

# Studies on some wild plant species used by the Mising (Miri) tribe of Assam in their traditional food items.

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## Abstract

The Mising peoples are the second largest plain tribes of Assam inhabitation in the Upper Assam particularly along the bank of river Brahmaputra. They are one of the culturally rich ethnic tribe of Assam, mostly dependent on nature for their livelihood. They rear pigs and poultry in every house hold which is a part of their custom. Fishing in rivers and beels is another important practice of these people. Besides, they use plenty of wild plants as vegetables in their daily food items from time immemorial. The paper deals with the investigation and documentation of some important plant species habitually use in their food items particularly in non-vegetarian dishes. In this study, we also observed that the use of some of these plant species is pertaining to their religious belief and festivals also.

**Key words:** Wild plants, Mising, Food habit, Traditional, Religious belief.

## Introduction

The Mising (Miri) is an Indo-Mongoloid and East Asian group of people migrated from the eastern Himalayan regions in Tibet in the hoary past and finally settled in the fertile Brahmaputra valley in Assam province of India. While migrating to Assam, the Mising followed mainly the course of the Brahmaputra, gradually spreading to other stretches of land lying on the banks of its tributaries like the Dihing, Disang, Dikhow, the Subansiri, the Ranganadi, the Dikrong, etc. with habitations scattered now in eight districts of the state, viz. Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsager, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur.

Oh, friends, “The Dërmī tender twig dance with breeze, the orchid flower give an immense beauty and pleasure to us” - the time immemorial folk song of Mising tribe definitely said that the cellular relation of tribe to the plant species in the multifold aspects. The Dërmī plant was their first recognized wild greens cooked with fish and used as fodder for their pigs from where they had their favorite pork. Kanjilal *et al.* (1992) reported the same uses of the Dërmī plant by the tribe.

## Methods

The study was undertaken during 2010-2011 by conducting survey in eight district of upper Assam. The kitchen women, who regularly prepare the food items, the priest (Mibu) who suggested and directed the necessary food items during traditional practices and festival, were interviewed. The preparation of some foods item were observed, tasted and documented. . Ethnobotanical data were collect as suggested by Jain and Goel (1995). The ethnobotanical data were collected using questionnaire, interviews and discussions in their local dialect. Plant species were cross-examined with reference books (Kanjilal *et al.*, 1992), photograph and identified by college and regional herbarium. The collected plant specimens were preserved according to the conventional herbarium techniques (Mitra, 1972). The collected and studied plant species were tabulated as N<sup>1</sup>, N<sup>2</sup>...N<sup>n</sup>.

**Result**

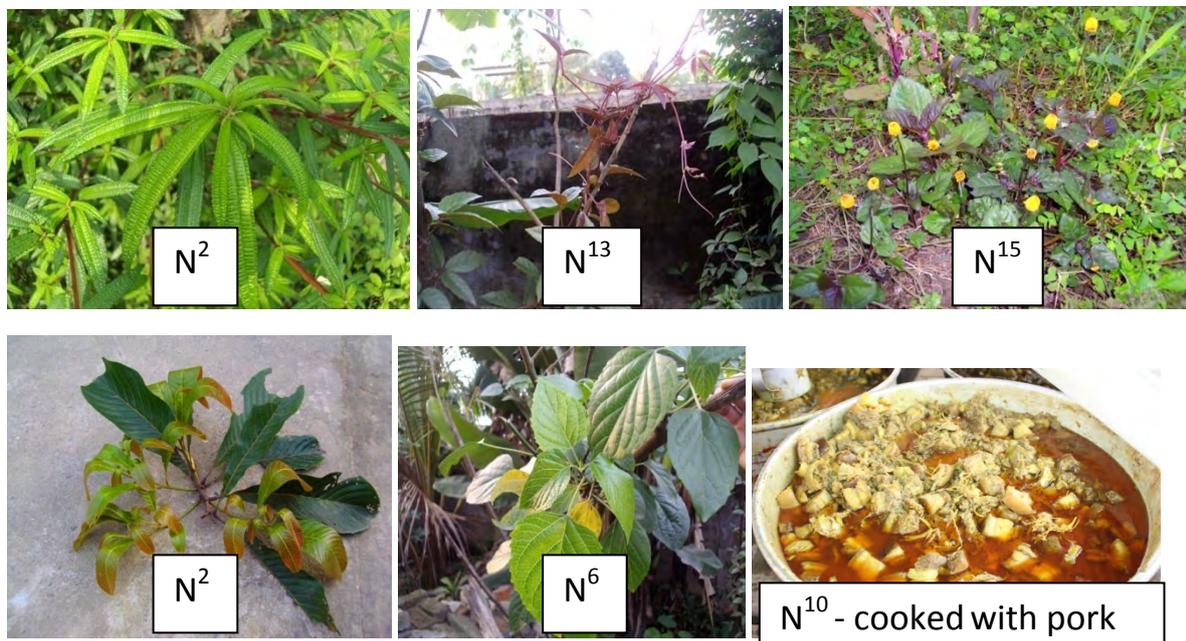
Table: 1- Plant species used by the Mising (Miri) tribe as vegetables.

