



# Healing Himalayan Herbs

Villagers living close to the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) have been collecting medicinal plants from the Park for as long as anyone can remember. A glimpse of herb collecting history of the area is found in the Anderson Forest Settlement Report (1886), which provides an exhaustive list of the forests/ pastures from where villagers could dig out medicinal plants for their bonafide use.

Elderly people from the nearby villages still talk about the discipline and procedures that they used to observe during collection of medicinal plants. They would wait until *Bis Bhadon*, a day usually falling in September, before extracting any herbs as it was believed that the herbs developed full potency by that time. On this day they would offer prayers to the local deities and bathe in sacred ponds before setting out for herb collection. They would always leave a part of the root behind so that the plant would continue to grow and could be harvested again the next season. With increase in commercialization, all these traditional practices of herb collection have now become a thing of past.

The GHNP management recognized the dependence of rural poor, especially women, upon the Park resources and started organizing them with the objectives to help them develop alternative sources of income that would reduce their dependency on GHNP resources.

During 1999-2000, ten nurseries of medicinal plants were established where high-value species such as *Picrorhiza kurroa* (Karu), *Aconitum heterophyllum* (Patish), *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* (Hathpanja) and *Podophyllum hexandrum* (Bankakri) are being raised. Seedlings from these nurseries are being provided to the organized women groups for planting in the allocated forest areas for reaping the harvest at appropriate time.

The learning at the Park is that in order to contribute genuinely to biological diversity conservation, there is a need to first resolve the socio-economic issues of the local people. By helping local people to earn livelihoods based on sustainable management of natural resources, the villagers are provided with economic incentives to conserve the environment. Income generation through sustainable production of medicinal plants is one such example that the Park management is actively promoting.



GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK

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**Bankakri**  
*Podophyllum hexandrum*  
The rhizomes are used as purgative and liver stimulant. Fruit is locally used in cough.

**Dhoop**  
*Jurinea macrocephala*  
Root is aromatic and is a source of *Dhoop*. Root decoction is also used as a heart tonic.

**Himalayan Blue Poppy**  
*Meconopsis aculeata*  
The text matter awaited

**Karu**  
*Picrorhiza kurroa*  
Its bitter roots are used as liver protectant, diuretic, stomachic and blood purifier.

**Nihani**  
*Valeriana jatamansi*  
The aromatic roots are used in gastric problems and as a sedative and aphrodisiac.

**Hathpanja**  
*Dactylorhiza hatagirea*  
Tubers used as nervine tonic and as aphrodisiac.

**Patish**  
*Aconitum heterophyllum*  
The root is used in digestive disorders and as febrifuge, tonic and aphrodisiac