

# The Importance of Conservation of Indigenous Plant Knowledge: A Select Study of Plant Species Culturally Used by the Karbi Community

Presented by:

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# Introduction

- In India the most widely recognised and accepted traditional systems of medicines are namely Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani apart from Homeopathy or Yoga (Shakya, 2016, Chauhan,2020).
- In India, the Northeast region which is already recognised as a major hotspot of biodiversity and is inhabited by more than 180 major tribal communities (Sajem, Rout and Nath, 2008).
- The Karbi Anglong district located in Assam is home to a major ethnic community known as the Karbis. They are deeply rooted with nature and its resources which has contributed to their vast knowledge of wild and medicinal plants.

- .Usually, *Jambili Athon* which is the cultural identity and traditional symbol of the Karbis is only carved during the death ceremony, known as *Chomangkan* considered to be the most expensive festival of the Karbis (Teron, 2008).
- This festival is held to honour the forefathers and ancestors to ensure safe passage for their souls to the afterlife village known as *Chom Arong*.
- *Jambli Athon* carved only from the wood of *Wrightia arborea* (Densst.) Mabb. can be use in the death ceremony, *Chomangkan*.

- *Se-Karkli* is the most significant among them as it is only practiced by the Karbi tribe which contributes to the cultural identity and is carry out for the well being of one family or an individual.
- This religious ritual is carried out to appease the various deities or supernatural beings that the Karbis believed in such as the sky god.
- The religious ritual can only performed be by the religious men (priest) known as *Kurusar* who prepares the various items needed for the ritual, and have to recite a particular chant without a taking a break before he can move on to the other chant and continue with the ritual.

- *Hor*, the alcohol beverage of the Karbi tribe plays an integral role in their socio-cultural life as it is used in many cultural and religious ceremonies
- There are two types of *Hor* prepared in Karbi culture which are known as *Hor Alang* and *Hor Arak* specifically. *Hor Alang* is the most commonly prepared alcohol as it is utilized more by the tribe in many religious rituals and festivals than compared to *Hor Arak*.
- For religious ceremonies or festivals like Se-Karkli and Chomangkan, it is customary to store *Hor Alang* in the empty and dried shell of the bottle gourd, *Langenaria siceraria* (Mol.) Standl. The smaller size of bottle gourd called as *Bong-so* is used for this purpose.

# Results and Discussions

- Plants serves a significant role in the customs and traditions of Karbi community but a few of the plants are stated to have medicinal properties that is used for preparation of traditional medicines
- The traditional knowledge among the Karbis are passed down orally from one generation to the next generation and hence, there are no proper written records or documents to be found.
- Lack of interest as well as communication between the younger generation and older generation has led to the loss of some traditional knowledge and practices. Natural habitats being cleared for other purposes such for growing cash crops such as wheat or sugar-cane haven a toil on wild plants

# Conclusion

- The Karbi tribe have many customs and traditions that is diverse and unique to them. Therefore, there is a need to preserve them as each of them contributes towards the cultural identity of the Karbis.
- The Karbis also have a vast knowledge of plants that they utilize them in their daily life and these plants are also used as medicines.
- There is still a great scope to explore the traditions and traditional medicines practiced the Karbis and documenting them will be helpful in the long run.
- Lastly, the gathering and utilization of medicinal plants with the efforts to conserve them is very unbalanced hence there is a great need to develop new approaches and technique which can aid in their conservation.



Fig 1: The symbol of cultural identity of the Karbi tribe (a. *Jambili Athon*, b. Traditional muffer of the Karbis with the symbol, c. *Jambili Athon* symbol in modern attire as part of cultural identification)





Fig 2: Preparation and significance of each of plant species in the religious ceremony of the Karbis, *Se-Karkli* (a. *Kaipho*, b. *Loh*, c. *Bong-so*, d. *Hijung ke-ik*, e. *Tuluhi*, f. *Hak*)



Fig 3 : The process of making the traditional alcohol beverage, *Hor* (a. *Thap*, b. The powdered thap mixed in cooked rice, c. *Horlang*, d. Tools used for alcohol preparation, e. Fermented rice cooked over fire slowly to make *Hor* and e. Distilled alcohol *Hor Arak*)



Fig : A Karbi women weaving *Pekok* in the traditional loom called as *The-rang*

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**Thank you.**