

Gorkha and Other Ethnic Herbal Medicines

H. K. Pradhan

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Many valuable masterpieces dumped in innumerable basements worldwide out of neglect, damp, insects and rats could be turning worthless. Before the advent of scientific study of medicine, almost every ethnic community had its own valuable medicines. Evolution of modern medical sciences gradually overshadowed such remedies at places even to extinction. During the mid of 20th Century, it was almost the fate of our ethnic medicines practised mostly by illiterates. At such a juncture, just out of sheer curiosity, since 1959 I started collecting tips of the apparently worthless system when still a kid in school. Much later, I found that there were some educated contemporaries of mine who, too, were collecting such secrets.

Subsequently, my wife Megha Rani and sons Vivek & Vikash had the prudence to compel a lazy me to pursue my study of ethnic medicines more seriously. Consequently, when I started compiling their tips they were always there to lend me their helping hands. Dr. Pawan Chamling, Honourable Chief Minister of the State of Sikkim, India, one-day kindly called and asked why I was not publishing a book with the treasure trove of the medicinal tips gradually vanishing into oblivion and assured me his wholehearted support for the same.

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H. K. Pradhan,
Siliguri
June 19, 2004

Disclaimer

Human beings differ from one another in mind, body and soul for hereditary, racial, physical, habitual and climatic reasons. Thus, their susceptibility to different stimuli or drugs varies. All plants contain several biochemicals, which could be medicinal as well as toxic in certain situations. In this book, effort has been made to avoid all those plants, which are generally toxic though, medicinal. On the other hand, there are medicinal herbal ingredients, which have adverse side effects during particular physical state. Wherever their particular medicinal uses have been mentioned in this book, precaution for those herbs have been mentioned, side-by-side. Use of most of the plants, mentioned in this book tallies with their similar uses in Ayurveda or other alternative systems of medicine. However, everyone apparently having similar symptoms cannot be guaranteed to benefit or not to be allergic to any particular plant or its biochemical components. Of course, our ethnic community and other such communities are known to be using the formulations beneficially for ages, with certain known precautions, which have been mentioned with the use of such herbs. Under the circumstances in good faith, all formulations are expected at least not to be harmful to anyone, if not beneficial. If at all, even a slightest adverse side effect is felt at the period of administration or application of the remedies stop the use of it temporarily, wait for a day or two for confirmation and resume the medication only after making sure that the hint of contraindication was temporary or false.

Author

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Introduction

Doctors and researchers could be interested in knowing the whys and hows of a medicine while a common individual simply desires to remain healthy and to see her/his near and dear ones in a similar state. These facts inspired me to author this book. The details of over 500 different herbal remedies, several of them even from common vegetables and spices used in the kitchen or fruits, given here should help readers prepare many effective medicines for ailments, including some of those, which are as yet accepted in allopathy like leucorrhoea, various menstrual disorders, bleeding piles, infection of ear, etc., as only manageable. Some very easy and useful non-herbal tips, which give immediate relief from certain problems, also have been included for the benefit of the readers taking the total of the remedies to 512. I also found several botany students in colleges in our area and others in a university nearby who were puzzled as to how to proceed with their practical ethno botany study projects. This was my secondary inspiration. Ever since I started collecting tips of our ethnic herbal medicines 45 years ago, as a teenager in school, and later while going in for more detailed study, I did not find any book giving in details, method of preparations, doses and precautions of herbal medicines by which a common reader could prepare the medicines with full confidence.

