and more about the nutrient qualities of food plants. Primitive man, through trial and error, has chosen numerous wild edible plants, which are edible, and subsequently domesticated them. Modern man has neither domesticated the leftovers nor identified any new food plants in recent times, which are widely accepted; they have improved only a few crop plants. The present-day wild edible plants are especially useful during famine and similar scarcity situations. Even in normal times, wild plants provide materials for a diet to the less developed segment of the human community, often referred to as tribals' or *adivasis* in India, who generally live in hilly and other inaccessible regions in both developed and developing countries [2].

The Mishing, also known as Miri, represent an ethnic group of Indo-Mongoloid and East Asian descent that historically migrated from the eastern Himalayan regions of Tibet. They ultimately established themselves in the fertile Brahmaputra valley located in the Indian state of Assam. During their migration to Assam, the Mishing primarily followed the course of the Brahmaputra River. Over time, they expanded their settlements to various locations along the riverbanks, including the Dihing, Disang, Dikhow, Subansiri, Ranganadi, and Dikrong rivers. Presently, their communities are distributed across eight districts within the state, namely Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsager, Jorhat, Golaghat, and Sonitpur[3].

The Mishings are known for using a variety of wild plants in their traditional diet, and they are also known to be highly passionate about cooking traditionally unique food items[4].

The present research study is a holistic attempt to document the traditional wild food plants used by the Mishing tribe of Moinapara

village, Dhemaji district, Assam, and also tries to understand how they incorporate these plants into their daily diet.

### Objectives:

The purpose of this present paper aims to emphasise the following primary objectives –

1. To document the traditional wild food plants used by the Mishing tribe in the study area.
2. To learn how the Mishing tribe uses wild edible plants in the study area.

### Methodology:

The present study has been carried out on the basis of empirical fieldwork among the Mishings of Moinapara village, Dhemaji district, Assam. The studied village was one of the earliest settlements of the Mishing people. To have a total understanding of the problem, standard anthropological methods, viz., survey schedules, personal interviews, case studies, and observation methods, have been used to accumulate the essential primary data. Data on their traditional wild food plants, local names, parts used for food, recipes, etc., have been gathered in depth through interviews and in-depth group discussions with the elderly and knowledgeable people. But the secondary data had been collected from various relevant books, journal research papers, newspaper articles, and websites to enrich the paper. The data has been analysed and compiled in an orderly fashion to fit the scientific requirements of the paper and is presented under the following appropriate headings and subheadings.

### Study Area And Sample:

The present study was conducted in Moinapara village, situated in the Gogamukh area of Dhemaji district, Assam. The village is located 1 km away from the sub-district headquarter Gogamukh (tehsildar office) and 32 km away from the district headquarter Dhemaji. A total of 30 households were covered during this study.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

In the present study, a total of 15 plant species were reported that were commonly consumed as vegetables, fruits, spices, chutney, etc., by the Mishings of Moinapara village, Dhemaji district. The detailed collected list of the wild plant species, their local names, scientific names and their common use by the Mishing tribe of the study area is described below:

Sl.No	Mishing Name	English Name	Assamese name	Scientific name	Modes of use
1.	<b>Onger</b>	Prickly ash	Mezenga	<i>Zanthoxylum oxyphyllum</i> Edgw	The Mishing people believed that cooking pork with an <i>onger</i> (prickly ash) destroyed the worms inside the pig's body; therefore, they ate tender <i>onger</i> (prickly ash) shoots as a vegetable, typically served with pig.
2.	<b>Sagla papio</b>	Red silk cotton tree	<i>Nak Chepeta</i> .	<i>Sterculia coccinea</i> Roxb.	Like beans, the fruits, or fragile follicles, are eaten cooked, and mature seeds are roasted or fried.
3.	<b>Singi</b>	Red silk cotton tree	<i>Simalu</i> .	<i>Bombax ceiba</i> L.	Immature <i>Singi</i> fruits were eaten raw by the Mishings of Moinapara village.
4.	<b>Tabing esing</b>	Amlavetasa	<i>Bor Thekera</i>	<i>Garcinia pedunculata</i> Roxb.	The Mishings of Moinapara village ate the mature <i>Tabing esing</i> fruits either raw or cooked. To give it a sour taste, it is usually mixed with other vegetables, especially pulses.

