

An Ethnobiological Study of the Tamang People

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Abstract

Tamangs are one of the major ethnic groups of Nepal. Ethnobiological investigation of Tamang people of Gorsyang Village Development Committee of Nuwakot district was carried out. Information was documented from structured questionnaire and interviews with local people. They were found to have rich indigenous knowledge. They use different 12 animal names as calendar. A total of 11 animal species and 44 plant species were found to be used in medicinal purpose. Viscera of *Hystrix brachyura*, pancreas of fish and flesh of *Rana tigrina* were found using in the treatment of asthma, jaundice and pneumonia. The fur of *Lepus nigricollis* is used to stop bleeding. *Acorus calamus*, *Centilla asiatica* and *Terminalia chebula* are the important medicinal plants, which they use to control throat, urine and gastric problems. The stem extract of *Tinospora cordifolia* is used in menstruation problems.

Introduction

Tamangs are one of the major Tibeto-Burmese speaking communities in Nepal. They believe that they originally came from Tibet. The entire community of Tamang is divided into several sub castes known as 'thar'. Each 'thar' has its own name like Sangden, Bomjan, Yonjan, Pakhrin, etc. Language-wise, these people are the third largest ethnic group in the kingdom, but if assessed from the angle of their being in the Tibeto-Burmese category, they would be the most populous.

In Nepal more than 61 ethnic groups are dispersed all over the countries. Tamang people account 5.5 per cent of the total population of the country (Anonymous 2000). Majority lives in the hilly regions of Nepal, adjoining sides of Kathmandu valley, the capital of Nepal. The historical and legendary account of the Tamangs show that they originally came from the Tibet. It is

said that they were horse traders. "Ta" in Tibetan means horse; "Mang" means traders (Bista 1967). They have very rich ethnobiological knowledge.

Their social, cultural, economic and religious practices are, in one way or other, linked to plants and animals. For example, in the 'Loh' (age calculation calendar), twelve different animals have been used. Each *Loh* always starts from 'Magh Suklapratipadha' and continue till a year. The animals associated with the twelve *Lohs* are: *Chi Loh* (Mouse), *Lung Loh* (Cow), *Ta Loh* (Tiger), *Yai Loh* (Goat), *Prub Loh* (Dragon), *Prul Loh* (Serpent), *Tak Loh* (Horse), *Look Loh* (Sheep), *Pray Loh* (Monkey), *Chyu Loh* (Bird), *Khi Loh* (Dog), and *Pha Loh* (Boar) (Tamang 1998).

So, within Nepal, there is remarkable ethnic and biological diversity and wealth of indigenous knowledge of plants and animals with economic value. A few ethnobotanical studies of Tamang people have been carried out (Shrestha 1988, Shrestha 1989, Manandhar 1991, Taylor *et*

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al. 1996) but record on ethnobiology is not available.

The study area lies in Gorsyang VDC of Nuwakot district (27° 48' to 28° 6' latitude and 84° 58' to 85° 30' longitude) of Bagmati zone in the hilly region of central Nepal. The VDC covers 33.03 sq.km at elevation of 900- 2738 m, where Tamange people have densely inhabited.

Materials and Methods

The research was carried out from May 1997 to Feb 1998. It was entirely based on both primary and secondary data. To obtain information, structured questionnaire was designed. Interviews were conducted with the Tamang people of the village, the Lamas (the tribal priest), local healers so as to know their ethnography as well as utilization of medicinal plants and animals. All the specimens consumed for medicinal purpose by the Tamang people of Gorsyang VDC were collected and identified with the available literature (Bangdel and Fleming 1984, Shrestha 1994, Anonymous 1994, Shrestha 1997, Polunin and Stainton 1997) and for further confirmation specimens were tallied in the Department of Forestry and Plant Research, Godawari (KATH); National History Museum, Swayambu; Botanical Department, Thapathali and Museum of Central Department of Zoology. Altogether 9 species of animals (both invertebrate and vertebrate) and 44 important medicinal plants were collected and deposited at Central Department of Zoology, Kirtipur and the Department of Forestry and Plant Research, Kathmandu.

