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Wild Plant Resources Used as Food by the Dimasas of Karbi - Anglong District, Assam, India

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ABSTRACT

The Dimasas of the Karbi-Anglong district, Assam are dependent majorly on the wild and some cultivated plant species for their food. A total of twelve (12) villages and associated forest lands of Karbi-Anglong have been visited during the survey. Eighty-six (86) plant species have been documented belonging to forty-one (41) families. Tabulation has been done according to scientific name with family, vernacular (Dimasa) name, plant parts used, purpose of use and method of use. The use of the wild food plants, and those very different from the mainstream food resources, has been elaborately discussed. The exclusive method of classification of species in Dimasa dilect has also been briefly discussed.

Key words: *Dimasa, Karbi-Anglong, Vernacular name.*

INTRODUCTION

Learning about edible plants, processing of foods and medicines using location specific wisdom and conservation of food related resources has been in the large part due to incremental and cumulative learning among the societies living in close connection with nature.

The forests have sustained lives since antiquity, and yet have found no importance in the modern society. The tribals, however, are still in touch with the roots and haven't abandoned the life giving forest lands. They take shelter under the foliage and make use of all the available resources to an extent that just never jumps into a level of exploitation. Taking privileges and conservation go hand in hand. The Dimasas stand live examples in justification of the same. They have successfully preserved the environmental assets unsullied, by keeping a check on external interventions and the outflow of knowledge into other communities.

All their traditions and culture revolve more or less, around the forests. Out of all of the traditional wonders, the Dimasa food culture is exclusive.

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A wide range of wild edibles are rarely used in a usual mainstream diet. Most of the wild varieties are underutilised and a lot is yet to be known in terms of their nutritional and medicinal values. The main objective of this study is to gather as much information as possible regarding the wild flora used in their food culture. Their reluctance to share much knowledge is one constraint that keeps the investigator from collecting adequate information.

The Dimasa-inhabited areas of Karbi-Anglong have not witnessed an industrial enterprise till date. As a result, many of their natural treasures remain unexplored, unexploited and almost in their pristine form. A few researches have brought the enormity of wild food used by the Dimasas to light. Some of them are highly nutritious.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study was conducted in the duration of March, 2015 to February, 2016, covering both the dry and rainy seasons. Wild, as well as the Jhum cultivated crops have been documented. Villages of Borlongfer *viz,* Dogju pathar, Nilapur, Hojaipur, Khakhao, Longflaidisha, Lailingdisha, Tamulbari, Khijurbon and one village of Manja, have been visited on a regular basis to collect relevant information concerning the present study.

The information has been collected from the elderly people recommended by the Khunang (village head man), and from the female vendor of the locality. Information was gathered through verbal interactions in the form of interviews and semi-structured surveys. The specimens were shown to them, the vernacular names of the species and, their corresponding uses were subsequently noted down in columnar tables upon identification. The voucher specimens of plant parts were secured in the form of herbarium. Corresponding photographs of specimens were also taken. Later, the scientific names of the associated specimens were procured with the consolidated help of internet, old literatures and experts from the department of Life Science and Bio-informatics, Assam University, Diphu Capmus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this present investigation, one eighty six (86) food plant (especially wild) species have been tabulated in the following table. The plants belonging to forty one (41) families have been recorded namely, *Solanaceae (08), Cucurbitaceae(06), Fabaceae (06), Poaceae (05), Araceae (05), Lamiaceae (05), Musaceae (04), Rutaceae (04), Dioscoriaceae (03), Apiaceae (03), Amaranthaceae (03), Zingiberaceae (02), Leguminosae (02), Agaricaceae (02), Verbenaceae (02), Bigoniaceae (01), Urticaceae (01), Athyriaceae (01), Clusiaceae (01), Phyllanthaceae (01), Portulaceae (01), Asteraceae (01), Amaryllidaceae (01), Arecaceae (01), Rubiaceae (01), Brassicaceae (01), Euphorbiaceae (01), Crassulaceae (01), Araliaceae (01), Bromeliaceae (01), Caricaceae (01), Moraceae (01), Myrtaceae (01), Rhamnaceae (01), Moringaceae (01), Dilleniaceae (01), Piperaceae (01), Acanthaceae (01), Convolvulaceae (01), Oxalidaceae (01), Combretaceae (01).*