5.	<b>Abori esing</b>	Bead tree	<i>Ghoraneem</i>	<i>Melia azedarach L.</i>	The Mishings from Moinapara village eat the blossoms of the <i>Abori esing</i> (bead tree) as a vegetable. In people and domestic animals, leaves are used to treat worms and skin conditions.
6.	<b>Pinke esing</b>	Japanese Raisin Tree	<b>Chetia bola.</b>	<i>Hovenia dulcis Thunb.</i>	The villagers of Moinapara village consumed the sweet and fragrant fruits of the <i>pinke esing</i> (Japanese raisin tree) in both raw and cooked forms. Additionally, they used the extracts from the seeds, branches and young leaves as a honey substitute and also for preparing wine.
7.	<b>Target ruibe</b>	Elephant apple leaves	<b>Oupat.</b>	<i>Natsiatum herpeticum Buch.-Ham.</i>	<b>Target ruibe</b> leaves and tender shoots are a favoured food of the Mishings of Moinapara village and are consumed prepared as pot herbs. When prepared with fish, it is quite delicious.
8.	<b>Nekung</b>	Indian chestnut vine.	<b>Nal tenga.</b>	<i>Tetrastigma leucostaphylum</i>	The Mishings of Moinapara village usually used " <i>Nol Tenga</i> " and " <i>Bhoot jolokia</i> " (King Chilli) to prepare pork. This recipe for pork is a favourite of the Mishings. They also consumed delicate shoots and leaves from <i>Nol Tenga</i> , which were combined with dals and consumed with little fish.
9.	<b>Dorge</b>	Hog plum/wild mango.	<i>Amora</i>	<i>Spondias pinnata (L.f.) Kurz.</i>	The Mishings of Moinapara village used unripe green fruits of hog plum to make curries and ate ripe fruits fresh. They also used tender leaves and flower buds to make a highly spicy dish with fish.
10.	<b>Bortan Manimuni</b>	Indian Pennywort	<i>Bor-manimuni</i>	<i>Centella asiatica.</i>	It was utilised as a vegetable by the Mishing people. The entire plant is used to treat stomach disorders, make rice beer, and make carminatives.
11.	<b>Ange</b>	Taro	<i>Kochu</i>	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Tender leaves and tubers are consumed as vegetables by the Mishing tribes. Leaves are used to prepare "namshing", which is the grinding of both dried fish and tender leaves. Namshing leaves are used to purify blood and cure malaria.
12.	<b>Takpiyang</b>	Roxburgh Fig.	<i>Dimoru</i>	<i>Ficus glomerata Roxb</i>	The Mishings of Moinapara village consume ripe fruit in its raw state. Additionally, the leaves are boiled with pork and prepared as a curry dish.
13.	<b>Mosundori</b>	Fish mint	<i>Mosundori</i>	<i>Houttuynia cordata Thunb.</i>	The Mishing community consumes the leaves of mosundori either raw or cooked, often preparing it as a vegetable chutney. Additionally, they utilise it for its medicinal properties in treating dysentery.
14.	<b>Bungkirupug</b>	Stink Vine	<i>Bhedailota</i>	<i>Paederia foetida L.</i>	The leaves of Bungkirupug, consumed by the Mishings, are prepared by boiling and served as curry. Additionally, the juice extracted from these leaves possesses astringent properties and is utilised as a remedy for diarrhoea and dysentery.
15.	<b>Jeying (M)</b>	Cane	<i>Bet</i>	<i>Calamus rotang L.</i>	The apical section, once stripped, is utilised as a vegetable and serves as a remedy for de-worming. It possesses a bitter flavour.

#### CONCLUSION:

The findings and discussions presented above indicate that documenting indigenous knowledge is essential for the conservation and utilisation of wild edible plants. Therefore, it is imperative to systematically record, accurately identify, and preserve the traditional knowledge held by tribal communities concerning the uses of these plants.

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