

Bauhinia Blossom Festival in Laisong Village, Assam: a community-driven celebration for biodiversity and sustainable living

Laisong is one of the oldest villages in the (erstwhile N.C. Hills), now Dima Hasao District of Assam, bordering Nagaland, and Manipur in northeastern India. The village, inhabited by the Zeme Naga tribe since its inception, is situated 60 km from the district headquarters, Haflong.

Laisong's residents are deeply connected to their traditions and customs. During the rainy season, communication is often disrupted as landslides block or wash away motor roads. Despite these challenges, Laisong is rich in flora and fauna. *Bauhinia variegata*, in particular, holds cultural significance and has been celebrated annually since 2021 as the Bauhinia Blossom Festival.

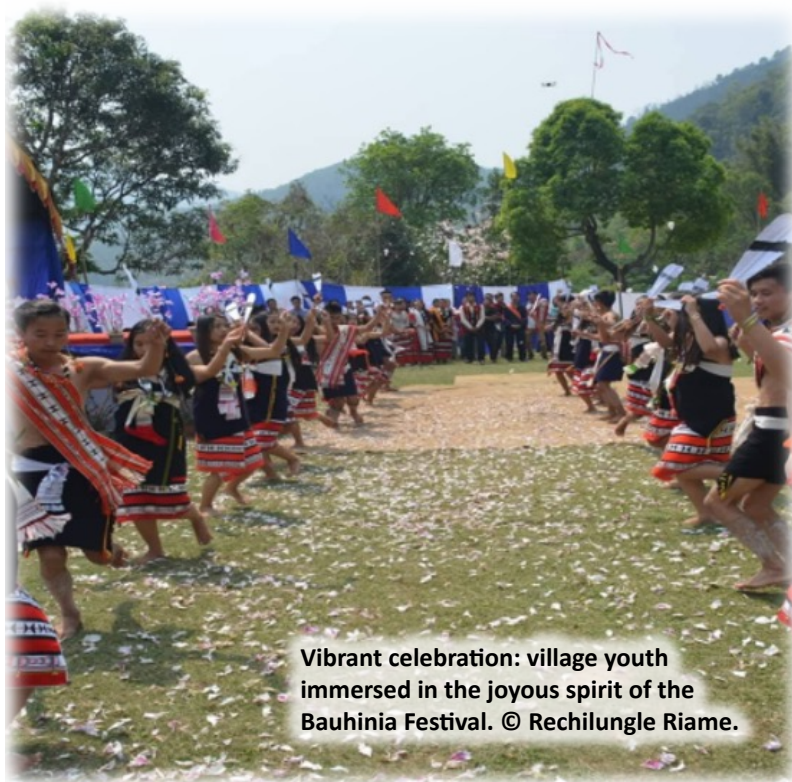
Traditionally, villagers believed that where Bauhinia plants thrive, both humans and animals can survive. This belief guided settlement choices in ancient times. The Bauhinia flower is also a symbol of peace and optimism, bringing joy during the driest season with its vibrant blooms. The flowers are used as vegetables during community fishing events, sometimes offered as a substitute when fish are scarce, turning disappointment into a shared culinary experience.

Currently, the festival showcases the village's floriculture, the medicinal and ecological significance of Bauhinia, and aims to promote Laisong as a tourist destination—a “village of Bauhinia,” or a “garden of peace,” where visitors can experience the joy of nature.

There is a lack of documented community-led rural ecological models in northeastern India that integrate cultural values with sustainability. While many top-down environmental projects overlook indigenous knowledge systems, this paper focuses on how tribal traditions can offer bottom-up solutions with tangible environmental and economic outcomes.



Girls cherishing the Bauhinia Blossom Festival (2022). © Rechilungle Riame.



Vibrant celebration: village youth immersed in the joyous spirit of the Bauhinia Festival. © Rechilungle Riame.

The objective of this write up is to illuminate the noble initiatives of an interior village for Bauhinia preservation, riverine and wild life protection along with cleanliness drive- a resolution taken by the Laisong Village Council and other civil society organisations of the village.

This study employs a qualitative case study approach using participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods. Data were collected through purposive sampling, involving 20 in-depth interviews and three focus group discussions with village elders, council members, youth leaders, and women's groups. The research spans from 2021 to 2024, drawing on both primary sources (interviews, field notes, photographs) and secondary materials (village records, news reports, and scholarly literature).

