

**An Ecocritical Reading of Bhupendra Chandra Deka's
Short Story 'Chipko'**

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Abstract :

Bhupendra Chandra Deka's short story 'Chipko' reimagines the ecological consciousness born from the 1972 Chipko Movement. It narrates the journey of a boy, Neelu, whose love for trees and memory of his grandfather's wisdom awaken in him a fierce sense of responsibility toward nature. The story portrays nature as a living organism, critiques the exploitation of the environment, and advocates for harmony between humans and the natural world. Expanding upon these themes, this paper examines Deka's portrayal of environmental responsibility, sustainability, and moral consciousness in the context of contemporary climate challenges. Through an ecocritical lens, 'Chipko' becomes both a local tale and a universal allegory of ecological ethics, reminding us that environmental survival depends on moral renewal and sustainable coexistence.

**Keywords: Climate, Chipko Movement, Ecocriticism, Nature, Short Story
The Ecological Consciousness of 'Chipko':**

Bhupendra Chandra Deka's 'Chipko' unfolds under the burning sun of a delayed monsoon- a setting that captures both the literal heat of summer and the metaphorical heat of ecological crisis. The story's title evokes the historical Chipko Movement, a landmark moment in Indian environmental activism where women physically hugged trees to prevent deforestation. Deka's narrative revisits this spirit through the experiences of two schoolboys, Papu and Neelu, situating the Chipko ethic within a modern generation facing environmental neglect.

From the start, the story bridges memory and action, philosophy and practice. It draws from a long Indian ecological tradition that sees nature not as inert matter but as sacred, living, and relational. The story's layers-its

depiction of the grandfather's wisdom, Neelu's moral awakening, and the family's eventual reconciliation- together articulate an ecohumanist vision rooted in empathy and ethical responsibility. From the first paragraph, the landscape in 'Chipko' breathes and suffers. The "air quivered like fire" and the "dusty road" appears scorched, suggesting that nature itself is reacting to human indifference. Dekka's descriptive precision personifies the environment as an organism in distress. The heat and dryness stand as symptoms of ecological imbalance, echoing the concept in ecocriticism that nature is not a static setting but an active participant in human existence.

Neelu's grandfather functions as the moral interpreter of this living world. His statement- "Cutting the trees would be like cutting the breath of this village"- frames trees as the lungs of the community. The metaphor fuses biological necessity with moral consciousness. The neem tree that "gives oxygen and shade to travelers" becomes a character of its own, embodying generosity and care. The grandfather's worldview aligns with deep ecological thought: that every organism has intrinsic value beyond its usefulness to humans. The forest, in this sense, possesses moral agency. The story's invocation of the Chipko women reinforces this view: their act of hugging trees is an embrace of the living planet. Dekka thus redefines the human-nature relationship as one of kinship rather than control. The story treats nature not as an inert background but as a living, breathing entity. The neem and krishnasura trees are given personality and spirit, protecting Neelu's family and cleansing the air around them. Such portrayal aligns with the philosophy of the Chipko Movement, where villagers, especially women, hugged trees to protect them, treating trees as companions and guardians rather than resources. Both the narrative and the movement remind us that nature has its own sacred vitality, inseparable from human existence. This perception aligns with deep ecological thought where nature possesses intrinsic value beyond human use, reminding us that the earth itself is alive.

If the story celebrates life in nature, it simultaneously exposes humanity's complicity in its suffering. The polluted road "littered with plastic and dust" and the delayed rains are consequences of environmental exploitation. The ecological crisis here is man-made, born of carelessness and greed. Papu's mention of the "frog marriage" ritual reflects humanity's

attempt to manipulate nature through symbolic gestures rather than ethical reform. Neelu's quiet critique- "What is the use if people keep cutting down trees?"- discloses the emptiness of ritual without responsibility. Exploitation, Deka implies, thrives where ritual replaces moral action. The intergenerational conflict between Neelu's father and grandfather dramatizes the moral dilemma of modern progress. The father's wish to fell trees for construction symbolizes the utilitarian mindset of modernity, while the grandfather's protest reflects ecological wisdom rooted in restraint. Their argument encapsulates the central paradox of development: the human desire for growth at the cost of environmental ruin.