Prior to discovery of powerful microscopes, none understood how and why natural substances like herbs healed. The discovery of microorganisms opened up doors to the understanding of diseases better. Prior to that, it may not prove very wrong to opine that without such scientific aids all brain storming in treatment of bodily disorders was limited to guesswork. However, for want of alternatives, it was good enough, because it helped humanity greatly all those ages. Our own ethnic healers knew only which herb to use and how for particular symptoms. They did not know any technical aspect of any medicine they practiced. Yet they did heal sizeable percentages of their own people in the past millennia. That may be one reason why our community did not vanish in thin air as did many other more advanced communities, even though our

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community had to live hand to mouth in the harsh cold and damp environment of the Himalayan foot hills and the sultry mosquito and fly infested **terai*, just below. The British conducted the first census of Darjeeling during the year 1891 A.D. The census report noted the Gorkhas as a prolific community. At that time they did not have allopaths, homeopaths, **ayurvedacharyas*, hakims, medical colleges, research institutes, medical specialists, etc. to educate them or attend to them, medically.

The tradition of ethnic medicines is ancient and universal. In some ethnic communities, its stock of medicinal knowledge kept on growing. Among the backward communities, the knowledge was handed down orally and preserved accordingly. Advancement of modern sciences in the West helped in probing causes of diseases and trying to find their remedies more explicitly. This advantage at the hands of researchers and practitioners of modern medicines went against and eroded the value of local medicines almost everywhere. This was so in the Indian subcontinent, too.

In the Indian sub-continent, prior to the advent of Western or modern medicines, mostly *ayurvedacharyas* attended the rulers, their courtiers, landlords and rich traders in the towns. The *ayurvedacharyas* obviously were not accessible to the common villagers, particularly the poorer ones, even in the towns, let alone in the villages. Ordinary herbalist healers, practicing ethnic medicines, attended to them. Despite the important role that those healers have played in our communities, they have remained ignored for long. Many of their medicines had not found place in Ayurveda or Unani systems. Now that the developed West is getting interested in the knowledge and secrets of the medicines in the backward hinterlands worldwide, the practitioners of ethnic medicines in the Indian sub-continent also might see the light of day if their knowledge were tapped against suitable compensation for their medicinal tips, by the medical scouts from the West after they have so far remained ignored in their own countries. I myself sent several letters and emails to Indian entrepreneurs, industries,

* Please see chapters 5 and 7 for meaning/ explanation of all terms in bold italics.

medical researchers and practitioners and government agencies for many years trying to draw their attention for conducting scientific trials, under strict scientific protocols, for either banning the use of a particular formulation known to me if found harmful or validating them for commercial exploitation if proved beneficial but none at all bothered to even acknowledge my correspondence. It may be the case outside India, too.

Every ethnic community was compelled to innovate and practice some medicines of their own, depending on the ailments plaguing the community because of the geophysical condition of the habitat, lifestyle and the plants and natural substances accessible to the people. The Indian subcontinent being an epitome of the earth's diversity, one can find varied vegetations, geophysical conditions and their consequences. Here too therefore, every ethnic community is still found practicing some remedies of their own depending on the geophysical condition of their age-old habitat and plants, animals and natural substances accessible to them. The tips of the remedies in course of time were exchanged between or permeated from one community to the other. Consequently, many of the remedies became common knowledge in various zones of the subcontinent. Ayurveda, as estimated by the Ayurvedic scholars started evolving about 6,000 years ago. I am therefore inclined to believe that it is the painstaking collection of such widespread knowledge by the roving sages who, as per late Shiv Kali Bhattacharjee, Bengal's eminent exponent of herbal medicines in the Twentieth century, were known in ancient times as 'Charaka'.

In 2 Kings, chapter 20 verse 7 of the Bible, Prophet Isaiah prescribes poultice of fig for King Hezekiah suffering from boil, which was cured on application of the formulation. This incident, as per estimates of Biblical scholars could have happened during the first millennium B.C. During the advent of the Ayurveda or the reign of King Hezekiah (716-687 B.C.), the intricacies of life sciences were definitely not understood as done in the modern scientific disciplines. Existence and composition of various biochemical involved in the medicines were like the dark side of the moon. Even now, many of their aspects continue to be in the grey area. Yet, many medicinal herbs and their parts, identified in ancient

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times possibly by primitive tribes as beneficial for specific ailments, continue to be in use and are as effective. Many of them became the basis of modern ethno botany and some of them have led to the discovery of valuable modern medicines.