Results and Discussion

Many people were found to lack a formal grade school education, but were highly knowledgeable about uses of local animals and plants (Tables 1 and 2). The two mammalian species *Hystrix brachyura* and *Lepus nigricollis* were recorded to have medicinal use. The viscera of *Hystrix brachyura*, fish and flesh of *Rana tigrina* were found to cure asthma, jaundice and pneumonia. The fur of *Lepus nigricollis* was used to stop bleeding. *Apis cerena* and *Apis dorsata* were found to be used in cold and cough treatment. Egg of *Vanellus Indicus* was found to cure asthma and flatulence. The flesh of *Rana tigrina* was found to cure asthma and pneumonia. Beside this, forty-two plant species were found to have medicinal use. *Acorus calamus*, *Centilla asiatica*, *Terminalia chebula* are their important medicinal plants to control throat, urine and gastric problems. The stem extract of *Tinospora cordifolia* is used in menstruations problem.

From the research it shows that Tamangs have a rich folklore and indigenous knowledge in the utilization of different plants and animals against various common diseases like asthma, pneumonia, jaundice, stomach problem, worms, minor cut, diarrhoea etc. But such folklore is passed on orally from generation to generation without keeping any written records. Therefore, the lack of written document on the plants and animals lore reveals the chances of losing the valuable tradition forever. In view of this aspect, it is necessary to preserve and properly document to keep a record of the diversified utilization of various plant and animal species.

Table 1. The recorded animal species used by Tamang people for medicinal purpose.

ANIMAL SPECIES	Species Type	Family	Tamang name	Part Used	Medicinal Use
<i>Apis cerana</i>	Invertebrate	Apidae	Sing shore	Whole insect	Cough and cold, tonic
<i>Apis dorsata</i>	Invertebrate	Apidae	Wai	Whole insect	Cough and cold, tonic
<i>Barilius bendelises</i>	Fish	Cyprinidae	Tarnga	Pancreas	To kill worms, asthma
<i>Chana gachua</i>	Fish		Hile	Pancreas	To kill worms, asthma
<i>Garra gotyla</i>	Fish	Cyprinidae	Buduna	Pancreas	To kill worms, asthma
<i>Hystris brachyura</i>	Mammals	Hystricidae	dumsi	Viscera	Asthma
<i>Lepus nigricollis ruficaudatus</i>	Mammals	Lagomorpha	Kharayo	Fur	To stop bleeding
<i>Noemacheilus beavani</i>	Fish	Cobitidae	Brudhung	Pancrease	To kill worms, asthma
<i>Rana tigrina</i>	Amphibia	Ranidae	kalang tek tek	Flesh	Asthma, pneumonia
<i>Tor tor</i>	Fish	Cyprinidae	Katle	Pancrease	To kill worms, asthma
<i>Vanellus Indicus</i>	Birds	Charadriidae	tedebuth	Egg	Asthma, flatulence

Table 2. Plants species used by Tamang people for medicinal purpose are:

PLANTS SPECIES	FAMILY	TAMANG NAME	NEPALI NAME	ENGLISH NAME	PART USED	USES
<i>Acorus calamus</i> L	Araceae	Bhojho	Bhojho	-	Stem	Cough, bronchitis
<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L) Correa	Rutaceae	Bel	Bel	Bengal quince	Fruit	Diarrhoea, dysentery, tonic
<i>Agave Americana</i> Linn	Amaryllidaceae	Ketuke	Ketuke	Century plant	Leaf extract	Diuretic, antisyphilitic
<i>Ageratum conyzoides</i> L.	Asteraceae	Pokomra	Gandhe Jhar	-	Leaf extract	Cuts and wounds
<i>Allium sativum</i> L	Liliaceae	No	Lasun	Garlic	Stem	Flatulence, skin rashes
<i>Aloe vera</i> (L) Brum F.	Liliaceae	Ghiu Kumari	Ghiu Kumari	Indian aloe	Plant extract	Burn
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i> Linn	"	Cendeth	Titepati	Mag-wort	Root and leaf	Nausea problem, intestinal worms
<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A Juss	Meliaceae	Neem	Neem	Neem tree	Leaf extract	Fever, intestinal worms
<i>Bauhinia variegata</i> L	Fabaceae	Koiralo Mendo	Koiralo	Pink bauhinia	Flower, seed	Dysentery, piles, diarrhoea,