Neelu's discovery of the felled krishnasura trees marks the narrative's emotional climax. The fallen trunks symbolize the severing of both ecological and familial continuity. His anguished cry- "These are my grandfather's trees!"- transforms personal grief into ecological protest. The scene recalls the original Chipko Movement's spirit: compassion transformed into resistance. Through this, Deka exposes the dehumanizing logic of exploitation, where the destruction of trees mirrors the destruction of empathy itself. The narrative strongly critiques human exploitation of natural resources. Neelu's father's decision to cut the trees for material convenience mirrors the larger global problem of deforestation and unrestrained urban expansion. The grandfather's resistance exposes how modernity often silences older wisdom rooted in ecological balance. The Chipko Movement also arose from a similar exploitation, where commercial logging threatened local forests. The story thus becomes an allegory of the human tendency to exploit rather than coexist, ultimately warning us of the spiritual and environmental costs of such greed.

After depicting conflict, Deka leads the narrative toward reconciliation. Neelu's defiance reawakens the dormant moral consciousness of his family and community. His father's realization- that his son mirrors the ecological conviction of his own father- suggests a rediscovery of harmony across generations. The family's decision to halt the cutting and plant new trees symbolizes the restoration of balance. The act of planting represents both remembrance and renewal. In that moment, "Neelu felt as if he had embraced the entire green world." The embrace becomes an emblem of restored unity between humanity and nature. From an ecocritical standpoint, this harmony

reflects the idea of ‘biophilia’ - the innate human tendency to seek connection with other living systems. Deka’s vision aligns with Gandhian environmental ethics and with the philosophy of Arne Naess, who argued that human fulfillment arises from identifying with the broader web of life. Harmony here is not sentimental but moral; it demands responsibility, sacrifice, and continuity.

The story urges us to see that true prosperity comes from harmony, not domination. Rainfall, fertility, and human health are interwoven with the survival of trees. This recalls the Chipko activists’ message that saving forests also meant saving soil, water, and climate cycles essential for rural life. Thus, the story pleads for symbiotic harmony between human beings and nature. The well-being of the family, the rhythm of rainfall, and the fertility of crops are interconnected with the presence of the ancestral trees. When humans preserve nature, nature reciprocates with sustenance and security. The narrative beautifully emphasizes that prosperity is not born from domination but from coexistence, and that true harmony emerges when human life flows in rhythm with natural cycles.

Environmental responsibility in ‘Chipko’ emerges as both a moral inheritance and a practical duty. The story’s progression- from ignorance to awareness- illustrates how ecological care must begin at the level of personal conscience before it can manifest as social change. Neelu’s transformation from passive observer to active protector marks the awakening of ecological citizenship. His defense of the trees exemplifies what ecocritic Lawrence Buell calls the “environmental imagination”- the ability to see one’s actions as ecologically consequential. Deka’s choice of a child protagonist underscores that environmental responsibility is not bound by age or authority but rooted in empathy and moral clarity. Sustainability, in the story’s moral architecture, is portrayed through continuity and regeneration. The decision to plant new trees in memory of the grandfather signifies that preservation must evolve into renewal. Sustainability is not mere conservation; it is an active process of replacing, nurturing, and maintaining balance.

Deka also critiques unsustainable human habits that disconnect people from their surroundings. The dusty, polluted street and absence of shade evoke the alienation of urban modernity. By contrast, the grandfather’s rural wisdom

and intimate knowledge of trees represent a sustainable relationship grounded in awareness and restraint. The act of planting a new tree becomes a symbolic contract between generations- a promise to maintain the ecological chain of life. The family's final decision to plant saplings marks a transition from destruction to sustainability and responsibility. Planting trees in place of the cut ones ensures continuity for future generations. The Chipko Movement similarly embodied this spirit of responsibility—villagers defended trees not only for themselves but for unborn generations. Both cases show that sustainability is not just an environmental policy but a moral duty, rooted in acts of care, sacrifice, and foresight.

Although 'Chipko' is set in a localized environment, it resonates deeply with global climate concerns. The delayed monsoon and unbearable heat mirror today's realities of unpredictable weather patterns, rising temperatures, and ecological imbalance caused by deforestation and carbon emissions. The boys' conversation about thirst and heat anticipates contemporary anxieties about water scarcity and heatwaves. The delayed monsoon is no longer mythic punishment but an environmental symptom of global warming. The story implicitly critiques the human tendency to attribute such crises to divine wrath or chance rather than to structural causes like industrialization and habitat destruction. By connecting the 1970s Chipko Movement to the present, Deka bridges historical activism and modern climate awareness. The women of Reni village fought for their "five Fs"-food, fodder, firewood, fibre, and fertilizer-demonstrating that ecological preservation is inseparable from livelihood and justice. Similarly, today's climate movements echo the same principle: human survival depends on ecological balance.