According to an ancient Ayurvedic text, surprisingly, an aboriginal tribe of the southern foothills of the Eastern Himalayas called **Kiratas**, when they still followed a primitive lifestyle and lived in caves, discovered the medicinal use of **Swertia chirata** for skin ailments. Possibly, with broad, open, magnanimous and candid mind of true sages, acknowledging the contribution of the primitive aboriginal tribe, Ayurvedic pioneers of the ancient times gave the nomenclature **Kirata Tikta** to the herb. The discovery definitely could not have been based on any scientific work or logic and yet its effectiveness remains unchallenged. The ancient aboriginal tribes of the region also used the herb against malaria. This latter tip also could have its origin in the antiquity. I strongly feel that God created many nondescript and otherwise useless weeds like **Achyranthes aspera**, **Amaranthus spinosus**, **Gigantium procera**, **Mimosa pudica**, etc., growing wild on the roadsides, particularly for their medicinal use.

During the late 1970s, I read in a reputed international news magazine that a prominent multinational pharmaceutical giant was sending its medical scouts to the Amazonian forests for garnering secrets of ethnic medicines from aborigines there. The question, how the still primitive and illiterate communities discovered tips of their ethnic medicines also will remain unanswered like the mysterious discovery by the Kiratas. Whenever I tried to find the origin of our own ethnic medicines, herbal practitioners in our own ethnic community stated that according to their forefathers the secrets of the herbs were handed down to the pioneers mostly in their dreams. Also according to a Western legend, an angel showed Byzantine emperor Charlemagne the root of the **Carline thistle** in a dream as a remedy for a plague. According to Shri Rajen Baraili, a renowned shaman of Darjeeling who claims and is widely believed by the Gorkhas of the area, in particular like many of his category of shamans to have been kidnapped in his childhood in trance by a spirit, kept in his care for

two months and twenty five days and taught herbal medicines and other essentials of shamanistic practice. My younger son in search of this category of shamans respected by Hindu and animist among the Gorkhas interviewed and video graphed his narration on November 14, 2003. His first person narration on the mysterious phenomenon is furnished in chapter 'Bun-jhankri'.

Our ethnic community from the southern foothills of the Eastern Himalayas was totally dependent on its own ethnic medicines until the end of the Nineteenth Century A.D. They survived the ravages of nature for centuries with the help of their oft-tried crude medicinal tips; people in the villages still depend on them. They generally go to modern doctors in towns only after their self-made medicines or those prepared by ethnic healers fail. Under the influence of modern science, the educated elite, out of skepticism, had started abandoning those ancient remedies. However, dependence of the poor and uneducated among them, kept the tradition alive. The World Health Organisation, I understand, is trying to encourage development of such tips. Just at the closing of the Twentieth Century the National Innovation Foundation (NIF) was established in India for identifying, among others, such useful indigenous traditional knowhow and talents.

I am not a medical practitioner with any formal training in the field. Initially just out of curiosity I started collecting ethnic medicinal tips over four decades ago. During the third decade of my erratic study, as collection of more and more such tips continued I also started trying to ascertain if such tips were fraught with risky side effects. In the meantime, with some basic known precautions, I started conducting their trials, too. Most of them were successful. So far, there has been no mishap, even if some medicines proved ineffective, at times. By combining several tips, I have developed many dependable new medicines for chronic diseases like Hepatitis of various strains, Bronchial Asthma, Chronic Dry Fungal Infection of Ear, Spasmodic Dysmenorrhoea, Detoxifier for Uric acid in the body, Repellant of animal Tick and bird Mite etc. I am unable to furnish their details particularly here because already I have furnished the same to our National Innovation Foundation, hoping for its help for validation and for their patents. Most medicinal tips

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given here are common knowledge to healers or members of our own and other ethnic communities I met. I tried to verify their authenticity with the help of further healers and published works on Alternative Medicines. My experience indicates that a particular formulation cannot cure everyone with the same apparent symptoms, though; on some, it might work as a miracle. In this book, many very useful medicines had to be excluded because of toxicity of their ingredients and therefore the risks involved.

