

Importance of local names of some useful plants in ethnobotanical study

Plants are commonly known by their local names in every part of the world. These local names play a very important role in ethnobotanical study of a specific tribe or region. Local names given to plants by indigenous people in their local dialects often reflect a broad spectrum of information on their understanding of plants. Most often, the local names are given based on some salient features, e.g. appearance, shape, size, habit, habitat, smell, taste, colour, utility, and other peculiar character, etc of the plants. These practical, meaningful, easily understandable and remember able local names are disappearing rapidly along with the culture and tradition of the tribal group of our country. Therefore, it must be recorded, preserved and documented before lost forever. In the paper, about 100 plants of Garhwal, Kumaun and Bhojpur area of Uttarakhand have been given in alphabetical order with their family followed by local names including their meaning in English along with detail reason / basis for the naming of the plants.

Plant Nomenclature Overview

- 1) Local plant names reflect human association with green surroundings.
- 2) Names aid in communication and inferring character-related details.
- 3) Plants are generally known by local names globally.
- 4) Binomial Latin names for plants are internationally accepted in scientific literature.
- 5) Linguists and anthropologists have provided examples of hierarchical plant taxonomies in aboriginal or primitive human societies.
- 6) Folk nomenclatures focus on locally observed phenomena, based on criteria that vary greatly from person to person, area to area, and culture to culture.
- 7) No formal rules for taxa recognition or rejection like scientific nomenclature rules.

- 8) Most communities have a definite system of nomenclature for forest flora.
- 9) In tribal communities, plant names convey characteristics that are common knowledge and culturally important.
- 10) Early plant names were practical and determined largely by their cultural importance.
- 11) Local names are often based on salient features such as:
 - Appearance
 - Shape

- Size
- Habit
- Habitat
- Smell
- Taste
- Color
- Utility
- Other peculiar characteristics

❖ These local names reflect a broad spectrum of information on:

- a) Local uses
- b) Ecology
- c) Physiology
- d) Anatomy
- e) Pharmacognosy
- f) Chemistry
- g) Several other aspects

- 12) A local name often describes characteristic features of the plant or plant parts in which communities are interested.
- 13) The descriptive word for a plant characteristic may differ in different languages or dialects, leading to different names for the same plant in different regions.
- 14) Knowledge about plants and many native local languages is becoming extinct.
- 15) It is urgent and important to preserve and properly document this knowledge before it is lost forever.
- 16) More than a hundred plants from different parts of Uttarakhand have been analyzed for the origin and etymology of their local names.
- 17) Some researchers have emphasized the importance and origin of the local names of plants from different regions.

For Example in India

Uttarakhand comprising of 13 districts is bounded in the northwest by Himachal Pradesh, in the North by Tibet, in the East by Nepal and in the South by Uttar Pradesh. The state covers an area of 53,485 km² with a wide elevation ranging from 210 m to 7,817 m. Uttarakhand is inhabited by tribes like Bhotia, Raji (Ban Rawat), Jaunsari, Tharu and Bhoja. The inhabitants of Uttarakhand have also developed specific terms

for naming the plants. Due to lack of any recognized language, people speak local dialects, called Garhwali, Kumauni and Bhoja in Garhwal, Kumaun and Bhojar, regions, respectively. These dialects are a combination of Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit words.

The primitive people of Uttarakhand have clear cut knowledge about the recognition of some allied species by indicating different local names. So, one can identify these allied species easily without any scientific parameters e.g. *Cassia occidentalis* Linn. is known as Bhansia Bamar, while *C. sophera* Linn. is called Bamar. *Corchus aestuans* Linn. is known as karona, while *C. olitorius* Linn. is known as Baro Karona. *Momordica charantia* Linn. is called as karela, while *M. dioica* Linn. is called as Janglee karela. *Ocimum canum* Linn. is called as Jangli Tulsi and *O. sanctum* Linn. is known as Tulsi. *Phonenix acaulis* Roxb. ex Buch.-Ham. is known as Khajuri while *P. sylvestris* Roxb. is known as Khajur. *Saccharum benghalense* Retz. is known as Munj, while *S. spontaneum* Linn. is called as Kasera. *Ziziphus mauritiana* Lamk. is known as Beri and *Z. nummularia* Wt.-Arn. is known as Jhar beri.

Though, local names are not recommended directly for scientific accounts of plants as they lack uniformity and consistency. But it may certainly be considered as a useful tool for search of new useful plants or new uses of known plants. Apart from the utility, the local names may be very useful and easy parameter for scientific identification of the taxa. They render a useful service as a means of reference by local people in a particular area. Efforts should be made to collect and preserved information on local names especially from tribal and rural areas. Once this information is lost, it may become impossible to get insight into several unknown facts about plants and their names.