The story's imagery of fallen trees and the boy's grief prefigures the emotional toll of climate change—a sense of loss, helplessness, and ecological mourning. Scholars such as Glenn Albrecht describe this as 'solastalgia': the distress caused by environmental degradation close to one's home. Neelu's heartbreak becomes a literary expression of solastalgia- a child's encounter with ecological loss that mirrors humanity's broader grief for a wounded planet. By weaving in images of scorching heat, delayed rainfall, and desperate rituals like frog marriages, the story situates its concerns in current climate crises. These details reflect both local Assamese cultural practices and global

anxieties about climate change. Drought, ecological imbalance, and extreme weather patterns serve as a mirror of today's environmental emergencies. In doing so, the story bridges folklore, lived rural reality, and modern scientific warnings, making climate change an immediate and relatable concern.

The moral structure of 'Chipko' rests on the recognition that environmental awareness is inseparable from ethical responsibility. The story teaches that nature responds to human morality- when humans act selfishly, nature withholds its bounty; when they act with care, it returns balance and grace. Neelu's courage becomes the moral center of the narrative. By opposing the cutting of trees, he acts out of conscience rather than obedience. His moral compass, guided by his grandfather's words, demonstrates what environmental philosopher Aldo Leopold called the "land ethic"- a moral code that enlarges the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals. Deka also critiques moral complacency. The father's initial anger reflects the indifference of modern adults who see nature as property rather than kin. His transformation illustrates that moral responsibility begins with self-reflection and the courage to correct one's own mistakes. The narrative thus extends beyond environmentalism into moral philosophy. It asserts that ethical living is ecological living. The human spirit finds fulfillment not in domination but in stewardship. In contemporary times- when ecological crises are entwined with political, economic, and social injustices- the story's moral message gains renewed urgency. Perhaps the most moving aspect lies in the moral responsibility embodied by Neelu's protest. His resistance to the tree-cutters transforms him into a symbol of ecological conscience, echoing movements like Chipko where ordinary people defended forests with their own bodies. The lesson is clear: safeguarding nature is not the duty of governments alone but of every individual. Even the youngest member of society can become a moral voice for environmental justice. The story closes with a reminder that love for trees is not sentimentalism but a duty towards survival and future generations.

Conclusion:

Ecocritically, 'Chipko' aligns with what Cheryll Glotfelty defines as the study of "the relationship between literature and the physical environment." Deka's story enacts this relationship through the lived

experiences of ordinary people. The physical act of hugging or saving a tree becomes a metaphor for restoring empathy between the human and the nonhuman. By personifying nature and dramatizing its exploitation, Deka creates what Timothy Morton calls an “ecological thought”- an awareness that all beings are interconnected within a single web of existence. His narrative integrates the personal, the social, and the ecological, showing that environmental harmony begins within the human heart. Ultimately, ‘Chipko’ is both elegy and prophecy. It mourns the destruction of trees but also prophesies regeneration through compassion. The boy’s small act of defiance becomes emblematic of a larger global necessity- the need for moral courage to resist ecological ruin. Through its fusion of emotion, memory, and action, Deka’s ‘Chipko’ transcends its local setting to offer a universal lesson: the earth is a living organism whose survival depends on human responsibility. To protect nature is to protect oneself. To embrace the tree is to embrace life itself- its breath, its balance, its belonging.

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Ethnobotanical Use of Wild Plants in the Food Culture of the Mishing Tribe

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Abstract: For survival of human beings, food is the most essential item besides being an important identity of a particular community. Besides survival food also gives about the geographical location of particular community and about the various edibles, animals, poultry found there and about their food habits. Food habits depend on the availability of food stuffs, climate conditions, social and religious practices of a particular community. Same way, the food habits of the Mishing tribes of Assam give them a particular identity. The Mishing tribes are the second largest plain tribes of Assam mostly found in upper Assam, residing along the bank of river Brahmaputra. Mishing tribes are culturally rich ethnic tribe of Assam and depend mostly on nature for their livelihood. Rearing pigs, poultry and planting edible wild plants in every household is a part of customs for the Mishing people. Recently, the food habits of the Mishing tribes have undergone many changes due to modernization and religion changes but still to some extent they practice their own traditional food habits. Special food habits can be seen in different festivals and religious practices. The Mishing tribes also include various wild plants in their food habits which have medicinal values. The paper deals with the food practices of the Mishing people- the method of preparation of various food items, food items prepared in festivals, marriages and in religious practices, wild plants used as edibles and their methods of preparation.