Number	Botanical Name	Family	Vernacular	Part(s)	Usage/cooked with
N <sup>1</sup> .	<i>Ficus</i> spp.	Moraceae	Tajig/Takse	Tender leaves	Mostly with pork, chicken
N <sup>2</sup> .	<i>Sarcochlamis pulcherrima</i> Goud.	Urticaceae	Ombe/ Notke	Tender leaves	Mostly with pork
N <sup>3</sup> .	<i>Solanum indicum</i> Lin.	Solanaceae	Bangko	Fruits	Roasted, fried with namsing, fried with potato.
N <sup>4</sup> .	<i>Solanum torvum</i> Lin.	Solanaceae	Sita- bangko	Fruits	Roasted, fried with namsing, fried with potato.
N <sup>5</sup> .	<i>Phlogacanthus curviflorus</i> Nees.	Acanthaceae	Konë-oying	Tender leaves	Meat, Fish
N <sup>6</sup> .	<i>Clerodendron colebrookianum</i> Walp.	Verbenaceae	Pakkom	Tender leaves	Roasted, fried with namsing, fried with potato.
N <sup>7</sup> .	<i>Antidesma bunius</i> Spreng.	Euphorbiaceae	Somkong-úsing	Fruits	Fish and green vegetables
N <sup>8</sup> .	<i>Meliosma pinnata</i> Roxb.	Sabiaceae	Dërmi- úsing	Tender leaves	Fish only
N <sup>9</sup> .	<i>Meliosma simplifolia</i> Roxb.	Sabiaceae	Gurban- úsing	Tender leaves	Fish and pork
N <sup>10</sup> .	<i>Dillenia indica</i> Lin.	Dilleniaceae	Sompa	Fruits (Calyx)	Mostly with fish and pork in general
N <sup>11</sup> .	<i>Musa sapientum</i> , Lin.	Musaceae	Kopak	Shoot	Chopped shoot fried with chicken only in the ritual practices.
N <sup>12</sup> .	<i>Buetmeria aspera</i> , colebr.	Sterculiaceae	Risut-róbú	Tender shoot	Fish only
N <sup>13</sup> .	<i>Polygonum assamicum</i> Gandoger.	Polygonaceae	Pinkër/Nëkung	Leaves	Fish only
N <sup>14</sup> .	<i>Calamus tenuis/rotang/erecta</i> .	Arecaceae	Jeying/Jejing Tayo	Tender shoot	Roasted and mix with roasted namsing
N <sup>15</sup> .	<i>Spilanthes acmella</i> Lin.	Asteraceae	Marsang	Tender leaves	Roasted with namsing
N <sup>16</sup> .	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Zingiberaceae	Alodi	Rhizome, leaves	Rhizome powder use as spice, leaves are use as wrapper for the roasted of fish and meat.