Table 1: Local plants used as food (wild/ cultivar/ domestic/ semi-domestic)

S.No	Scientific name with family	Local (Dimasa) name	Category (domestic/ semidomestic/wild/cultiv-ar)	Part(s) used	Mode of consumption	Method of use
1.	*Solanum nigrum* L./*Solanaceae*	Hagrani khimkhatai	Wild/semi-domestic	Fruit	Boil/Khari/ Honn/Fry	Used as vegetable
2.	*Solanum indicum* Linnaeus/*Solanaceae*	Phantao khimkhatai	Domestic/ cultivar	Fruit	Khari/Fry/ Boil	Used as vegetable
3.	*Solanum torvum* O.P.Swartz/*Solanaceae*	Phantao khimkhatai gidiba	Simi domestic/wild	Fruit	Fry/Boil Khari/Honn	Used as vegetable
4.	*Capsicum chinense x C.Fructuscens /Solanaceae*	Morsai magam	Domestic/ Cultivar	Fruit	Raw/Pickle/ Spice	Used in every dimasa dishes for hot flovour/Pickles are prepared
5.	*Capsicum annum* L./*Solanaceae*	Morsai mani	Wild/ domestic	Fruit	Pickles /Spice	Extensively used in all dishes to get local delicacy.
6.	*Solanum melongena* L./*Solanaceae*	Phantao	Domestic/Cultivar	Fruit	Boil/Khari/ Honn	Young fruits are cooked with other vegetables to prepare palatable dish ,*phantao khari*

