

## Plants used by Kanuels in Designing and Weaving Kangries for Earning Livelihood in Anantnag District of Kashmir Himalaya

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### ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted in the Achabal town and the Seer village of Anantnag district to about the various plants used by Kanuels (craft weaver) in weaving Kangries to strengthen their socio-economic status and also to know the willingness of the inhabitants for doing this job. A total of three plant species *Parrotiopsis jacquemonitana*, *Indigofera tinctoria* and *Salix* sp. belonging to families Hamamelidaceae, Fabaceae and Saliaceae respectively are commonly used by Kanuels to strengthen their socio-economic status. It was revealed that due to comparatively drier winters and lesser snowfall during the last few years had adversely affected the market of kangries. Moreover, the plant species used in fabricating Kangries were found depleting rapidly due to habitat fragmentation, anthropogenic pressure and climate change, due to which the people associated with this profession seem to have become compelled to leave this ancestral craft. The younger generations also did not appear much interested in doing this work as the market of Kangries had declined badly due to climate change and modernization. The forest department as well as the Kanuels should therefore make efforts to conserve these precious plant species and also to encourage the younger generation in order to conserve this traditional knowledge.

**Keywords:** Plants, Kanuels, Anantnag, Kashmir Himalaya

### INTRODUCTION

The Indian Himalayan region spreads over 10 states, covering 95 districts and constitutes about 16.2% of India's total geographical area<sup>1</sup>. Studies suggest that there exist about 816 tree species, 675 edibles and nearly 1742 species of medicinal value in the Indian Himalayan region<sup>2</sup>. The plant diversity is used for several purposes, i.e. food, fodder, fuel, medicine, spices, dyes, religious, purposes and timber, etc<sup>3</sup>. The local indigenous communities manufacture and sell products, prepared from these plant species, on the basis of their traditional knowledge, to fulfill their basic needs<sup>4</sup>.

Kashmir valley is also rich in forests and people inhabiting the valley are dependent on forests for their livelihoods. Kangries are used to kill the chill during the severe winters in Kashmir. The Kangri designers and weavers are called Kanuels. A Kanger is also known as Kangri (traditional Fire –pot)<sup>5</sup>. This is also regard as work of art<sup>6</sup>. It is made up of two parts. The outer part is an encasement of wicker, inside there is an earthen bowl –shaped pot called Kondul. The Kangri is filled with tsini (charcoal)<sup>7</sup>. The Kashmiris normally kept it inside pheran (over coat type garment)<sup>8</sup>. The traditional fire pot is an effective and economical heating arrangement in the modern era which helps to keep people warm and comfortable during the harsh winters without being affected by electricity failure and load shedding. Regular use of kangri however causes specific skin cancer also know kangri cancer<sup>9</sup>.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

District Anantnag, is one of the 10 districts of Kashmir. It is located at 75<sup>0</sup> 09' E longitudes and 33<sup>0</sup>.44' N latitudes with an altitude of 1565m. The district is situated in Southern Kashmir and has an area of 39842<sup>2</sup> kms. Anantnag District possesses all the typical characteristics of the climate of Kashmir valley as a whole. The year stands divided into four seasons, winter (December- February), spring

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(March-August), summer (June– August) and autumn (September- November). The winter season of Kashmir is very cold and temperatures may even go below 0<sup>0</sup>c with precipitation being received in the form of snow.

The present study was conducted in the Achabal town and the Seer village of Anantnag district. Fresh data were collected by personally interviewing senior Kunels in the month of December 2015 and March 2016. Prior to the interviews an unstructured questionnaire was prepared. Specimens of plants used by kunels were collected and were identified by consulting documents and professional taxonomist of GBPIHED kosi – Katarmal, Almora Uttarakhand. Once the complete information was collected, the report was compiled after consulting the related literature.



**Figures.** A. Kangri (fire-pot), B. Kanuel (who designs and weaves kangri), C. *Salix sp.* locally known as Veer, D. Twigs of *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana* locally known as posh kauni and E. Twigs of *Indigofera tinctoria* locally known as kecch kauni.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The designing and weaving of kangries is one of the popular techniques practiced by Kanuels. The present study reveals that the plants used by Kanuels for weaving Kangris are *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana*, *Indigofera tinctoria* and *Salix sp.* belonging to the families Hamamelidaceae, Fabaceae and Saliaceae respectively. Kunels first collect twigs locally known as kauni from the deciduous shrubs, (*Paratiopsis jacquomonitana*, *Indigofera tinctoria* and *Salix sp.*). These twigs then scraped, peeled, soaked and dried, are finally woven to design and fabricate the traditional Kashmiri Kangries which are sold in the market. The Kangries made up of twigs of *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana* are locally known as posh kauni are the most preferred in the Kashmir valley. This species is mainly confined to the coniferous forests and is locally known as wan, where as *Indigofera tinctoria* occurs in both forests and dry lands and is locally known as Daar. 10-12 years earlier the seasonal income of each family associated with this profession was approximately Rs. 60,000/- per season, but comparatively drier winters and lesser snowfall during the last few years has resulted in the decline of the market of Kangries,. The Kunels also told that the availability of cheap electric appliances has also adversely affected the market of Kangries. However, the Kanuels were also found to be facing difficulties in collecting these species from the jungles, as (according to Kunels) these species were decreasing fast and faced the threat of extinction. The reasons why these species face extinction are overpopulation, habitat degradation and anthropogenic pressure. More than 16% households associated with this profession have now left this traditional work due to the drastic decline of these plant species in their respective habitats as also the reduction in the sale of Kangries. Some Kunels also said that they were compelled to leave this traditional job considering the fact that if these species continued to decline at the same rate, these were bound to face extinction. A few experienced Kunels also reported that the forest department was not paying proper attention towards the protection of these invaluable species. The Kanuels also reported that 10-20 years earlier Kangries

were used for at least six months due to extremely cold weather in the winters, but the climate change that has occurred during the past 4 to 5 years has resulted in the reduction of the sale of Kangries, According to the Kanuels their wards are no more interested in this profession due to the decline in the market demand of kangries as also modernization which has resulted in the boom of cheap electrical appliances in the market.

## CONCLUSION

Kanuels use various plant species especially *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana*, *Indigofera tinctoria* and *Salix sp.* for weaving Kangries to strengthen their socio-economic status. It was revealed that drier winters and lesser snowfall has resulted in the decline of the market of kangries and hence the economy of the Kanuels. It is, therefore, necessary to take steps to mitigate the climate change problem. It was also revealed that the plant species used in fabricating Kangries were depleting fast due to habitat fragmentation and anthropogenic pressure. Although these precious plant species were facing the threat of extinction the forest department was not implementing any measures for their conservation. In order to protect these species from extinction the forest department as well as the Kanuels should makes efforts for their conservation. Furthermore, the younger generations do not seem to take any interest in doing this work, which may be due modernization. Therefore, it is required to motivate the younger generation to conserve their valuable indigenous knowledge through the implementation of appropriate strategies.

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