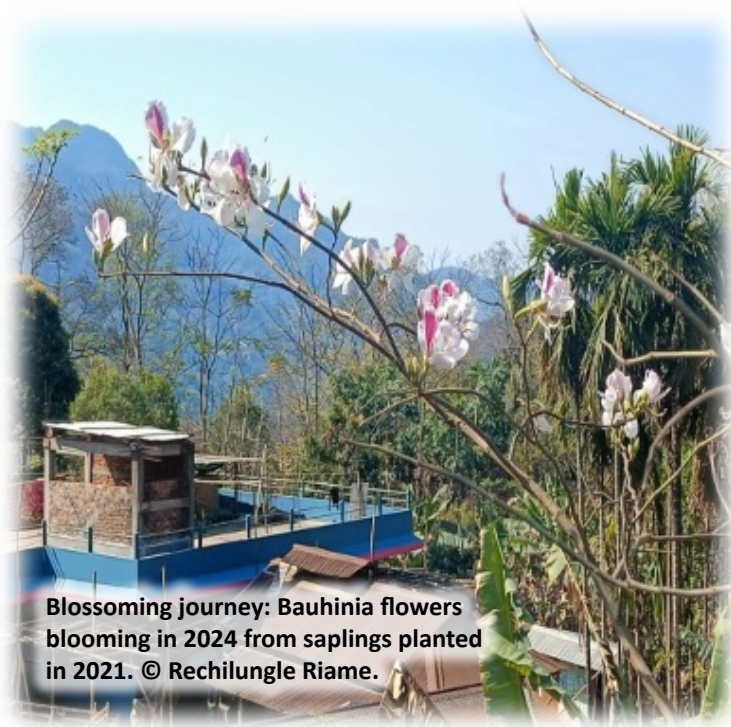
Medicinal and health benefits of *Bauhinia variegata*

Bauhinia variegata is found in different parts of India and used to fight against numerous types of diseases. Regular consumption of plant products like flower, seeds, fruits, leaves in diet have many human health benefits as it helps in protecting the body from chronic disease like cancer, diabetes, and arthritis. *Bauhinia variegata* is one such plant (Sharma et al.2020). Each and every part of the plant contains various bioactive compounds which has health promising effects in one or the other form (Kumar et al.

2020). The illiterate villagers in the absence of medical knowledge used the bark of Bauhinia



Nurturing nature: Village boys actively engaged in planting Bauhinia saplings (2024). © Rechilungle Riame.



Blossoming journey: Bauhinia flowers blooming in 2024 from saplings planted in 2021. © Rechilungle Riame.

plant to threat dysentery and diarrhoea, skin diseases etc this practice is continuing even today. Bauhinia plant has medicinal value even for livestock (Carlowitz 1991). The leaves are believed to be particularly useful for cattle for retention of pregnancy (Singh 1989). The village has long been recognised Bauhinia plants as a crucial source of livelihood especially during dry seasons.

Ecological significance of *Bauhinia Variegata*

Locally known as “Nggapa” or mountain ebony, *Bauhinia variegata* has significant watershed protection value in its natural range, the sub-Himalayan tract, which is prone to soil erosion during heavy monsoon rains. It is planted to reclaim eroded sites and stabilize river banks (Carlowitz 1991). The tree provides shade, live fencing, improves soil fertility, and serves as a farm forestry species in

shelterbelts and windbreaks (Sheikh 1993). Planting Bauhinia helps mitigate landslides, a common problem for the village during the rainy season. The plant is multipurpose, especially valued as fodder in rural economies (Rojas-Sandoval & Acevedo-Rodriguez 2015). Its vibrant flowers attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies, supporting biodiversity and ecological balance.

Unlike externally imposed conservation schemes, the Laisong model aligns deeply with tribal values and ecological wisdom. The findings resonate with post-2020 literature

emphasizing biocultural diversity (Sharma et al. 2020; Rojas-Sandoval & Acevedo-Rodriguez 2015). In comparison to similar festivals in Arunachal and Meghalaya, Laisong’s approach integrates medicinal, ecological, and spiritual functions more holistically. The emphasis on intergenerational learning and collective rituals



Leadership in growth: Village headman proudly holding a Bauhinia sapling (April 2023). © Rechilungle Riame.

enhances sustainability.

This community-led movement reflects a living model of “survival planet” thinking—linking local wellbeing with global environmental consciousness.

Conclusion

The Bauhinia Blossom Festival is not merely a celebration—it stands as a manifesto for rural-led sustainability. By harmonizing biodiversity preservation with economic development and indigenous cultural practices, Laisong Village offers a replicable grassroots model for ecological stewardship. This initiative underscores the importance of integrating local ecological festivals into broader state-level eco-tourism plans, recognizing and funding village-level biodiversity councils, and developing platforms for documenting similar indigenous sustainability practices. However, the study is limited to a single village, which may affect the generalizability of the findings across other tribal contexts. Moreover, it lacks quantitative ecological impact assessments, which future research can address. Further studies could involve comparative analyses of similar efforts across northeastern India and longitudinal tracking of the ecological impact of Bauhinia plantation efforts to assess their long-term viability and influence.

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