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Weeds of Cachar district of Assam and their ethno-botanical uses

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SUMMARY

The present paper deals with a total of 80 species and 69 genera belonging to 34 families of weeds of Cachar district of Assam are recorded herein. Out of these 80 species, 44 ethno-medicinal plants are recorded which are used for the treatment of different diseases by the tribal community of the district *viz.*, minor cuts and wounds, diarrhea, dysentery, eye diseases/ cataract , fever, gastric and indigestion, high blood pressure, jaundice, skin diseases, stomachache, toothache, earache, vomiting, asthma , liver diseases, jaundice, menstrual disorder, piles etc Weeds are known as unwanted plants but rural and tribal communities of the district used them for treatment of different diseases, for edible purpose etc. Geographically, Cachar district of South Assam or Barak Valley of North East India is surrounded by North Cachar Hills and Khasi and Jaintia on the north, Mizoram on South, Manipur on East and Tripura state on West. The area has an altitude of 26-27m above sea level and this falls under 24.8' and 25.8'N latitude and 92.15' and 93.15' E longitude. The area with diverse habitats, including hill and some wetlands are suitable for conserving the diversity of plants. Summer seasons are for the luxuriant growth of the species and the family Asteraceae and Poaceae comprise the highest number of weed species of Dicotyledones and Monocotyledones of Angiosperms, respectively. In the present paper an attempt has been made to highlight the unique diversity of weeds and their ethno-botanical uses.

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Weeds are unwanted grasses or the plants growing where they are not desired. Since then several definitions of weeds have been suggested and a comprehensive and widely accepted one is a weed is a plant growing out of place and out of time. When such plants become constant associate with other plants they can be termed as weeds which may be annual weed - the weeds which complete their seed to seed life cycle during a crop season and then wither away at the end of the season, biennial weeds- complete their life cycle in two seasons and then wither away and perennial weeds- which persist in an ecosystem for more than two years and are equipped with potential to regroup time and again from their underground rhizome and tuber. Such weeds which are associate with aquatic plants and grow within and around water bodies of fresh water like lakes, ponds, rivers etc may be called as aquatic weeds; and those weeds which flourish with specific crop and associate with cultivated plants are termed as crop field weeds. Further, it is also commonly termed as road side weeds, land weeds, noxious weeds etc.

Growing with the crop plants, weeds cause tremendous reductions in crop yields and elevate their production costs in varied ways. Several scientists have estimated such losses in crop yields in different parts of India. A very broad-based average of these estimates shows that weeds reduced productivity of wheat by 15-30%, of rice by 30-35%, and of maize, sorghum, pulse, and oilseeds by 18-85% each. There are also frequent cases of complete crop failures due to weeds, particularly in the upland rice and vegetable crops.

Several well known weeds have been of certain economic uses since ages, particularly their medicinal use is perhaps the most ancient one in India. *Saccharum spontaneum* and species of *Typha* are used in cottage industry for making ropes and thatch material. Weeds like *Chenopodium album*, *Amaranthus viridis* and *Portulacea* sp. are good leafy vegetables. Dry shoots of *Cyperus tegedium*, *Clinogyne dichotoma* are used on large scale to make mats. Sticks of *Lantana camara*

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