7.	*Solanum spirale* Roxb./*Solanaceae*	Kanaringma	Domestic/wild	Flower and tender leaves	Boil/Honn	Used as ingredient in boil or *Honn* dishes.
8.	*Solanum sp.* / *Solanaceae*	Gidibao khasiba	Wild /Semi domestic	Fruits	Khari/Honn	Used in*khari* or *Honn* dishes
9.	*Eryngium foetidum* L./*Apiaceae*	Baknor	Wild/Cultivar/Domestic	Leaves	Raw/ chutney	Used for garnishing and flavor.Chutney is prepared with leaf paste.
10.	*Coriandrum sativum* L./*Apiaceae*	Bakhor	Cultivar	Leaves	Chutney	Leaf paste is used as chutney and raw leaves are used for garnishing
11.	*Centella asiatica* (L.) Urban/*Apiaceae*	Mikharing	Wild/ Semi-domesticated	Leaves with Stem	Boil/Raw/ Chutney	Used as vegetable or raw chutney
12.	*Parkia trimoriana* (de Candolle) E.Merril/*Leguminosae*	Bairabthai	Wild/ Domestic	Fruits	Burnt food	After burning fruits are pasted and fried in oil.
13.	*Tamarindus indica* Linnaeus /*Leguminosae*	Thintri	wild	Fruits	Raw	Fruits are eaten raw and pickles are prepared.
14.	*Alpinia nigra* (Gaertn.).B.L.Burtt. 1977/*Zingiberaceae*	Deragong	Wild	Inner portion of the stem	Boil/Fry Chutney / Khari/ Honn	Used in all kinds of vegetable dish preparation.
15.	*Curcuma amada* (Roxburgh) / *Zingiberaceae*	Thaiju hajing	Wild/ Cultivar	Rhizome	Chutney	Rhizome paste is used as chutney or sauce and used as flavouring agent.
16.	*Oroxylum indicum* (L.) Benth.ex Kurz /*Bigoniaceae*	Khalong / Kharlong	Wild	Tender leaves	Boil/Honn	Used as vegetable
17.	*Sarcochlamys plcherrima* Gaudichaud-Beaupre/*Urticaceae*	Misheigi	Domestic/ Wild	Leaves	Boil/ Chutney/ Mudru	Boiled tender leaves with boiled banana flower is given to the new mother. It is boiled with Dillenia fruits and other vegetables as *Mudru* .In Shraddha ceremony *maimuhtarba* this is an essential item.
18.	*Diplazium esculentum* (Retz.) Sw./ *Athyriaceae*	Daonahlai	Semi-domestic/ Wild	Leaves/ Shoot		Tender leaves with shoot are cooked as boiled fod.
19.	*Musa sp./Musaceae*	Ligonthai	Wild/ Domestic	Flower/ Stem	Boil/ Honn / Fry/ Khari/	Used as vegetables in different dishes.Cooking banana flower with dry prawn is local delicacy.
20.	*Musa x paradisiacal L.[1] /Musaceae*	Thailik gathang	Wild/ Domestic	Fruits	Fry/Boil/ Khari/	Unripe fruts are used in fry/boil/khari preparations
21.	*Musa acumineta* Colla/Musaceae	Thailik	Domestic/ Wild	Fruits	Raw/Fry	Ripe fruits are eaten raw.
22.	*Musa balbisiana* Colla/*Musaceae*	Thailoo athier	Domestic /Wild	Stem/Inflorescence	Fry/Boil/Honn/Khari	Inner part of the stem is preffered most in many dishes.
23.	*Garcinia lancifolia*Roxb./*Clusiaceae*	Shusruthai	Domestic/ Wild	Fruits	Raw	Fruits are eaten raw.
24.	*Trichosanthes cucumerina* L./*Cucurbitaceae*	Jenga	Domestic Wild	Fruits/ Shoots	Boil/Khari/ Fry	Tender fruits and shoots are cooked for various dishes.
25.	*Momordica dioica* Roxb. Ex. Willd /*Cucurbitaceae*	Hangathai	Domestic/ Wild	Fruits	Boil/Honn/ Fry	Used as vegetableas fried,honn,or boiled food.
26.	*Momordica charantia* L./*Cucurbitaceae*	Hagrani gala	Wild/Semi-domestic	Tender leaves/	Boil/Fry /Honn	Used in all kind of vegetable dishes