As already mentioned, the Indian subcontinent is an epitome of the earth's diversity. It has varied geophysical features and climatic conditions varying from sultry humid plains to the world's highest snowy peaks and their geophysical characteristics. It is rich in plant varieties, indigenous to import. Their roots, barks, seeds, fruits, leaves, etc. are used in making indigenous medicines. In the subcontinent, there are specialized shopkeepers, locally called *pansaris* who deal in such medicinal ingredients. Along with the spread of Chinese ethnic people worldwide, their food became available everywhere. Similarly, with the dispersal of Indians worldwide most of the Indian herbal medicinal ingredients are gradually being sold everywhere. Even if some of them are not readily available now, sooner or later they should be, because faith in herbal medicines is growing by the day.

Among herbal medicinal formulations elaborated here, many are simple yet highly effective remedies even for those disorders, which continue to baffle the allopathic system. Indian medicinal herb dealers anywhere should find no difficulty in identifying necessary herbal ingredients mentioned in the book from the given Sanskrit/ Ayurvedic besides Nepali nomenclatures along with English and botanical equivalent listed in the glossary. For the convenience of readers, efforts have been made to make each item of the formulation complete in itself, at the cost of many repetitions here and there, so that in an emergency or at normal situation too, a reader may not need to go through the whole text, over and over again for preparing a particular remedy with confidence.

At places, located a few hours drive from cities, readers could store some of the essential herbal ingredients meant for problems rampant in the particular places, use the tips given in the book just as first aid and then rush to the nearest qualified doctor for safety's sake if immediately the formulations does not show its efficacy. With basic precautions punctiliously followed, all the medicines included here are known to us to be harmless unless some individual has specific allergy for any plant. Even common vegetables like tomato, potato, beans, brinjal/ eggplant, etc., can cause allergy in some persons.

Basics of Herbal Remedy Preparation

The dictionary meanings of herbs are: (i) a plant, which is devoid of woody stem, grows annually or for two to three years, and wither away and (ii) any plant that is used as a medicine. Any nondescript plant can be under medicinal use of an ethnic community somewhere while other communities could be unaware of the virtue of the plant. Out of sheer necessity and of and curiosity, as in the past, in the future too, more and more discovery of medicinal uses of plants just empirically or by scientific investigations, cannot be ruled out. The potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) was nonexistent in the old world until the Portuguese imported it to the region. Our ethnic community may have come across the vegetable only a century and a half ago yet; it uses its tuber as a first aid medicine for minor burn injuries. In this way, each and every plant can one day be recognized as medicinal or capable of being a source of various beneficial drugs, because every part of a plant consists of a number of different biochemical. Unfortunately, by that time many of the gifts of God in the form of varied species of plants will have become extinct because of unregulated use or out of neglect and extermination for utilization of that space where the plants were growing naturally.

One or more parts like rhizomes, roots, bulbs, flowers, buds, stigmas, fruits, seeds, leaves, wood, and barks of plants are used in herbal medicines. Unless specified otherwise, they must be mature and used either fresh or dried. In both the cases, some basic precautions or procedures need to be followed. Ayurvedic texts even specify minute details of diurnal or seasonal time for picking herbs for medicinal purposes but our ethnic healers were not so specific on that point. As for us, we pick the wild ones in particular mostly when they are mature and their seeds start falling, so that the plant is replaced by new growth, naturally. Commercial collectors, as I found out, are not very concerned in this respect.