N <sup>17</sup> .	<i>Eryngium foetida</i> Lin.	Umbeliferae	Yumrang- O:ri	Leaf and inflorescence	Leaf and inflorescence powder or paste used as spice.
N <sup>18</sup> .	<i>Polypodium</i> spp.Lin.	Polipodiaceae	Bilongoni	Tender leaves	With chicken for enhance milk of the newborn baby's mother
N <sup>19</sup> .	<i>Phyrinium</i> sp. Lin.	Maranthaceae	Kou-pat	Leaves	Used as wrapper for the religious traditional food items.
N <sup>20</sup> .	<i>Albizzia lucida</i> Lin.	Leguminaceae	Tage- úsing	Tender leaves	Cooked with fish and meat.

**Discussion**

The collected and documented plant species used by the community were listed in the table No. 1. The study investigated that the, N<sup>1</sup>, N<sup>2</sup>, N<sup>8</sup> and N<sup>9</sup> plant species were cooked only with pork in the Dodgang, Gyati-yu, Donóng, Dobur, and in the Ali: aye Lógang the oldest agricultural festival celebrated in the month of February every year. Such combination also found in the every household whenever they cooked pork in their food item. It was found to that, the N<sup>19</sup> plant is used as wrapper for the preparation of different pitha (Sweet- a community Specialty) in all festival and traditional ritual of the tribe. The N<sup>4</sup> leaf of plant is also use in the preparation of starter for traditional rice beer by the Deori tribe of Assam (Deori, C., *et al.*, 2007). The N<sup>11</sup> plant is reported as the medicine for diabetes (Borah, et al. 2009). N<sup>17</sup> plant species is use in disease against cough and bronchitis (Das and Rahman, 2011). The N<sup>18</sup> plant deserved the special mention, as it is consume to enhance for the milk of newborn baby's mother. During investigation, the milky extract from the bark of N<sup>1</sup> plant was found to be the treatment for the bone fracture.





N<sup>19</sup> - prepared wrapped sweet



N<sup>19</sup> - wrapping the rice for traditional food item.

### Discussion

The Mising tribe kin to Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, which belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group, used huge numbers of wild plant species for various food items. Gajurel, P.R. (2006) reported that the Adi tribes residing along the banks of Siang river towards South western Boundary of DDBR utilize about 150 wild plant species for various purposes; of these, about 85 plant species were found to be edible. Among these, most of the species were utilized as vegetables and fruits, while a few are used as medicine and for other needs. The present investigation found 20 numbers of plant species habitually used by the Mising tribe of Assam as these days; they are fur flung from the rich plant species diversity. However, their plant vernacular names, similarity of food items to far extent indicated the closed relationship to the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh and extensive used of wild plant species for the various purpose before coming to the riverside areas of the Assam.

The Mising tribe generally takes non-vegetarian food items on their choice and taste. This is the common feature of tribal peoples of earth in general. Pork and domestic fowl's meat are the chief meat for their food items cooked with wild greens. They sacrifice the pig, hen and duck in their religious customs and ritual practices for the well-being of person, families and the society. The tribe used maximum number of wild greens in the cooked of pork meat than other meat. What domestic fowl to be scarify in what custom and ritual practices, were determine and fixed by the priest (Mibu), and these practices transmitted generation to generation. To some extent, the wild greens are also fixe to cook with certain meat in certain traditional religious customs, ritual practices and festivals. Most of the rural peoples of Mising used more wild green vegetables than the cultivated. The urban peoples of Mising planted some such plants in their kitchen garden, which are of a specific practice of long standing. Traditional habitual used and sumptuous nature is the transmission customs or beliefs from generation to generation and such greens attract the conservation strategy of the plant species.

### Conclusion

Present investigation indicates that the Mising (Miri) tribe is blessing with marvelous diversity of leafy vegetable plants. They consume and conserve the plant species for their diverse uses. The tabulated plant species showed that the tribe consumed not only the dietary values but medicines also.

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### **Glossary**

Dodgang = function for worshiped to god for deceased person.

Gyati-uyu = worshiped to ancestor for the well-being of family.

Donóng =welcoming function of normal condition for the diseased person due to wicked look of departed soul kin to diseased person.

Dobur = ritual practice that perform for the well being of family in personal occasionally and for the society in general every year.

DDBR = Dihang Dibang Biosphere Reseve.

Namsing= fermented fish preserved as grinded powder in the inter-nodal part of bamboo (hole).