27.	*Gymnopetalum chinense* (J. Loureiro) E.D.Merrill/*Cucurbitaceae*	Dukhatai	Wild	Fruits	Boil/ Khari	To prepare *khari* with dry fish and for boiled preparation the fruits are used
28.	*Luffa cylindrical* (L.) Rox./*Cucurbitaceae*	Maising phoronthal	Wild/domestic	Young fruits	Boil/ Fry	Used as vegetable
29.	*Lagenaria siceraria* (Molina) Standl. / *Cucurbitaceae*	Titalau	Wild/Cultivar	Fruit	Fry/ Boil	Used in vegetable preparation
30.	*Amaranthus viridis* L./*Amaranthaceae*	Khutra	Semi- domestic/wild	Tender Leaves/ Stem	Boil/ Fry	Used as vegetable fry with or without oil.
31.	*Amaranthus spp./ Amaranthaceae*	Mata	Domestic/Cultivar	Leaves/ Stem	Boil/Fry	Used as boiled or fried vegetable.
32.	*Celosia argenttea* L./*Amaranthaceae*	Khimsagajao	Domestic	Leaves/ Stem	Boil/Soup / Fry	Used as vegetable
33.	*Citrus jambhiri*Lash./*Rutaceae*	Thaisa maikhri	Wild	Fruit	Raw	Unripe fruit palps eaten
34.	*Murraya koenigii* L. Sprengel[1]/*Rutaceae*	Curry blai	Domestic	Leaf	Khari	Young leaves are used ti add aroma in *Khari* dish.
35.	*Aegle mermelos* (L.) Correa[2]/*Rutaceae*	Bael	Wild	Fruit	Raw	The ripe fruit juice is mixed with jiggery to drink or eaten raw.
36.	*Citrus maxima*Merr./*Rutaceae*	Reba	Wild/ Domestic	Fruit	Raw	Ripe fruit or fruit juice is consumed.
37.	*Psophocarpus tetragonolobus* (L.) D.C./*Fabaceae*	Sabaikhamrang	Cultivar	Leaves / Pods / Seeds	Boil/ honn/ Khari	Leaves are consumed in boil form, pods are used in *Mudru* or other dishes and seeds are used to prepare *Dal Khari*
38.	Vigna mungo (l.0 Hepper/ Fabaceae		Cultivar	Seeds	Khari	Seeds are prepared as *khari* dish
39.	*Sesbania grandiflora* (L.)Poiret/*Fabaceae*	Nwonishorjo	Domesticated	Flower	Fry	Flowers are used as fried food.
40.	*Bauhinia acuminate* L./*Fabaceae*	Muglub balai	Wild/ Domestic	Tender leaves	Boil	Used as boiled vegetable
41.	*Cajanus cajan* (L.) Millsp./*Fabaceae*	Khaokhlem	Cultivar	Fruits/Seed	Boil/ Khari	Lentils are boiled and prepared as *Dal Khari*
42.	*Acacia pennata* (L.)Wild./*Fabaceae*	Sam Themra	Wild	Bark	Frmentation	Small pieces of the dried bark is added to prepare the starter cake , necessary for the preparation of *Judima*
43.	*Clerodendrum colebrookianum*Walp./*Lamiaceae*	Misimao	Domestic/Wild	Tender leaves	Boil/ Honn	Leaves are simply boiled with salt and consumed as vegetable. But the pregnant women cannot consume it.
44.	*Clerodendrum infortunatum* L./*Lamiaceae*	Sgaingyopalai	Wild	Tender leaves	Boil	Used as boiled vegetable
45.	*Mentha arvensis* L./*Lamiaceae*	Pudina balai	Domestic	Leaves	Raw	The raw leaves are pasted with *Micuring* leaf and consumed as *Chutney* with rice.
46.	*Leucas aspera/ Lamiaceae*	Kemberti	Wild	Leaves and Flower	Boil/ Fry	Boiled or fried leaves are consumed with rice.
47.	*Ocimum basilicum* L./*Lamiaceae*	Bahanda balai	Domestic	Leaves	Raw / Chutney	Used for garnishing the dishes,for aroma.Chutney is prepared with dry fish.
48.	*Phyllanthus*	Hamlaithai	Wild	Fruits	Raw	Unripe fruits are eaten.Sometimes Fruits are