Some Precautions to be kept in mind regarding herbal medicine preparations:

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1. Make sure that the ingredients are pure, without foreign materials, genuine and not substitutes, unless the substitute is known to be of the same use even if less effective.
2. Remove all impurities and wash or brush away dirt and then dry the item properly if it is to be stored for future use.
3. If leaves need to be preserved, first examine them for presence of any insect eggs or larvae on the underside of each leaf. Discard the contaminated ones, wash the good ones and hang them, if the branches or stalks are intact, in a windy place for draining out excess moisture. After excess moisture has been removed, dry in the sun to crispness. Over exposure to sun causes loss of the active principals. The crisp leaves can immediately be crumpled and stored conveniently in glass containers.
4. Certain items like, *Berberis aristata*, *Berberis asiatica*, *Abroma augusta** wood, bark and root has biochemical principal constituents easily soluble in water. Therefore, they must not be washed as far as possible. A toothbrush can be used for cleaning the outer skin.
5. Glass containers are ideal for storing herbs. If plastic containers are used, make sure that they are food grade. Certain items like *Acorus calamus*, *Petalium murex* etc stored in a plastic container, in course of time, I found soften the container walls and even distort the shape of the container. This can make the contents vulnerable to vermin and insect attack.
6. Any herbal ingredient in the form of a powder must not be preserved for over a year, as far as possible. Such items lose their potency with time.
7. Any herbal ingredient could contain inherent microorganisms, which on long storage can develop into tiny insect. For protection against such pests, addition of *Acorus calamus* rhizome, neem leaves, etc. or their powder in the proportion of 20:1 is recommended.

* For meaning of all words in the book in italics consult chapters 5 or 7.

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8. For frying any herbal ingredient in oil or fat heat the oil/fat until it starts fuming, then remove it from the fire and allow it to cool a bit. Add the ingredient into the warm oil and again start heating slowly so that the oil does not spurt and cause burn injury or loss of the medicinal items. Keep stirring the ingredients so that it does not char or remain half-cooked or uncooked inside.

9. Big pieces of ingredients need to be first broken in to smaller pieces before grinding them in a domestic grinder. The husk and coarse particles can be removed by sieving. For preparing juice out of the ingredients by boiling, start with water, four times the required quantity of juice, and boil until the volume of the mixture reduces to $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the original volume. While preparing water extract, first take boiling water in a tumbler and allow the water to cool just a bit so that the ingredient added to the boiling water for preparation of extract is not cooked. Add the ingredient in to the hot water, keep the tumbler covered for 10 to 12 hours, unless specified otherwise, and decant the extract so that the residue is left at the bottom of the first tumbler and only the extract is drained out in to a second tumbler for its use. The ingredient, which dissolves or part of which, like its juice, is soluble in water, need to be cleaned by dry method like brushing or wiping with a piece of cloth. Before rubbing any root, bark, fruit or seed on rough flat stone surface or on a *chanauto* with water for preparation of paste, both the roots, bark, fruit or seed, etc. and the stone surface must be properly washed. After the requisite quantity of paste is prepared, ensure that before storing the remaining rinsed and rubbed piece is properly dried for protection against fungus.

Bun-Jhankri

Gorkhas (English dictionaries mention them as Gurkhas or Goorkhas) are mixture of semi-Aryan and Mongoloid communities, living for centuries in the foothills and adjoining *terai* of the Eastern Himalayas, mainly Nepal. The 20th century introduced them to modern medicines in the urbanized pockets. In rural areas, however, until the middle of the century, they remained wholly dependent on their own ethnic medicines and shamans, prevalent since time immemorial. The medicines they used being either herbal or prepared from other natural substances. In earlier times, it was mostly the shamans who prepared the medicines. Gradually, even the common people started learning the tips and started preparing them for their family or their neighbours. In this way, without being institutionalised or being formally recorded or treated, various such medicinal tips became oral heritage of individuals and their families, while those, which were widely known, became common knowledge of almost every one in the ethnic community who cared to remember them. Those among them who collected more and more such tips or started practicing the knowledge as a profession turned in to herbalist healers like the late Shri Pakhrin Chyangba and his descendants mentioned in the following chapter 'Ethnic Medicines'. However, there are many medicines, which continue to be the secret preserve of the shamans who refuse to disclose their tips even to the members of their own family on the plea that their disclosure would render the medicines ineffective, or for any other reason best known to them.

