



## ETHNO MEDICINAL CLAIMS EXISTING AMONG MISING TRIBES OF ASSAM

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### ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to explore the ethno medico system of Mising (Miri) tribe of the Majuli subdivision, Jorhat district of Assam, India. The study mainly deals with the identification of medicinal plant species with the local names, preparation methods, treatment techniques that used frequently for curing several diseases. The practices of herbal treatments were more in the char-chapori (riverine) area as compared to areas nearer to the modern medical facilities. An interesting fact is that the magico-religious practices were done before any type of treatments in the Mising community. The popularity of modern medicines though has increased a lot, but they have ardent faith only on qualitative herbal medicine.

**Keywords:** Ethno medicine, Majuli, Mising tribes, ailment, treatment.

## INTRODUCTION

Jorhat district of Assam is situated in the central region of the state surrounded by Sivasagar district in the East, Golaghat in the West, Lakhimpur and part of Sonitpur district in the North and Nagaland state in the South. The district comprises three sub divisions- Jorhat, Majuli and Titabor. In Majuli sub division which was the biggest river island in the world, also known as *Satriya* cultural island, is now reduced to less than half of its total geographical area due to severe erosion problem occurring every year. The total population of the island is 1,53,337 (2001 census). The Majuli sub division has 45% ST (plains) population among which 35% is *Mising* tribes<sup>1</sup>. It has 20 *Gaon* panchayat of which 11 (eleven) are reserved for ST (P). The tribes inhabiting the island are *Mising*, *Deori* and *Sonowal-Kachari*, of which the *Mising* constitute the largest ethnic tribe in the Island. The *Mising* people usually live in huts raised on bamboo and wooden posts, settle themselves on the river side particularly along the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. They are living with the nature and are still engaged in fishing and seasonal cultivation, and are acquainted to a large variety of wild plants used widely in their day to day life. As ethnic tribes, the *Mising* have their own social organizations, religious beliefs and life crises. They have magico-beliefs, religious traditional beliefs and other customs related to herbal medicine treatments parallel to modern medical practices that prevail among them. Magico spiritual and religious traditional beliefs have impact on the psychology of the patient and the guardians, and have great significance in curing the illness. The present work attempts to get a firsthand report on the use of different medicinal plants by the community.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried out in Majuli subdivision of Jorhat district of Assam. Majuli is situated at 26°-25° and 27°-12° North latitude and 93°-39° and 94°-35° East longitude and 85m above sea level<sup>1</sup>. The study was conducted during 2013. Twenty-gaon panchayat were selected that are mostly inhabited by *Mising* people. The eldest person who possesses folk medicinal knowledge and practices (*NémĭngKinné* or *KusereKinné*) was interviewed in order to collect the information regarding their traditional system of treatment. Sample of plant species were collected from forest and their own kitchen garden and were identified with the help of available flora<sup>2,3</sup>. Collections were carried out and preserved as herbarium sheets employing conventional herbarium techniques, and photograph taken using digital camera and preserved. Some of the common plants used in health ailments are encoded with botanical nomenclature, family along with their local names used by the healers, preparation methods and treatment techniques listed in tabular form.