	*emblica*L.[1]/*Phyllanthaceae*					dried for future use to chew or masticate.
49.	*Portulaca oleracea* L./*Portulaceae*	Barthoslai	Wild	Tender leaves	Fry	Used as fried vegetable.
50.	*Blumea lacera* L./*Asteraceae*	Mugungre	Wild	Leaves with stem	Boil/ Fry/ Honn	Used in different kind of vegetable preparation.
51.	*Melocanna buccifera* (Roxb.) Kurz/*Poaceae*	Wadreng	Domestic/Wild	Shoot	Pickle/Khari/Fry/ Boil	Used as ingredient in *Khari*preparation.Used as Pickles/ ccconsumed as boiled or fried form.
52.	*Dendrocalamus hamiltoni* Gamble/Poaceae	Wayung	Domestic / Wild	Shoot	Pickles/Khari/Fry	Used in Khari preparation,Fermented as pickle.Sometimes fried with oil.
53.	*Melocalamus indicus* R.B.Mazumder/Poaceae	Washi	Domestic/ Wild	Shoot	Pickles/Khari/Fry	Used in Khari preparation,Fermented as pickle.Sometimes fried with oil.
54.	Zea*mays L./Poaceae* (coloured variety)	Maizu manglai	Cultivar	Seed	Stemed/ Boil	Used as staple food during famine or in scarcity
55.	*Zea mays* L./ *Poaceae* (white variety)	Maisa manglai	Cultivar	Seeds	Steamed/ Boil/ Smoked	Used as tiffin or staple food in boiled or in smoked form.
56.	*Allium sativum*L.[1]./*Amaryllidaceae*	Samphrang guphu	Cultivar	Bulb	Spice/ condiment	It is an essential ingredient to cook fish, dry fish, or meat dishes.
57.	*Calamus rotang* L./*Arecaceae*	Raigong	Wild	Stem	Burnt food	Inner part of the stem is burnt and consumed as chutney with rice.
58.	*Agaricus spp./Agaricaceae*	Mukhum	Wild/Semi- domestic	Flower	Boil/Fry / Khari/Honn/ Chutney	Used in all kind of vegetable preparation
59.	Agaricus spp./Agaricaceae	Mukhum gidiba	Wild	Flower	Boil/Fry / Khari/Honn/ Chutney	do
60.	*Paederia foetida* Linnaeus/*Rubiaceae*	Sam giphu	Wild/ Semi domestic	Leaves	Chutney	Leaves are pasted with garlic and chilli.
61.	*Brassica juncea* (L.) Czern/*Brassicaceae*	Yaolai	Cultivar	Leaves/ Seed	Boil/ Fry	Leaves are used as vegetable. Seeds are used to prepare oil.
62.	*Manihot esculenta*Crantz[1]/ *Euphorbiaceae*	Ruthi/ Thabanjuyadar	Cultivar/wild	Tuber	Boil	Used as vegetables or famine food.
63.	*Dioscorea alata* Linnaeus/ *Dioscoreaceae*	Thaphu sathai	Cultivar	Tuber (Yam)	Boil/ Honn	do
64.	*Dioscoria aculeta* Linnaeus/ *Dioscoreaceae*	Thagdi	Cultivar/Domestic	Tuber (Yam)	Boil	Sweet tasted boiled tuber is used as the substutite of staple food
65.	*Dioscorea deltoidea* Wallich ex A.H.R Grisebach /*Dioscoreaceae*	Thaphu miyung	Cultivar	Tuber (yam)	Boil/Honn	Used as vegetable or substitute of staple food.
66.	*Premna* spp./*Verbenaceae*	Hanmu/ Bonthapli	Wild	Stem bark	Flour made of the heartwood	The barks are cut into pieces. The inner white soft portion of the heart wood is grinded toflour and sundried .During scarcity of staple food the flour is used to make Roti/ Chapati.
67.	*Lippia alba* (Mill.) N. E. Br. Ex Britton & P. Wilson/*Verbenaceae*	Bahanda gidiba	Wild/ Domestic	Leaves	Raw/ Chutney	Raw leaves are used for garnishing, aroma.Chutney is prepared with dry fish.
68.	*Bryophyllum pinnatum* (Lamark) L. Oken/*Crassulaceae*	Wai blai/ Makhri lai	Wild/ Semi- domestic	Leaves	Boil/ Mudru	During preparation of *Mudru*, Sour tasted leaves are mixed with other vegetables.
69.	*Amorphophalus bulbifer* (Roxburgh) C.l.Blume/*Araceae*	Thabema	Wild/ Semi- domestic	Tuber	Boil/ Khari	Boiled or prepared *Khari* with meat or fish.
70.	*Colocasia esculenta* (Linnaeus) H.W. Schott/*Araceae*	Thagondai	Wild/ Semi-domestic	Leaves/ Stem/ Tuber	Boil/ Fry	Leaves and tubers are boiled.Leaf sheath are fried preferrably
71.	*Colocasia antiquorum*Schott./*Araceae*	Thagondai	Wild	Stem Corm/ Tubers	Boil	Corms are cut into pieces, boiled and water sieved out .Tubers are consumed in boiled form.
72.	*Xanthosoma spp.*Schott[1]/*Araceae*	Manai gisim	Wild/ Semi -domestic	Leaf and Stem	Boil/Khari	Used as vegetable
73.	*Alocasia macrorrhiza* (Linnaeus) G. Don/*Araceae*	Thagongyung	Wild/ Semi-domestic	Leaves/ Stem	Boil/ Fry	Leaves with stem are fried or boiled to consume.
74.	*Travasia palmate*(Roxb.) Vis/*Araliaceae*	Khimthoudi	Wild/Domestic	Fruits	Boil/ Curry	To prepare palatable dish the boiled fruits are mixed with smashed potato and chilli./Curry is also prepared.
75.	*Ananus comosus*(L.) Merr./*Bromeliaceae*	Laiyamuri	Cultivar	Fruits	Raw	Raw fruits are eaten .
76.	*Carica papaya*L.(1)/*Caricaceae*	Goyaphol	Wild/ Domestic	Fruits	Raw/Boil	Unripe fruits are eaten as boiled food.Ripe fruits are consumed in raw form.
77.	*Morus alba* L. 1753/*Moraceae*	Sumu maikhri	Domestic	Fruits	Raw/Pickle	Sour tasted fruits are eaten raw and pickles are prepared.
78.	*Psidium guajava* L./*Myrtaceae*	Sukrem	Wild/Domestic	Fruits	Raw	Raw fruits are eaten.
79.	*Ziziphus mauritiana* Lam./Rhamnaceae	Thigendi	Wild /Domestic	Fruits	Raw/Pickle	Raw fruits are consumed for oral delicacy and pickles are also prepaed.
80.	*Moringa oleifera* Lam./*Moringaceae*	Sajna (drumstick)	Domestic/Wild	Fruits/ Leaves	Khari	Fruits are added to the *Dal Khari* or any kind of Khari dish
81.	*Dillenia indica* Linnaeus/ *Dilleniaceae*	Thaidi	Domestic/Wild	Fruits	Pickles/Chutney/Raw/ Mudru	Fryits are eaten raw.Pickles are prepared for future use.used as ingredient in *Mudru*
82.	*Piper* nigrum L.[1]/*Piperaceae*	Morsai di	Domestic	Seed	Spice/Condiment	Seeds are ground to powder and are used in many dishes.
83.	*Phlogocanthus curviflorus* Nees,1832/ *Acanthaceae*	Alusho	Wild /Domestic	Leaves / Flowers	Boil/ Chutney	Used as vegetable
84.	*Ipomoea aquatica*P.Forsskal /*Convolvulaceae*	Dine thamunglai	Wild	Leaves and Shoot	Boil/Fry	Used as
85.	*Averrhoea carambola* L./*Oxalidaceae*	Khamrangthai	Domestic	Fruits	Pickles/Boil	Pickles are prepared. Sometimes in boil preparations of .
86.	*Terminalia chebula A.J.retzius/Combretaceae*	Shilikkha thai	Wild	Fruits	Raw	Raw fruits are eaten in unripe or dry condition.Used as mouth freshner.