Prior to the advent of the Shah rulers about two and a half century ago in Nepal, aborigines of the region were mostly animists, Hinayana Buddhists or Lamaists. Under the influence of the Hindu rulers, gradually the aborigines absorbed Hindu rituals, simultaneously following their own shamans. Different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups have different types of shamans distinguished by their different nomenclatures like *bijuwa*, *bumthing*, *bhuiphutta jhankri*, *dhami*, *mata*, *phedangma*, etc. Normally a *bijuwa*, *dhami* and a *jhankri* are male and only very rarely a female. They are

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initiated in to the profession or fraternity by a practicing *jhankri* or *bijuwa*. A *mata*, which literally means mother, can mostly be a female. People believe the spirit of Goddess Durga to have descended on their body or them to be under the spell of the Goddess. When this happens, a girl involuntarily goes in to a trance, indicated by severe tremor of their entire body accompanied by involuntary murmuring of mantras or prophecies. Villagers start flocking to her for alleviation of their problems and diseases by the spirit. This generally happens to girls mostly after puberty. After repeated trances, parents of the girl request a shaman to take her as his/her protégée and impart to her rudiments of shaman rituals. This is mainly required under the belief that without a guru, the medium, while in trance, could go berserk in its rituals. During the initiation ritual, some times a guru finds a protégée/protégé to be under the spell of an evil spirit and therefore exhibiting pseudo signs of shamanism. In such a situation, highly accomplished and powerful shamans are needed to drive away the evil spirits. The reputed shaman in an elaborate ritual liberates the prospective *mata* or a male shaman from the spell of the evil spirit and normally discipleship is denied to such an individual.

The shamans or such mediums among the Gorkhas annually perform appeasement ritual to their guardian spirit, believed to be the *tantric* manifestation of Shiva. This ritual is called '*guru puja*'. It is performed during the full moon of the month of '*Bhadau*' in the Nepali calendar, which falls during the months of August-September. On that day, all such shamans, in their peculiar ceremonial dresses with flight feathers on the head, like Red Indian warriors, converge at different chosen spots, identified in the past to be holy and seat of the spirit of Shiva. They go dancing ritually to the beat of their individual drums or gongs.

In the ancient times, prior to the advent of any other ethnic community, if at all or later the British and the establishment of Darjeeling town by the latter, the masters among shamans came from hamlets far and wide and congregated at the height of *Mahakal kosom* (hilltop of *tantrik* Shiva) in the present day Darjeeling town, for the annual ritual worship of their spiritual guru. Those shamans, belonging to the community of Kiratas, were said

to trek for days at an end, through dense forests, along with their protégés. Their guardian spirit being Shiva also called Pashupatinath, meaning master of animals, they were believed, during such a trek, to be fully protected from wild animals, insects and snakes of the dense pristine forests on the way. On the whole, it must have appeared like fairy tale annual carnival of shamans in the tranquil solitude of the hilltop covered with *Alnus Nepalensis*, Birch, Hemlock, Magnolia, Oak, Rhododendron and other varieties of pine trees. After the British rulers took charge of the area, the shamans and their remedies gradually got overshadowed and allopaths and modern medicines relegated the shamans and their carnival to the background. Consequently, they became rare by the day. Strangely nothing about the shamans and their colorful and noisy annual ritual in otherwise tranquil forested hilltop obviously difficult to miss by observant British colonizers is found recorded. Ofcourse the Mall Road planned by the colonizers and still in existence encircling the hilltop was out of bounds for the natives except for the upkeep of the road and why this ban was selectively not put in black and white is understandable. But no mention by the British chroniclers that Kiratas were annually frequenting the hilltop for the ritual even if they were not living permanently anywhere nearby prior to the annexation of the Darjeeling hills by Prithwi Narain Shah, or the British is intriguing because ancient Hindu 'sastras' did not miss mentioning the Kiratas as living in the Himalayan foothills since antiquity. Why also no historian ever noticed this anomaly, unless deliberate on dictate of the rulers for any administrative or political necessity adds to the mystery further.