Key words: Mishing, Wild Plants, Food Habits, Medicinal, Culture, Tradition, Rice Beer.

Introduction:

A brief history of Mishing people of Assam

The Mishings (Miri) are one of the most colourful tribes of North-East India. They are also one of the Major communities of Assam. The Mishing now residing in the riverine areas of upper Assam are originally a hill tribe inhabiting with the Abor, Miri and Mishmi hills of present-day Arunachal.

They came down to the plains in small numbers presiding the advent of Sukapha in early part of the thirteenth century. The cause of migration of the Mishings to the valleys is not known clearly. There is no recorded history, reliable accounts, supported by factual evidence analysing the cause of migration of the Mishings. However, it can be guessed that the economic reason is the main cause of migration of this peace-loving community of various sub-tribes now known as Mishings, to the plains. They occupy mainly the low-lying areas to cultivate paddy which is their staple food. Probably, inter-tribal feud was also another reason of migration of the people to the plain. Mishing people inhabited mainly the low lying, fertile and paddy growing areas of Dhemaji, Jonai, Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam and East Siang, Lower Debang Valley and Lohit District of Arunhchal Pradesh bordering Assam. The Mishings are racially one of the great Mongoloid stock. With the hill Miris they have a close affinity. But this affinity is only ethical, cultural and linguistic reminding a past of the Mishings in the hills. Now a days the Mishing are a stable, peace loving people, tradition based group of people having brotherly relations with all plain people. Mishing is now a distinct nationality closely related with Mynirngo, Pasi, Padoms and some other hill tribes of Arunachal who worship Doyi (sun) and Polo(Moo), call themselves 'Ami' or 'Tani' which mean 'man'. Ethnological, linguistic, cultural and literary studies reveal that the Mishings had a very close relations with the Adis, Padoms, Myniongs and Pasis of Arunachal Pradesh. Mishings claim to be the 'man who live in the riverine area'. Mi-suggests man and 'shing' suggests water or river. Mishing hence suggests a community of men living in the riverine areas.

Physical Feature

Various anthropologists described Mishings as- Mongoloid in physical appearance. Various scholars have described the Mishing people as yellow or yellow- brown. However, some black skinned Mishing people are seen intermixed with the yellow people. Black haired, with black or dark brown narrow eyes with specific mongoloid feature, the Mishing people are distinctive. And are generally medium featured and beautiful.

Food And Drinks Of The Mishing Tribe

Rice is the staple food of the Mishing people. Pigs and fowls are their delicacies. They cultivate all sorts of vegetable and preserve fishes for long

period, the preserved fish is known as Namsing. In certain period, there are some taboos on food. Eating meat is a taboo when a member of a family dies until purificatory ceremonies is completed.

Fishing and hunting are traditional sports of the Mishing, however with the change of time, group hunting and fishing is becoming almost extinct. But whenever there is possibility, the tribe practice group fishing in the winter and group hunting in summer. They used all sorts of weapons including firearms in group hunting. In group fishing they use many traditional fishing gears like Dibang (a five to six meters long bamboos with metal spearhead), Zurlei, Chaloni, Diorang, Porang, Si-Zamborak (A type of crossbow)

Mishing people produce ‘Apong’ a special rice beer. Apong is considered to be the most prestigious item for entertaining the guest and every family should keep some apong to entertain guests. Preparation of apong is solely the women business.

Objectives

- To identify the wild edible plants traditionally used by the Mishing tribe of Assam.
- To explore the medicinal and nutritional values associated with these wild plants.
- To highlight the role of food culture in preserving the tribe’s cultural identity and traditional knowledge.

Methodology

- The study is qualitative and descriptive in nature.
- **Data Collection:** Primary data were gathered through field visits, direct observation, and informal interviews with elders, women, and traditional healers (Mibus) of the Mishing community.
- **Secondary Data:** Additional information was collected from books, research articles, and online ethnobotanical sources.
- **Study Area:** The research focused on selected Mishing-inhabited regions of Upper Assam, particularly along the banks of the Brahmaputra River.
- **Documentation:** Local names, botanical names, edible parts and medicinal uses of wild plants were documented. Photographs were taken both from fieldwork and reliable internet sources.

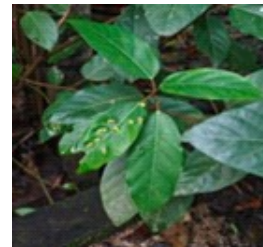
Wild Plants Used By The Mishing Tribe And Its Medicinal Benefits:

It is found that Mishing people use to eat more than twenty wild plants leaves and their various parts. Following are some if the wild plants used by the tribes. Most of the food items were prepared by the women folk and sometimes guided in preparation by the Mishing priest khowns as Mibu.