The staple food of the Dimasas is Mai (rice). They eat rice 3 (three) to 4 (four) times a day accompanied by other side meals. They often eat Maizu (glutinous rice; so named because of the sticky nature of the rice and not in the sense of gluten-content, also known as sticky rice) as light meals.

Another item of importance in Dimasa food culture is the locally prepared alcoholic beverage. Alcohol is a must in almost every occasion, ritual and festival in the Dimasa society. Alcoholic drinks are obtained mainly from rice and following its importance, huge amount of rice cultivation is encouraged among the Dimasas. The names of the liquors vary according to the fermentation procedure, ingredients, taste etc. They are called Ju, Jumai/Judi, Juhara and Laosa on account of these slight differences from each other. Jumai is one variety that can be extracted in excess from a type of rice called 'Baireng' rice and Jumai is more in use than any other variety. But, due to its oily nature, Baireng cannot be consumed as cooked rice. In all kinds of indigenous rice beer preparation, Humao (starter cake) is an essential ingredient. For the preparation of these starter cakes, small pieces of bark of Themra (*Acacia pennata)* are used.

In Dimasa tradition of cooking, use of oil is very less. Though, nowadays the Dimasas use mustard oil and, often, sesame oil for cooking. The use of an ethnic alkaline preparation, called 'khari', is also very popular. Vegetables cooked with 'Khari' are known as 'Khari dish'. Most of the 'Mudru' (boiled food) is prepared with **(**Bottle gourd*; Lagenaria siceraria*) leaves, Khaokhuluhaba (wax gourd*; Benincasa hispida*) leaves, many species of taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), Mesheigi (*Sarcochlamys pulcherrima*) and Yaolaisa (*Sinapis arvensis*) etc. Apart from this, 'Breyangba' (fish or vegetables prepared within tender bamboo pipes), 'Guduyaba' (small fish or vegetables wrapped and smoked within banana leaves and kept under the hot ashes of mud-ovens) and 'Hayangba' (grilled fish and meat) are some of the palatable recipes of the Dimasa cuisine.