Our Nature (2003) 1: 37-41

						worms
<i>Berberis aristata</i> DC.	Berberidaceae	Chutro	Chutro	Indian berbery	Stem	Jaundice, fever, skin disease
<i>Bergenia ciliata</i> (Ham) sternb	Saxifragaceae	Pakhanbed	Pakhanbed	-	Nagikret	
<i>Bombax ceiba</i> L	Bombacaceae	Kaga	simal	Silk cotton tree	Bark	Gum, aphrodisiac, diarrhoea, dysentery
<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L	Cannabaceae	Gaja	Gaja	-	Leaf	Pain killer, stomach ache
<i>Centella asiatica</i> (L) Urb	Apiaceae	Chortapre	Ghortapre	Water pennywort	Stem	Skin disease, diuretic, indigestion
<i>Cuminum cyminum</i> L	Apiaceae	Jera	Jera	Cumin	Seed	Stomach ache, dyspepsia, diarrhoea
<i>Curcuma langa</i> L	Zingiberaceae	Haledo	Haledo	-	Powder	Cough, bronchitis
<i>Cuscuta reflexa</i> Roxb	Cuscutaceae	Urlara	Akash beli		Tendril	Jaundice
<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i> L	Dioscoreaceae	Gitta	Gitta	Air potato	Seed	Piles, dysentery, ulcer,
<i>Eulaliopsis binata</i> (Retz) C.E. Hubbard	Poaceae	Babiyo	Babiyo	-	Root	”
<i>Ficus racemosa</i>	Moraceae	Lambrang	Dumri	-	Seed	
<i>Gamga pinnata</i> Roxb	Bursaceae	Dab dabe	Dab dabe	-	Bark	”
<i>Girardiana diversifolia</i> (Lindl) Fris.	Urticaceae	Pachher	Allo	-	Bark	
<i>Hedychium densiflorum</i> Wall	Zingiberaceae	Besar	Besar	Turmeric	Powder	
<i>Imperata cylindrical</i> (L) Beauvois	”	Siru	Siru	-	Stem	Antihelmenthic
<i>Justicia adhatoda</i> L	Acanthaceae	Ashuro	Ashuro	Malabar nut	Leaf	Medicine
<i>Lalotropis gigantea</i> (L) Dryand	Asclepiadaceae	Ank	Ank	Giant milk weed	Stem	”
<i>Litsea cubeba</i> (Lour) pers.	Lauraceae	Prumo	Sil timur	-	Seed	Cholera
<i>Litsea monopetala</i> (Roxb) Allen Ko Ster	”	Chabuth	Kutmero	-	Bark	Diarrhoea, painkiller
<i>Litsea salicifolia</i> (Roxb. ex. Nees) Hook	”	Harchut	Harchut	-		Bark
<i>Melia azedarach</i> (L)	Meliaceae	Bakaino	Bakaino	-	Seed	Fever, headache, loose bowel
<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> L	Musaceae	Moje	Kera	Banana	Leaf extract	Diarrhoea, dysentery
<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L	Labiatae	Babari	Babari	-	Seed	Gonorrhoea, diarrhoea, dysentery
<i>Plumeria accuminata</i> Air	Apocynaceae	Chuwa	Chuwa	Pagoda tree	Plant extract	”
<i>Potentilla fulgens</i> wall	Rosaceae	Ghobarchhe	Bajradanti	-	Bark	Gum problem
<i>Premna intergrifolia</i> L	Verbenaceae	Gindari	Gindari	-	Bark	”

Our Nature (2003) 1: 37-41

<i>Psidium guajava</i> Linn	Myrtaceae	Ambaru	Ambak	Guava	Bark	Diarrhoea, dysentery
<i>Schima wallichii</i> Korth	Theaceae	Chillaune	Chillaune	-	Bark	Fever
<i>Spondias pinnata</i> (L.F.) kurtz	Anacardiaceae	Chypang	Amaro	-	Seed	''
<i>Sterculia villosa</i> Roxb. ex. Smith	Sterculiaceae	Pat	Odal	Sterculia	Root	''
<i>Terminalia bellirica</i> C.B. Clarke	Combretaceae	Barro	Barro	Belleric myrobalan	Seed	Cough, bronchitis
<i>Terminalia chebula</i> Retz	''	Pangyun	Harro	Chebulic myrobalan	Seed	Cough, bronchitis
<i>Thespesia lampas</i> (cav) Dalz & Gibs	Malvaceae	Kapai	Ban Kapas	-	Root	Jaundice
<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>	Menispermaceae	Gurju	Gurjo	-	Tendril	Menstruation problem
<i>Woodfordia fruticosa</i> (L) Kurz	Lythraceae	Dhayaro	Dhayaro	-	Flower	Dysentery

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