



## TRADITIONAL LEPCHA HATS IN SIKKIM HIMALAYA

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### Abstract

The tribe Lepcha is known for the knowledge on bioresources across Sikkim Himalaya. The study is conducted to unravel the integrated knowledge embedded in the traditional hats of Lepcha. The traditional hats, Sumok Thyak Tuk and other one, Papre, are made up of *Calamus leptospadix* Griff, *Schizostachyum capitatum* (Munro) R.B Majumdar, *Maranta arundinacea* L, *Rubia cordifolia* L., *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* Nees & Arn. ex Munro and The Greater Racker tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*). The detail information of integrated knowledge found in traditional Bamboo Hats of Lepcha, the social indicator of Lepcha tribe, is presented.

**Keywords:** *Calamus leptospadix* Griff, *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii* Nees & Arn. ex Munro, *Dicrurus paradiseus*, Greater Racker tailed Drongo, Lepcha Hats, *Maranta arundinacea* L, *Schizostachyum capitatum* (Munro) R.B Majumdar, *Rubia cordifolia* L, Sikkim Himalaya.

### Introduction

Lepcha, the tribe of Sikkim Himalaya has an integrated knowledge of both flora and fauna (Pradhan *et al.*, 2021; Pradhan *et al.*, 2022). Many researchers have worked with Lepcha tribe and even used Lepcha names for naming plants (Hooker, 1857; Hooker, 1872–1897; King and Pantling, 1898). The present communication deals with one of the crafts of this tribe.

During present study, the traditional hat of Lepcha was found unique both in its craftsmanship and as bioresources uses. Although the hat is costly nowadays, yet this is popular among the tribe. The high cost may be due to the less availabilities of bioresources such as feather of ‘Greater Racker tailed Drongo’, *Calamus leptospadix* Griff and *Schizostachyum capitatum* (Munro) R.B Majumdar etc. During the study, it was found that most of *Schizostachyum capitatum* (Munro) R.B Majumdar, of Dzongu



region, flowered in 2019-2020. It means that the resources of *Schizostachyum capitatum* (Munro) R.B Majumdar shall not be available at least for twelve years unless this species regenerates. This resulted into low availability of this species in the valley for making the traditional hats and it may be one of the factors for the high cost of traditional Lepcha hat, which costs approximately twenty five thousand to thirty thousand per piece. Another reason for its high price is also connected to the availability of tailed feather of bird, 'Greater Racker tailed Drongo', which is also very significant component of the hat. In fact, the bird population of 'Greater Racker tailed Drongo' bird is also very less and seldom seen in its habitat. Further, the significant point is that the traditional Lepcha hat, 'Sumok Thyak Tuk', is only worn by a few respected and socially elevated people. Those persons preserved 'Sumok Thyak Tuk' as ancestral treasure from generation to generation so there is no such misuse of bioresources. On the other hand, the Papre, another type of traditional hat, does not use the tailed feather of bird, which is culturally accepted to wear by the common Lepcha people. Thus, it also reflected that the community is protective to the nature and the biodiversity. Also it is specially mention that there is no animal sacrifice in preparation of theses hats.

Hence, this paper presented to document the information of bioresources used in traditional hats of Lepcha for future references.

### Materials and Methods

Reconnaissance of data from the several qualitative sources performed and compared the information with the available data for understanding its utility. The field visit and interaction among the knowledgeable tribal groups conducted for qualitative and quantitative analysis in the Sikkim.

### Taxonomy Of The Plant Species Used In Preparing These Hats

*Paphiopedilum venustum* (Wall.) Pfitzer ex Stein, Orchid.-Buch: 489 (1892).

Local Name (in Sikkim): Sumok Reep (Lepcha)

Specimen examined: L1527044, Plants of Assam, Inida, University of Michigan.

Distribution : India : Sikkim : Dzongu, North Sikkim; BANGLADESH; CHINA; NEPAL.

*Canna edulis* Ker Gawl. In: Ker Gawl. In: Bot. Reg. 9: t. 775. (1824).

