

## Chapter 15

# *Eupatorium birmanicum*: A Medicinal Plant of Ritualistic Importance in the North–East Indian State of Manipur

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### ABSTRACT

*Plants have been a source of treatment and a cure to various diseases and health conditions. India has immense traditional knowledge of useful plants of medicinal importance. This knowledge has been an intrinsic part of the lifestyles of various indigenous peoples in different parts of the country and has served as the basis of discovery/designing of modern medicines. One such region rich in traditional knowledge of medicinal plants is the north-east Indian state of Manipur. Eupatorium birmanicum DC known as Langthrei (Asteraceae), which is grown in every household and has a revered position, has anti-ulcer properties, and crushed fresh juice is taken orally to treat gastro-enteritis. There is an abundance of such ethnomedicinally important plants whose improved scientific understanding will improve their value in treating chronic conditions as well as conserving the plants and their knowledge. This chapter emphasizes the importance of *E. birmanicum*, discussing its various medicinal properties.*

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## INTRODUCTION

For centuries, indigenous plants have been an integral part of food as well as medicine in Manipur. It goes without saying that conserving and recording such traditional knowledge is of utmost importance, not only from a cultural and utilitarian perspective but also to prevent cases of bio-piracy. An important way to conserve plants of importance is through ritualistic and folk traditions. Such traditions reflect the commitment of indigenous peoples towards conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources. The Meitei community of Manipur is one of the communities that have contributed in conservation of these plants by incorporating them into their religious practices and worship of nature. In fact, a systematic and elaborate tradition of folk medicine exists which is recorded as *Hidaklon* in five volumes of text. Various rituals involve offering of seven different flowers and seven different fruits as offering to the gods. Most of these plants have been found to have medicinal properties. Some of the plants are either offered to gods and ancestors as offerings, parts of the plant used as rosaries for protection against evil, used as fumigant to ward off evil spirits, etc. Though the folk use can be many a times seeped in superstitions or religious beliefs, never-the-less, these plants are also used as medicines.

There are several prominent examples. *E. birmanicum* grown in every household has anti-ulcer properties. The bark of *Erythrina variegata* Murr. (Fabaceae) is used to make rosaries for protection of the wearer and its twig is used to make a decoction that serves as liver tonic when mixed with honey. Another plant, *Cyperus rotundus* Linn. (Cyperaceae) is offered to the gods and also serves as anthelmintic to expel intestinal worms when consumed as juice. *Cedrela toona* Roxb. ex Rother (Meliaceae) is used in rituals to purify a house by dipping its twig in water and using it to sprinkle water around. Medicinally, the fresh leaf when boiled in water is used as bath water to cure poxes and other skin diseases. *Plectranthus terniflorus* (Vatke) Agnew (Lamiaceae) leaf is burnt to use as a fumigant to disinfect rooms, especially maternity rooms to protect both mother and babies from any pathogens. It is also used to cure fungal and bacterial diseases. Out of the wide range of plants known to this community; this chapter will explore the medicinal properties and uses of one of such plants used in rituals of the Meiteis, *Eupatorium birmanicum*.

*E. birmanicum* has several synonyms. Some of them are *Eupatorium allaisii*, *Eupatorium aregentum* Wallich, *Eupatorium cannabinum* subsp. *cannabinum*, *Eupatorium cannabinum* var. *cannabinum*, *Eupatorium cannabinum* var. *indivism* DC., *Eupatorium mairei*, *Eupatorium simonsii* C.B. Clarke, *Eupatorium trifidum* Vahl, *Eupatorium viscosum wallich*, *Chrona heterophylla* Dulac, etc. (The Plant List). It goes by the common English names, Burma agrimony, water hemp, hemp agrimony or hemp Eupatorium (USNPGS). It is called *Langthrei* in Manipuri.

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