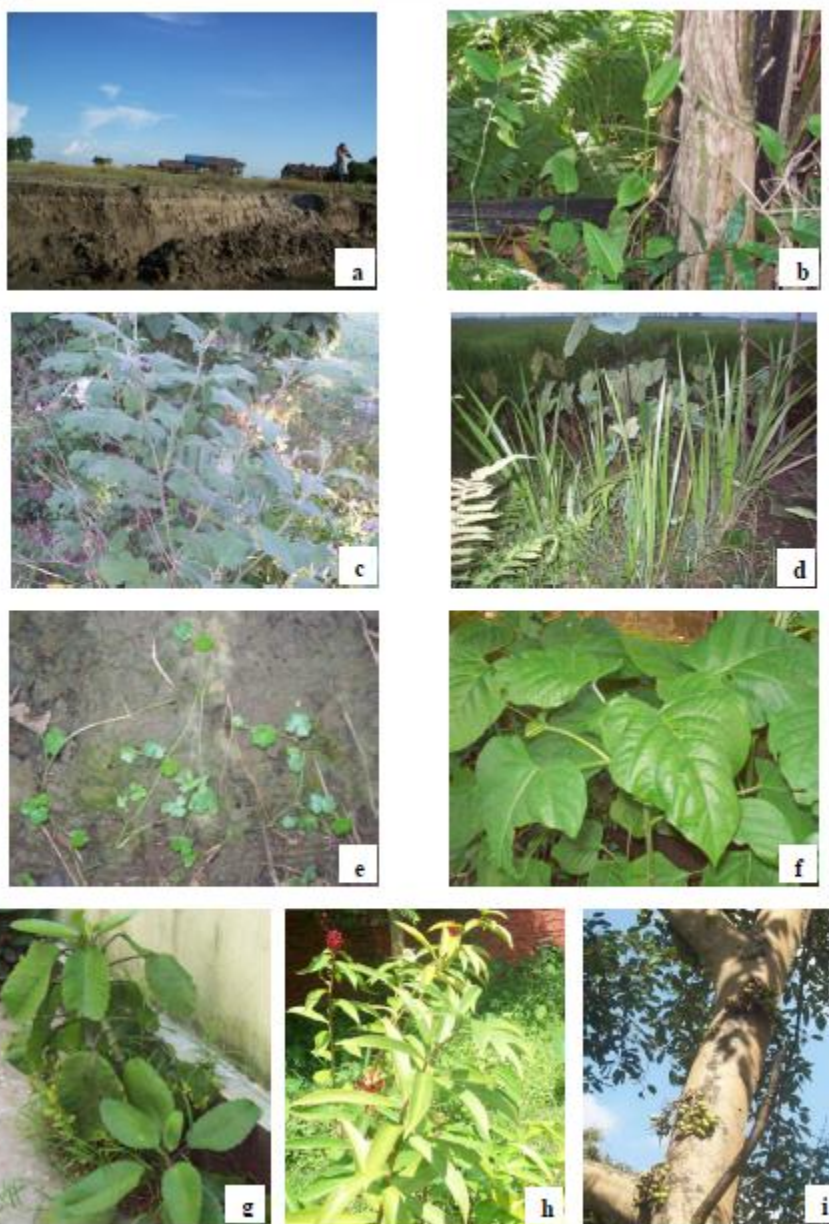
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the study 300 *Mising* peoples were interviewed, 15 from each *gaonpanchayat*. All 300 people informed ethno-medicine treatment, but only 197 peoples frequently used and others only occasionally. The study revealed that 24 plant species has been used against 10 diseases where the rate of plants use is 2.4 higher than the diseases. The various species of the plants that are most intensively studied were documented in the annals of ethno-botany. Their potential pharmaceutical uses are actively contested in the literature associated with modern commercial herbals and alternative medicine. People of *Mising* tribe preferred traditional medicine because of their long term association with forest, low price, cultural acceptability, friendly attitude of healers and other traditional religious beliefs. The *Mising* tribe has been using enormous plant species in their day to day life since time immemorial. They are the sons of soil. Once they are completely dependent on natural products that is perpetuating still today. The kitchen gardens which were found in every *Mising* household indicate their good relation in every respect, specially the preparation of ethno-medicine and socio religious uses in their ritual functions. The plants are so closed that the properties of some plant species were spaciouly uttered in their folk song, which they sing every year in their major festivals. Good relations to the nature provide number of herbal medicines whenever they encounter life crises. Socio-religious beliefs enhance the faith on ethno-medicine well. Table 1 shows that the *Mising* peoples use many herbs for treating poisonous insects bite, malarial fevers, thread worm infections, common dysentery, cut injury, urinal bitter, white discharge of women, bone and muscular pain and acute fever in child. At least one *NćmingKinnć*(Traditional healers) in each village found to practice the ethno-medicine. Many healers use many herbal medicine formulae for curing the diseases. Besides specific healers, most of the elder persons know at least some herbal medicine that could be useful for treating of minor diseases. *Oscimum sanctum* is extensively used in the socio religious activities. It is also used by the *Mising* community in the Dibrugarh district, Assam for curing allergy<sup>4</sup>. *Solanum indicum* found to be highly effective in curing threadworm problems and the mode of applications found to be unique. This method is prevailing only among the *Mising*, but *S. indicum* has also been reported to possess antihelmentic properties<sup>5</sup>. Similarly the wearing of rhizome around the neck and inhaling the odour of *A. calamus* rhizome after crushing is a unique religious belief for eliminating bad evils and for curing health ailments. This is supported by the fact that the rhizome yields essential volatile oil having insecticidal properties<sup>6</sup>. *C. asiatica* and *S. dulcisis* widely used by the people against dysentery. On the other hand *S. dulcisis* used for the treatment of urinary stone<sup>7</sup>. This may be the reason that urinary stone problem is rare among the community (personal observation).