Local name (in Sikkim): Kafer (Lepcha)

Distribution: INDIA: Sikkim : Dzongu, North Sikkim; CHINA; NORWAY; MEXICO; CHINA; BRAZIL; MEXICO; COLOMBIA; SPAIN; INDOENSIA; USA; SPAIN; PERU.



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Specimen examined: L 1481818 National Herbarium Nederland, *Canna edulis* Ker Gawl. collected in Indonesia by Naturalis Biodiversity Center (licensed under

***Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*** Nees & Arn. ex Munro. In: Nees & Arn ex Munro. In : Trans. Linn. Soc.

Local Name (in Sikkim): Palee poo (Lepcha); Choya Bans ( Nepali)

Distribution: INDIA: Sikkim : Dzongu, North Sikkim; NEPAL; CHINA; BHUTAN; THAILAND; MYANMAR.

Specimen examined: New York Botanical Garden 00380520, 00380519

***Calamus leptospadix*** Griff. In: Griff. In: Calcutta J. Nat. Hist. 5: 49. (1845).

Local Name (in Sikkim): Ruu kup (Lepcha); Bet (Nepali)

Distribution: INDIA: Sikkim : Dzongu, North Sikkim; NEPAL; MYANMAR.

Specimen examined: K000521991 collected in Assam, India

***Rubia cordifolia*** L. In: Syst. Nat. ed. 12: 229. (1767).

Local Name (in Sikkim): Vyem (Lepcha); Majito (Nepali)

Distribution: INDIA: Sikkim : Dzongu, North Sikkim; CHINA; RUSSIAN FEDERATION; SOUTH AFRICA; TANZANIA; KENYA; PAKISTAN; KOREA.

***Schizostachyum capitatum*** (Munro) R.B Majumdar. In : S. Karthikeyan & al. In: Fl. Ind. Enum.- Monocot.: 281. (1989). London 26: 151. (1868).

Local name (in Sikkim): Payoung (Lepcha); Gopay Bans (Nepali).

Distribution: INDIA: Sikkim : Dzongu, North Sikkim; NEPAL; CHINA; BANGLADESH; VIETNAM; INDONESIA; INDIA; THAILAND; SRI LANKA; CONGO; PUERTO RICO; MYANMAR.

Specimen examined: BM000959281, collected in Myanmar by The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London.

***Maranta arundinacea*** L. In: Sp. Pl. : 2. (1753).

Local Name (in Sikkim): Tuklop (Lepcha )

Distribution: INDIA: Sikkim : Dzongu, North Sikkim; MEXICO, BRAZIL, NICARAGUA, USA, COSTA RICA, PHILIPPINES, PANAMA, NEPAL, MALAYSIA, BELGIUM.

Specimen examined: "BM000557503, *Maranta arundinacea* L. collected in Netherlands by The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London.



## Results and Discussion

Traditional Bamboo Hats of Lepcha is ‘Sumok Thyak Tuk’ (Figs 1-2). The term, Sumok, is the name of hat. The meanings of thyak is head and tuk is cover.

The traditional hat has following parts, namely, Sungdyung song, Eemik and Aasyer Figs 4-5). During the process of preparation of hat, the craftsman starts Aasyer at first, which help to make the frame of the hat. The Aasyer, also called Nong meaning inner. It is prepared like a net having hexagonal shapes. On top of the Aasyer, the dried leaves of *Maranta aurndinacea* L are placed. Locally, it is known as Tuklop in Lepcha language. Tuk means traditional Rain Shield made up of bamboo (locally called Ghum in Nepali) and lop means leaves. Other type of leaves also used which is called Kafyer. The Kafyer is scientifically known as *Canna edulis*. Both the types of leaves are useful to drain out the water efficiently. Interestingly, it was found that the traditional Lepcha hat uses stone having mica contents. Such stone is called Tungjer Long. The thin layers of such mica bearing stone are placed along with the dried leaves.