1. Fig

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Tajig	<i>Ficus racemosa</i>	Fig

In Assamese language it is known as Dimoru. Tender leaves are used for cooking with pork and chicken. Tajig adds a unique tangy and umami flavor, helps in preservation, and improves digestibility. Tajig-based dishes are often prepared during festivals like Ali-Aye-Ligang and Po:rag. The process of making Tajig is usually done by women and considered a skill passed down generations. Tajig remains an essential link between food, tradition, and identity in Mishing cuisine.



2. Duggal fibre tree

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Ombe(M)/Mesaki(As)	<i>Sarcochlamyspulcherima</i>	Duggal fibre tree

The edible leaves are cooked with pork and the leaves have many medicinal and nutritional values. These plants are found in every Mishing people's residence. In Assamese it is known as Mesaki. Ombe is valued for its taste, aroma, and nutritional benefits. It is rich in vitamins A and C, iron, calcium, and dietary fiber. For the Mishing tribe, it represents both daily nourishment and traditional identity. Ombe grows naturally in riverbanks, and its young leaves and stems are often cooked fresh. Among the Mishing tribe, Ombe dishes are a symbol of traditional knowledge and self-sufficiency. It represents the community's practice of growing and consuming organic food. Dishes made



from Ombe are served in family gatherings, community feasts, and during traditional celebrations. Ombe is rich in antioxidants, iron, calcium, and fiber. It strengthens the immune system, helps in digestion, and is considered beneficial for blood circulation. The Mishing tribe prefers preparing it in natural ways, using minimal oil and spices to preserve its nutrients.

3. Black berry night shade

Vernacular.

Botanical Name.

English Name.

Bangko(M)/ Tita Bekuri (AS) *Solonum Indium lin* Black berry night shade

In Assamese it called Tita Bekuri. The edible parts are the fruit. It is either boiled or roasted. Sometime it is mixed with roasted fish. Among the Mishing people, Bangko fruit dishes are especially popular during the monsoon and winter seasons, when the fruit is abundantly available. Its tangy flavor not only adds taste to their daily meals but is also believed to aid digestion and cool the body.



4. Pea Eggplant

Vernacular.

Botanical Name.

English Name.

Sita bango(M)/Hati Vekuri(AS) *Solonumtorvum* Pea Eggplant

It is a bushy, erect and spring perennial plant. The edible parts are the fruit which is bitter in taste. Sita Bangko fruit — a wild edible fruit known for its sweet-sour taste and rich nutritional value. The fruit is used in both raw and cooked forms and features in various traditional dishes prepared during different seasons. The Mishing people employ indigenous cooking techniques such as boiling, roasting, fermenting, and stewing to prepare dishes from Sita Bangko fruit. In Mishing households, Sita Bangko dishes are an integral part of seasonal diets. The fruit's versatility allows it to be used in both sweet and savory



preparations. During community feasts and local gatherings, roasted or boiled Sita Bangko is often served alongside traditional dishes like namsing, smoked fish, and apong (traditional rice beer). The preference for natural and minimal ingredients showcases the Mishing tribe's eco-sustainable food culture and indigenous culinary wisdom. Sita Bangko fruit is rich in vitamin C, natural acids, antioxidants, and dietary fiber. It helps improve digestion, strengthen immunity, and prevent common colds. The fruit is also believed to have cooling and detoxifying properties, making it suitable for consumption during hot and humid seasons. The Mishing people traditionally use it as a natural remedy for stomach discomfort and dehydration.

5. Wild Nongmangkha

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Kone oying (M) / Titaphul (As)	<i>Phlogacanthuscurviflorus</i>	Wild Nongmangkha

In Assamese it is known as Titaphul. A shrub with large leaf, with red or light rose flowers and capsule about an inch long. The edible parts are the tender leaves. It is cooked with pork, chicken fish. The Mishing people often gather the edible part from nearby forests or riverbanks. Besides their culinary value, these leaves are also believed to have digestive and medicinal properties, helping to cool the body and improve appetite.