The most powerful and mysterious among the shamans are '*bun-jhankri ko chelas*' which literally means disciples of a *bun-jhankri*. They also are known as '*bhuipputta jhankris*'. '*Bun*' in Sanskrit or in any language like Nepali, derived from Sanskrit, means jungle/forest. In the opinion of their disciples or protégés, a *bun-jhankri* is a powerful and helpful, benign spirit inhabiting pristine jungles. According to their disciples a *bun-jhankri*, though only a spirit appears to them as a dwarf measuring about 1 meter tall. The term '*Bhuipputta*' means one who has mastered/acquired a skill or knowledge without any earthly teacher and a '*jhankri*

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means a shaman. Therefore, a *bun-jhankri* is a spirit that initiates a *bhuiputta jhankri*. With time, this category of shamans is becoming scarce. *Bun-jhankris* are said to be deserting their habitats because of denudation and contamination or pollution of the pristine patches of deep forests by human intrusion and presence. By the middle of the 21st century they might not be found anywhere, those believing in their existence lament.

In the Indian subcontinent, traditional knowledge or skill was and continues to be handed down by a teacher, called a guru, to disciples or apprentices called *chelas* or *shisyas*, in most cases individually. This has been the system also for training of shamans, including initiation of the *Bhuiputta jhankris* by the *bun-jhankri*. One has no option to volunteer to be a *bhuiputta jhankri*. Instead, he or she is chosen and individually kidnapped by *bun-jhankri* to its ethereal abode and initiated in to a powerful class of shaman. In this regard, the following narration on November 14, 2003 of a renowned *bhuiputta jhankri* of Darjeeling is expected to explain the mysterious phenomena of *bun-jhankri* and *bhuiputta jhankri* more succinctly.

“I was six years old. One morning when I was playing as usual at Maney Danra, I was possibly put under a spell by my guru and kidnapped because I did not resist when he lifted me up and carried me along. He took me up far away over rocky terrain. Later, I was found playing nonchalantly at the same spot at the same time of day, after 2 calendar months and 26 days. Every one at home and my neighbourhood was astonished to find me there, unchanged, despite remaining untraceable all those days. At that time, to my senses, my alleged 2 months and 25 days of absence from my usual routine, parents, other relatives, friends, teachers, home, neighbourhood, classroom, school, and other habitat, was almost untrue. I was also aware of my having been taken by him as if in a trance, our journey from the spot to the ethereal abode of my guru, his presence all along with me. Simultaneously, I had been living my virtual usual life of a school going child at home, school and neighbourhood. As I grew, later I could derive a conclusion and perceive that perhaps during that period, I could have been living only a virtual illusory existence of my normal childhood. I felt I was

living my normal life at home though I was away from it all the while. Inexplicably, during that time, I was also aware of my presence with my guru in his ethereal temple like abode below the depth of the Teesta River, brightly illuminated by hosts of flickering bright flames.

On my return home, I found out that my parents, along with other people from my village, had searched for me for many days after I went missing. Ultimately, they had concluded that I had strayed in to the stream and had drowned and that my dead body had been swept downstream beyond recovery. Therefore as per our religious custom, in absence of my corpse, an effigy of my six-year-old body was contrived with a banana tree trunk as my dead body and last religious rites and burial completed just a day before my homecoming. On the day of my return, oblivious of my 2 calendar months and 25 days' absence just out of trance, I was found playing at the very spot at Maney Danra, at the very hour of day, I had been kidnapped. Possibly my guru had left me back at the very spot and moment of day that I had been picked up from.

During my stay with my guru, I had no sense of passing time or the feeling of day or night. I was being initiated in to shaman practices without any strain whatsoever; since I felt I was at home, among my parents and friends, all the while. Indeed, it is very difficult to make anyone understand or make one perceive what I experienced during the period of my ethereal existence.