Although, nowadays, the Dimasas have taken to some of the mainstream subsistence like potato, radish and beans, wild vegetables are preferred since ancient times. And they have an interesting and unique way of classifying the food plants that is rather different from the manner of scientific classification. They mainly classify a group of plants in the same category only if they happen to depict similarity in uses. For example, Bahanda (*Ocimum basilicum)* and Bahanda gidiba (*Lippia alba*) scientifically belong to two different families. But, their use in the similar purposes of garnishing, aroma and as condiments has made them share the same category in the Dimasa aphorism. Therefore, bahanda is the local generic name for both of these scientifically different species; the former belonging to the *Lamiaceae* family while the later, to the *Verbenaceae* family. The etymological significance of use of 'gidiba' along with the term 'Bahanda' for the later is to imply its taller height. 'Hagrani' refers to wild varieties. 'Khimkhatai' is used for food with bitter tastes. Thus, Hagrani khimkhatai refers to the wild black nightshade plants and its fruits are essentially bitter in taste. Phantao khimkhatai refers to the bitter varieties of eggplant whereas; Phantao khimkhatai gidiba refers to the taller variety of bitter eggplant. Anything that grows underground as tubers (yams) is prefixed with 'Tha',eg. Thabanju yadar (*Manihot esculenta*) belongs to the family *Euphorbiaceae*; Thaphu sathai (*Dioscorea alata*), Thagdi (*D. aculeata*) and Thaphu miyung *(D. Deltoidea*) belonging to the family Dioscoreaceae. Various species of bamboo are prefixed with 'Wa', eg. Wadreng (*Melocanna buccifera*), Wayung (*Dendrocalamus hamiltoni*), Washi *(Melocalamus indicus*) etc.

Agriculture is the principal source of income. They practice shifting cultivation or Jhumming. Different varieties of paddy, different fruits, bamboos and pulses are grown in the Jhum lands. Many of the leafy vegetables and fruits are cultivated in the homestead gardens. Some plants growing in special environmental conditions are also

collected for consumption, eg. Misheigi (*Sarcochlamys pulcherima*). However, the health benefits of many of these indigenous foods have been largely unexplored and research on the nutritive value of underutilized species/local varieties deserves a higher priority in nutrition research[3]. Despite this plethora of nutritional food available right in the folds of the surrounding environment, this community continues to be in the grip of poor nutrition and health, owing to demographic, agricultural, technological, cultural, educational and infrastructure related constrains. The Dimasa children and women suffer from malnutrition, owing to the loss of knowledge over time. Women are mostly the victims of anaemia and deficiency of zinc and vitamin B12. They ascribe these ailments to the genes, which may not be the reality.

CONCLUSION

As the civilisation has stepped far away from its ethnicity and traditions to pick up the pace with the high tech world, the cultures and traditions are striving hard to survive their existence-crises. The ethnic tribes are no less affected by this. Educating oneself, getting a job and earning money are the essential goals in almost everyone's checklist. This trend, though not to blame, is consuming a disproportionately large fraction of one's time, energy and interest. This consequently drives the person much away from their roots and his basic interest to be rooted to it. Coming to the Dimasa community, it is already visible that a lot of knowledge has been lost to the lapse of time. The latest generation is encouraged to focus on their professional career as no one wants to be elbowed aside as backward. This definitely, is a beneficial concept that has dawned in their community. But, this should not completely estrange this generation from its roots. The beauty and the enormity of knowledge of their tradition, their food culture, the indigenous medicines, their riches of flora and fauna should not be lost or passed on to the wrong hands. The education of modern day can actually help them device better and effective ways to preserve their knowledge and traditions, patent their indigenous species and bring the underutilised species to light.

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