6. East Indian Walp Glory Bower

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Pakkam(M)/ Nephaphu (As)	<i>Clerodendroncolebrookianum</i>	East Indian walp glory bower

It is a shrub or small tree. The edible parts are the tender leaves. It is roasted or fried with potato and pork. It is also boiled and taken with rice. Pakkam leaves, commonly consumed by the



Mishing community, are known for their high nutritional and therapeutic properties. These leaves are rich in iron, calcium, vitamins A and C, and dietary fiber, which help in improving digestion and maintaining good health. Traditional Mishing healers also believe that Pakkam leaves possess cooling and detoxifying effects, which are beneficial for treating stomach ailments, skin irritation, and mild inflammation. The regular inclusion of these leaves in their diet not only provides essential nutrients but also helps maintain body balance, especially during the hot and humid seasons. The use of Pakkam leaves thus reflects the tribe's deep understanding of food as medicine, an important aspect of their indigenous knowledge system.

7. Meliosma

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Gurban(M)/ Hingori(As)	<i>Meliosma simplicifolia</i> (Roxb.)	Meliosma

The edible part of this plant is the leaf. It is cooked with pork and fish. These plant has some medicinal values. Gurban leaves hold a special place due to their unique taste and nutritional value. In Mishing households, dishes made from Gurban leaves are highly valued for their natural taste and health benefits. The cooking techniques—boiling, roasting, and steaming—demonstrate the community's sustainable and health-conscious approach to food.

Gurban leaves are known for being rich in vitamins A and C, iron, and antioxidants. They are believed to aid digestion, improve eyesight, and detoxify the body. Traditionally, the Mishing people use these leaves to prepare light dishes that help maintain body balance during changing seasons. The use of Gurban leaves thus highlights their deep indigenous knowledge of food as both nourishment and natural medicine.



8. Worm head tree

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Dermi(M)/Dhapapatia(As)	<i>Meliosma Pinnata Roxb</i>	Worm head tree

The leaf is the edible part and it is mostly cooked with fish. In Assamese it is known as Dhapapatia. The tribe traditionally believes that green leafy vegetables like Dermi help in maintaining good health and internal balance. Dermi leaves are known for their high iron, calcium, and vitamin content. They are believed to aid digestion, improve blood circulation, and act as natural detoxifiers. Among the Mishing people, Dermi leaves are also used in traditional home remedies to relieve stomach problems and boost immunity. Their frequent inclusion in daily meals reflects the community's indigenous knowledge of health and nutrition.



9. Queensland Cherry

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
SomkongEsing(M)/Heloch(As)	<i>Antidesmebuniusspreng</i>	Queensland cherry

In the Mishing language, "SomkongEsing" refers to a type of wild edible herb commonly found near wetlands, paddy fields, and riverbanks. The edible part of the plant is the fruits and is cooked with fish and other green vegetables. The plant has soft green leaves and a mild, earthy flavor. It is valued for its medicinal and digestive properties, often used in traditional diets to maintain health and balance during seasonal changes. SomkongEsing is not only a food ingredient but also a traditional herb that supports digestion and boosts immunity. Mishing elders believe that consuming this herb during monsoon and early winter prevents stomach



ailments. Its inclusion in fish or pork dishes enhances both the taste and nutritional value.

10. Pellitary

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Marsang(M)/ Jati Malkathi	<i>Spilanthesacmellalins</i>	Pellitary

In Assamese it is known as Jati Malkathi. The edible part is the whole plant. It is boiled with chicken and taken as soup for remedy from cold and fever. It is mostly consumed by women after childbirth to help relieve post-delivery pain.



11. Indian Chestnut vine

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Nekung	<i>Polygonum assamicumgandoger</i>	Indian Chestnut vine

In Assamese it is called Nol- tenga. The taste is sour and it mostly cooked with fish pork sometime it is prepared with grained rice. The leaves are believed to possess medicinal properties that help in improving digestion, purifying blood, and maintaining overall health. They are mostly found in forest areas. They are often used in traditional remedies for stomach and liver problems.



12. Rattan cane

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Yeying Tayo(M) /Betghas(As)	<i>Calamus tenuis/ Rotang/ erecta</i>	Rattan cane

In Assamese it is known as Betghas. It is bitter in taste. The tender shoot is the edible part. It is either roasted, fried or boiled. Mostly it is use with roasted namsing (Dry fish). Yeying Tayo refers to a type of tender cane shoot widely used by the Mishing community. In the Mishing language, *Tayo* means cane shoot, while *Yeying* denotes its young and tender form. These shoots are typically



collected from forests, especially during the rainy season when they are at their most tender and suitable for consumption. In some households, Yeying Tayo is also sun-dried or fermented for long-term preservation, known as Eypo Tayo.