All the diagnosis and treatment is done using different names like *Bez*, *NćmingKinnć*, or *KusereKinnć*, etc. The *Mising* women also have knowledge of ethno medicine as first hand relief for different ailments. Ethno medicine is still on in the *Mising* tribe even after introduction of modern medicine. Of course, its former popularity and reliability has considerably decreased. It has to be mentioned that the project on ethno medicine, awareness of plant properties, and eco-friendly action emerging out will contribute in popularizing

the herbal products.

**Plate 1:**



**a)** Erosion at *Mising* village, **b)***Polygonumperfoliatum*, **c)***Solanumindicum***d)***Acoruscalamus*, **e)***Centellaasiatica*,  
**f)***Clerodendroncolebrookianum***g)***Bryophyllumcalycinum*, **h)***Costusspeciosus*, **i)***Ficusglomerata*

S.No	Botanical name (Family)	Local name	Parts used	Mode of application
1. Poisonous insects bite	Bambusa balcooa Roxb. Poaceae Bambusa nutans Wall ex Munro Bambusa tulda Roxb. Poaceae Dendrocalamu hamiltonii Nees. Poaceae	Buluka Di:bang  Mokal  Jati Di:bang  Kakoi Di:bang	   Bamboo shoot	Bamboo shoot is grinded and allowed to ferment; preserved poultice: poultice is placed over the swelling region caused by poisonous insect bite. The pain is relieved within 5-10 minutes, swellings tend to minimized to the normal.
2. Malarial fever	Clerodendron colebrookianum Lin. Verbenaceae	Pakkom	Tender leaf	Tender leaves of Clerodendron along with Namsing (dried grinded fish preserved for long uses) wrapped with banana leaf/Cucurbita leaf /Alpinia leaf and roasted; served it with rice. Consumption of this preparation is taught to be the resistant against malaria.
3. Thread worm	Solanum indicum Lin. Solanaceae          Ananas comosus Lin. Bromaliaceae	Bangko          Matikothal	Fruit          Very young	100 numbers of berries in 1000ml allowed to boil for 30 minutes, and crushed; the extract is then transferred to an earthen pot. Now, the diseased person is allowed to sit over the mouth of the pot so that the anus gets hot vapors'. Or sometimes the person is asked to release excreta in the pot. For complete cure 3-5 times practice is advised to cure. Grinded leaf is taken with water.