My guru is a short ape like man about a meter tall. Peculiarly, his feet are in opposite direction, i.e., the toes face backwards and the heels face front. He has very long and bushy hair. His face is more reddish compared to normal humans among us. I have been instructed to recall his physical being intently whenever I needed his help and instantly he will be there for my help, he has assured. This instruction comes in handy whenever I am in a dilemma over any difficult ritualistic situation in solving problems, medical or those related to spirits, both evil and benign of my devotees or in dealing with evil spirits confronting me in performance of my duty as a shaman. In this way, I call him for his

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guidance. He appears instantly and vividly; however, he remains invisible to others present at the spot.

In ordinary situations, particularly to a child of six my guru must look very much hideous. Yet during my very first encounter when I saw him at Maney Danra, he must already have caste spell on me therefore instead of trying to flee when he beckoned I simply went to him as if he was a familiar person. He took me uphill through thickets and difficult rocky terrains with total ease. Suddenly, I found that I was going with him in to the depth of a river. Later I could perceive that we had possibly gone into the depth of river Teesta from just below one end of the Anderson Bridge. You must have seen part of the bridge devastated beyond repair by the deluge of October 1968. It was indeed an unearthly experience even to a child that was I then because my whole body and my dress were very dry instead of being drenched fully by water as we submerged into the depth of the torrential river before all on a sudden emerging at his brightly lit abode. I can recall it vividly: it was like an ethereal temple with innumerable bright and flickering flames illuminating it.

My guru taught me by constantly whispering *mantras* in my ears. He gave me earthworms, pieces of iron, pebbles, sand and insects to eat but I felt and consumed them as if they were normal food given to me as usual at home by my mother. He used to proffer me the above kinds of food, which as instructed I had to accept on the reverse side of hand by turning the palm and eat the same.

His wife was far taller than he was, roughly over one and a half meters tall. Her breasts were elongated very much and hanging when not kept folded over her shoulders. Whenever his wife entered the chamber, he would hurriedly hide me in his long bushy hair. I was told that she would devour me if she found, me.

My stay inside the chamber was one of uninterrupted entity of time, the length or passing of which I could not perceive at any time there. I do not remember going to sleep. My guru chanted 108 *mantras* in my ear each day to be retained in memory. At times he ordered me to look at my palm on which I could see different types

of herbs at different times, all of which I was familiar with and could thus identify. He would then chant in my ear the use of the herb as a medicine for various bodily disorders.

At the fag end of my initiation, he put bright flames in to my mouth 108 times, as a mark of completion of my discipleship/training and vows that I would not disclose certain of his secrets to any one, would not take his name in vain and would maintain a clean and ethical life. I was to avoid mutton, garlic, stinging nettle, wine prepared from millet, stale food including water boiled the previous night, etc. He assured me that if whenever I were unable to help any of my followers out of any disease, particularly caused by evil spirits, he would come to my rescue if I called him by intently trying to recall in my mind his physical being.

On any day, after starting my usual worship or shamanistic rituals, I have been forbidden to leave my seat before completing the treatment or worship session of the entire day, even if it stretches to 24 hours or more at a time. On Tuesdays and Saturdays, I perform my shamanistic rituals in presence of my followers who come from far and wide. During those days, I only drink tea, that too without milk. I do not know how many liters of tea I end up drinking by the time I call it a day, yet, I do not need to leave my seat even once because, as assured by my guru, those sitting nearest me, whoever it might be, have to go to urinate on my behalf so that my rituals go on uninterrupted.

It is difficult for me to explain to a normal human being, the ethereal experiences I have undergone at the hands of my guru, and even more difficult it should be for them to perceive or understand the duality of space at one and the same point of time in an illusory ambience, then. It is equally difficult for them to understand that my guru is a spirit, capable of changing forms in to various forms of animals, birds, insects, trees or any inanimate object like rocks. His habitats are the pristine patches of jungles or inaccessible rocks or caves. Since all of those spots are being encroached upon and intruded by the visits of sinful and degenerated humans, soon the spirits may become extinct altogether from the humanly perceivable three-dimensional ambience.