13. Elephant Apple

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Champa(m)/O-Tenga(As)	<i>Dilleniaindia, lin</i>	Elephant Apple

The O-tenga, or elephant apple, is a large, greenish fruit with a tough rind and soft, juicy pulp inside. It is sour in taste and used primarily to add tanginess to dishes. In Mishing households, O-tenga is used in both vegetarian and non-vegetarian preparations. The fruit is believed to aid digestion, cool the body, and provide relief from stomach problems. It is mostly boiled with fish and pork. The inner gum like substance is use as samphoo for washing hair by the women folk.



14. Colebr

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Risut-rubu (M)/ Hingjuri (As)	<i>Buettneria aspera</i>	Colebr

RisutRubu is a traditional leafy plant commonly found in Mishing villages near riverbanks and fields. The leaves are slightly bitter and aromatic, often used for their digestive and healing properties. They are rich in vitamins and minerals and are believed to cleanse the body of toxins. The edible part is the tender shoot. It is mainly cooked with fish only. The leaves help in digestion, purify the blood, and strengthen immunity.



15. Plantains

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Kopak	<i>Musa sapientum, lin</i>	Plantains

The plantain or banana plant—holds a special place. Almost every part of the plant, including its fruit, stem (shoot), and flower (blossom), is used in their cooking. The Mishing people prepare various nutritious and flavorful dishes using these parts, often combining them with fish, meat, or other natural herbs and spices. The shoot is the edible part. The shoot is chopped into small pieces and mixed with chicken while cooking. It is mainly use in ritual practices. The Mishing people use the plant as a multipurpose food source — the stem and flower are cooked, while the leaves are often used for wrapping and steaming food, giving it a natural aroma. The banana stem juice is considered a natural remedy for kidney stones and urinary problems. The banana flower is believed to boost iron levels and improve immunity, especially for women.



16. Black Galangal

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Taling(M)/Tora (As)	<i>Alpinia nigra</i>	Black Galangal

These leaves are used for various purposes. It is mainly use in preparation of purangapin which is main item of the festival ali-ai-ligang. The leaf is used as wrapper for meat or fish while roasting. The tender shoots of Taling are edible and have a slightly tangy, earthy flavor. The leaves are sometimes used to wrap fish or meat before roasting on fire or steaming. This method enhances the aroma and keeps the food moist and flavorful.



17. Spiny Coriander

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Yumrangori (M) /Maan dhonia(As)	<i>Eryngium Feotides</i>	Spiny Coriander

Yumrang Ori, or Maan Dhonia, is a wild variety of coriander found abundantly in rural and forested areas of Assam. The leaf is mostly use as spice while cooking meat or fish. The leaves resemble ordinary coriander but have a stronger aroma and slightly peppery taste. It is used as both a seasoning and a medicinal plant. Yumrang Ori is not just a flavoring herb but also a traditional medicine used to treat stomach ailments and colds.



18. Eagle fern

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Bilongoni (M,AS)	<i>Polypodium Spplin</i>	Eagle fern

The tender leaf of the plant is boiled with chicken and it is served to the new born baby's mother for the enhancement of milk. The leaves are also used while preparing apong (Rice beer). In Mishing cuisine, Bilongoni leaves are used to add tanginess to curries, especially fish-based dishes, and to make light, healthy soups. Apart from their culinary use, they are also believed to aid digestion and reduce heat in the body. Bilongoni leaves are commonly used in the summer months for their cooling and digestive properties. They are rich in vitamin C and natural acids that stimulate appetite.



19. Bamboo Shoots

Vernacular Botanical Name English Name.

Ei-Kung/Bha Gaaj *Bambusa vulgaris*

Bamboo shoots are a mainstay in Mishing cooking and are especially valued when used in fermented forms. The Mishing people's traditional eating habits and strong bond with nature are reflected in the utilisation of bamboo shoots. Like other Assamese clans, the Mishing tribe prepares and eats ekung, a type of bamboo shoot. A distinct, acidic flavour is added during the fermenting process and is frequently paired with fish or pork.



20. Fiddlehead Fern

Vernacular. Botanical Name. English Name.
Okan/Dehkia *Diplazium esculentum* Fiddlehead Fern

Dhekiya holds a special place in the Mishing household diet. It grows abundantly during the spring and monsoon seasons near paddy fields, riverbanks, and forested areas. The community prefers using freshly plucked Dhekiya as it retains its unique earthy flavor and tender texture. It is rich in iron, calcium, and antioxidants, making it both nutritious and delicious. For the Mishing tribe, food is not merely sustenance but an expression of cultural identity. Dhekiya-based dishes are often served during community feasts, marriages, and festivals. The method of preparing Dhekiya reflects their traditional knowledge of natural food and sustainable living. Dhekiya is considered beneficial for digestion, blood purification, and maintaining healthy skin. It is low in calories and rich in minerals, making it ideal for a balanced diet. The traditional cooking methods used by the Mishings help retain its nutritional quality without excessive use of oil or spices.