Subsequently, the hat is covered from the outer layer, Eemik, which is woven, 5.5 - 6.0 cm, by *Schizostachyum capitatum* (Munro) R.B Majumdar. This is followed by the top section of the traditional hat, Sungdyong song, that has the spider’s web. The spider’s web is divided into eight sections at the top of the hat which signifies a protection from the evils. The material used for making Sungdyong song is *Calamus leptospadix* that is properly processed and rounded to make the fine design. In accordance to the requirement of colour in the bamboo strips, *Rubia cordifolia* L. is also used.

After the complete weaving of hat, the lower end of the hat opens like the orchid, *Paphiopedilum venustum* (Wall.) Pfitzer ex Stein, which is called ‘Sumok Reep’ in Lepcha language. This orchid is a terrestrial plant having stem 2-3 cm long, lanceolate sheathing bracts and 4-7 leaves. Its inflorescence is solitary or sometimes two flowered. Flower is whitish green having pale yellow lip, tingled with reddish purple spots (Hooker, 1892). The flowering period of this plant is from February to April. Its status is rare and threatened.

During the study, the new habitat of this rare and threatened species recorded in Ruklu, Dzongu, Sikkim and the representative specimen is deposited in Sikkim State Forest Herbarium (SSFH) for taxonomic usages.

Eventually, the newly woven hat is added with the tail feather of the bird-, Greater Racket tailed Drongo (Fig 6). The noteworthy point of The Greater Racker tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) is that it is considered as the king of the birds by the Lepcha tribe. It is also known as Nubong Ong Fo in Lepcha Language. This bird is a large drongo in all black colour with a unique tail and a crest of backward –bent feathers. The outer feathered tail have central portion bare with expanded racket like vane at the tip. The



most important is that it does excellent mimic producing variety of screams, whistles and perfect imitations of a dozen species. It may be a possible reason why other birds follow this bird, Greater Racker tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*). Its other features are boldness and aggressiveness. Furthermore, the habitat of this bird is in between 1500-2000m in Sikkim Himalaya.



Fig 1: Traditional Bamboo Hat of Lepcha, 'Sumok Thyak Tuk'



Fig 2 : Aasyer in Traditional Bamboo Hat of Lepcha, 'Sumok Thyak Tuk'



Fig 3: Papre hat



Fig 4: Aasyer in Papre hat



Fig 5: Aasyer



Fig 6: Greater Racket tailed Drongo

The crest of backward –bent feather is used in the traditional hat, Sumok Thyak Tuk, to signify the royalness in earlier days and also wore by the socially elevated and respected person. Further, the use of symbols of the Sun (Sutshuk in Lepcha language) and the moon (Lavo in Lepcha Language) on the hat are also in practice however this study cannot ascertain when it was started.

On the other hand, another type of bamboo hat of Lepcha, Papre, was also found in used by the ordinary person of Lepcha community, which has no Eemik portion in hat. It means the hat without Eemik is Papre (Fig 3). The other difference is that the Papre, the Lepcha hat of ordinary people, has the spider's web having six sections at the top whereas in the other traditional hat, Sungdyung song, the spider's web has eight sections. The significance of the spider's web is to protect from the evils. The top of the hat, Papre, is made from weaving bamboo strip of *Calamus leptospadix* Griff, which is properly processed and rounded to make the fine design. In some cases, the weaving bamboo strip is also coloured by the extract of the plant, *Rubia cordifolia* L.

The socio-cultural significances of the traditional Lepcha hats, 'Sumok Thyak Tuk' and Papre are noteworthy. Historically it is known that the hat formed the headgear of the royal soldiers and also later on of Sikkim Guards during the regime of Chogyal dynasty in Sikkim. Later these hats became ceremonial in different festivals and marriages in tribal community. It is noteworthy that now it has become an identity symbol of the region also.



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## Conclusion

The study documented the uses of bioresources for preparing the traditional Lepcha hat, which is the indicator of social hierarchy in Lepcha tribe in Sikkim. It is based on the uses of the traditional hats, Sumok Thyak Tuk and Papre. However, this study is not focused on the weaving pattern and has not compared to the rest of the weaving styles of South Asian regions. These warrant further researches.

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