4. Dysentery	Scoparia dulcis Lin. Scrophulariaceae	Modhuban	Tender leaf	Equal amount of S. dulcis and C. asiatica leaves were grinded.
	Centella asiatica Lin. (Apiaceae)	Manimuni	Whole plant	Decoction of leaves is taken with sugar in empty stomach in the morning; thrice daily until dysentery stop.
	Bombax malbaricum D.C. Bombacaceae	Singgung	Unripe fruits	Unripe fruits are recommended.
	Mangifera indica Lin. Anacardiaceae	Ke:di Milong	Bark	Decoction of bark taken in empty stomach; twice daily before meal till complete relief.
	Nymphaea lotus Willd Nymphiaceae Nymphaea stellata Willd Nymphiaceae	Hekul N'ng Heluk	Seeds & tubers. Seeds & tubers.	The seeds and tubers are eaten raw or roasted. Same as above.
5. Cut injury	<i>Bambusa spp.</i> Poaceae	<i>Di:bang</i>	Stem scrap	Green stem scrap is applied over the fresh cut.
6. Urinal problems	<i>Bryophyllum calycinum</i> Salisb Crassulaceae	<i>Dupor tenga</i>	Leaf	Leaf extract taken with water in the empty stomach in the morning.
	<i>Centella asiatica</i> Lin. Apiaceae	<i>Manimuni</i>	Whole plant	Leaf juice with water or chewed the whole plant.
7. White discharge of women	<i>Costus speciosus</i> (Koenig ex Retz.) J. E. Smith. Zingiberaceae	<i>Jom Lakhuti</i>	Underground rhizome	Underground rhizome is ground and kept with water overnight. Filtrate is taken orally with milk in the empty stomach. Practices 15 days to 3 months depend on acuteness.
	<i>Phyllanthus acidus</i> Skeel Euphorbiaceae.	<i>Pora amlokhi</i>	Leaf	Leaf juice with sugar. Daily in empty stomach for 15 days to 3 months.
	<i>P. destichus</i> Muell-Arg. <i>Polygonum perfoliatum</i> DC. Polygonaceae	<i>Pora amlokhi</i> <i>Dongkal</i> <i>Tabad</i>	Leaf Whole plant except root	Same as above. Smashed with water and filtrate is advised to be taken in empty stomach.

8. Child fever	<i>Allium sativa</i> Lin. Liliaceae  <i>Acorus calamus</i> Lin. Aracaceae	<i>Kampun'ctalab</i>  <i>Bos</i>	Bulbous root  Bulbous root	Bulbous roots are ground with mustard seeds, mixed with warm mustard oil and massage whole body specially the palm and sole. It is also wearing with chilly to eliminate bad evil and used to remove sluggish feel of body. Also applied on nostril and naval region. Same as above. Leaf decoction is used for stomach pain.
9. Ear ailments (Wound)	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> Lin. Lamiaceae	<i>Tuloshi</i>	Leaf	Leaf juice is mixed with ground powder (dried spider body) and the preparations applied over the wound.
10. Bone and muscle pain	<i>Ficus glomerata</i> Lin. Moraceae	<i>Tajik/ Taksek</i>	Milky juice & Bark	Milky Juice is applied as a thick layer on the pain area. If it is acute and bone is thought to be fractured, the bark is tied on the affected area together with juice for 15-30 days.

**Table1:** List of diseases, plant used and their local name, family, the parts used and mode of application

### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from this study that the medical system of the *Mising* tribes of Majuli Island is heterogeneous. The tribe encompasses different types of practices that employ magico-religious, plant and animal products and the allopathic medicines representing a medical pluralism. Most of the people of *Mising* villages are situated at remote area like Ahatguri and DokhinAhaturipanchayat in the West and Ratanpur miri and Luitporiapanchayat in the East specially the riverside area. They give priority to traditional system of treatment because of their strong spiritual and magico-religious beliefs. Besides, the remoteness of the villages from modern medical system can be considered as prime cause for preferring the traditional system. However, the person near to the modern medical treatment is also dependant on traditional system to some extent. The important fact about the people is that, magico-religious treatment (*Kumsak*=Pray to forefather in the name of patient/assurance before the god to give offer, whatever left known or unknowingly) is offered

first in every household of the *Mising* tribes before giving any other treatment to the patient. The study shows that the people trust more on indigenous system that has quality herbal medicines. Phytochemists and Pharmacologists have to pay attention for further scientific study to determine the active component of the plants and formulation of right doses of medicine which may lead more and more belief on the herbal products and for the wellbeing of mankind.

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