21. Taro

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Enge/Kachu	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Taro

Khosu, known scientifically as *Colocasia esculenta*, grows abundantly in the moist and fertile lands of Assam, especially along riverbanks and paddy fields. The plant is versatile — its leaves (Khosupaat), stems (Khosu lota), and roots (Khosu aloo) are all edible when properly cooked. The Mishing people have mastered the art of preparing Khosu in ways that neutralize its natural itchiness and enhance its earthy aroma and taste. The Mishing people use alkaline water (khardona) or lemon juice to reduce the itchiness of Khosu during cooking. Cooking in bamboo tubes or earthen pots enhances its flavor, a traditional method still practiced in some Mishing villages. Khosu-based dishes are an essential part of Mishing daily meals and festive feasts. They reflect the tribe's connection to their land and water resources. The simplicity of Khosu recipes symbolizes the Mishing people's sustainable and nature-centered food culture. Khosu is rich in carbohydrates, fiber, iron, and vitamins. It aids digestion, provides energy, and is believed to help in maintaining healthy skin and bones. The Mishing community values Khosu not just as food but as a medicinal plant used in traditional healing.



22. Indian Pennywort

<u>Vernacular.</u>	<u>Botanical Name.</u>	<u>English Name.</u>
Manimuni (M,AS)	<i>Centella asiatica</i>	Indian Pennywort

Manimuni leaves (known in English as *Centella asiatica* or Gotu Kola) hold a special place for their medicinal and nutritional properties. The leaves are believed to purify the blood, aid digestion, and improve memory. The Mishing community incorporates Manimuni in several simple, healthy, and flavorful traditional dishes. It's used to treat digestive problems, fever, and fatigue.



flavorful traditional dishes. It's used to treat digestive problems, fever, and fatigue.

These are some of the wild plants used by the Mishing Tribals, which have many medicinal values and good for health.

Changing Trends Of Food Habits Of The Mishing People.

Due to modernization and deforestation some sort of changes have come in food habits of the Mishing people. Before, the use of mustard oil was limited but present most of the edible items are cooked in mustard oil. Use of packed spices have become common. Now a days tea and coffee is served instead of Apong. Apong the rice-beer is commercialized at present which was a prestigious traditional drink. Now a days foreign liquors are also consumed in various festivals. And due to deforestation many wild plants are now hardly to be found, which has made it difficult for the Mishing people to hold grip of their traditional eating habits.

But still in Mishing villages some sorts of wild plants are found and most of the wild plants, herbs, shrub etc are planted by the Mishing people within their compound. Though modernization has taken over, the community still practice their traditional festivals, ceremonies and food habits to some extent.

Conclusion

The study reveals that the Mishing tribe possesses rich indigenous knowledge about wild edible plants and their nutritional and medicinal properties. Their traditional cooking practices are eco-friendly, healthy, and deeply connected to their natural surroundings. Despite modernization and deforestation bringing changes in lifestyle and food habits, the community continues to preserve many of its traditional food practices. By cultivating and conserving these plants within their compounds, the Mishing people not only ensure food security but also sustain their cultural and ecological heritage. However, while the Mishing food culture is resilient and efforts are being made to preserve it, it faces significant threat from the convenience and cultural influence of a globalized world. Hence certain timely measures may be undertaken for future conservation of the food culture.

- Documentation of recipes and traditional knowledge related to cultivation and preservation of food, conducting scientific and in-depth studies and documenting traditional recipes along with preparation methods is essential to create a formal record of the Mishing culinary heritage which is currently largely based on oral tradition. This will also help in inter-generational knowledge transfer.
- Market availability: Ensuring the availability of traditional food ingredients is necessary for cultural continuity of traditional cuisine. Due to commercialization of agriculture, deforestation etc. many indigenous plants needed for Mishing cuisine are not easily available. Proactive steps should be taken to establish seed banks, indigenous plant nurseries, support local markets and create linkages for Mishing farmers to sell their produce. This can help in making traditional food ingredients accessible.
- Identity preservation by prevention of conversion to different religions done by force, coercion or allurements as this has led to the abandonment of some traditional food due to new food taboos or ideologies.

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