

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES IN THARU COMMUNITY OF LAMAHI-4, DANG, NEPAL

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The use of the traditional healing practices is deeply rooted in Nepalese culture and are based on beliefs and historical experiences accumulated from generation to generation. In Nepal, over 60 traditions exist and about 85% of the population depends on traditional medicines for their basic healthcare. The Tharu are the largest indigenous ethnic group in Nepal's Terai region, practicing traditional medicines in their community since long time. This study mainly focuses on the survey of traditional healing practice including plant used and dhama-jhakri of Tharu community of Dang district Nepal.

**Method:** It was cross sectional descriptive study. The survey was performed to collect the data in Tharu community of Lamahi-4, Dang by using open ended questionnaire and face to face interview.

**Results:** The maximum traditional healers were between age group 61-70 i.e. 37.14% and dominated by male i.e. 85.71%. Majority of traditional healers were engaged in agriculture and 97.145% of traditional healers were illiterate. The diseases were diagnosed by observation and complaint of patient, aksheta herne, traditional mantra, touching body parts etc. Various treatment methods used by traditional healers were aksheta herne, phukphak, body massage, yoga and herbal plants. 76 plant species belonged to 42 families were used by healers for preparing different herbal formulation to cure the different ailments

**Conclusion:** Traditional healing practices was widely used as means of primary healthcare in study area and this area was rich in medicinal plants that have significant role in treatment of different ailments. The widespread use of some medical plants caused the extinction of valuable plant; hence those plants must be preserved for future use.

**Key words:** Traditional Healing Practices; Medicinal plants; Tharu Community; Herbal remedies

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional beliefs about the diverse uses of plants are deeply rooted in Nepalese culture. Various ethnic groups of the country have developed their own indigenous knowledge systems relating to the role of plants in food, shelter, health care and their spiritual needs. Traditional herbal practices are the outcome of the long history of trial and error practiced from generation to generation and confined by traditional practitioners with knowledge of plants and their ecology. As World Health Organization (WHO) document, the traditional medicine is described in the following way: "the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness."<sup>1</sup>

According to estimates, 80% of people employ traditional medical practices such as herbal remedies, acupuncture, yoga, indigenous, therapies, and others. Traditional medicine is a socio-cultural practice with a rich biological legacy that can be a significant resource for the advancement of inclusive, diversified sustainable development.<sup>2</sup>

Uses of traditional medicine for primary health care in different countries are Uganda 70%, India 70%, Chile 70%, Rwanda 70%, Pakistan 80% and Ethiopia 90%.

Uses of traditional medicine in developed countries at least once are Germany 80%, Canada 70%, France 49%, Australia 48%, and USA 42%.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional medicine is frequently used to treat, diagnose, prevent and manage a variety of health issues. Traditional medicines are widely available, easily assessable, acceptable and affordable. Due to their accessibility and affordability, the majority of people in the world prefer alternative medicine, especially visiting nearby traditional healers.<sup>4</sup>

In Nepal, over 60 traditions exist and about 85% of the population depends on traditional medicines for their basic healthcare. Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi religious and multicultural country. According to their culture and tradition, they follow different kinds of tradition healing practice in their locality. Traditional healers of Nepal are known by different names such as dhama-jhakri, pandit-lama-pujari-

gubhaju, jyotish.<sup>5</sup>

Geographically, Nepal is divided into three major regions as-Himalayan, Mountain and Terai and various administrative regions. Tharus are one of the native people of the Terai and inner Terai region of the country.<sup>6</sup> The Tharu were described as a single undifferentiated non-hindu tribal group in various nineteenth and early twentieth century literature.<sup>7</sup>

Tharu people have been using traditional medicine to treat different diseases. Due to lack of proper documentation of these knowledges of traditional healers and medicinal plant, they are in state of danger and may be lost completely in near future. Therefore, an attempt was made to document such healers' practices before their loss.

Note: - Dhama-Jhakri: Shamans wear a peacock feather headdress and carry a double-sided drum; Jharphuke: Traditional healers treat by chanting mantra, blowing breath on body; Jyotish: Astrologer; Aksheta herne: Observation of rice to treat/ diagnose the disease.

## METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out at Lamahi Municipality ward no.4 in Dang district of Lumbini province, Nepal. Nonprobability purposive sampling technique was applied on this study. The aim of this study was to explore the knowledge of traditional healing practices. Standard questionnaire on Tharu language was prepared and face to face interview was taken with 35 traditional healers to collect the data about medicinal plants, methods of diagnosis and methods of treatment of different diseases. This data was presented illustratively using bar diagram, pie charts and tables wherever required.

## How to Cite

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Frequency of used (FU): Higher the used frequency; higher the use of common medicine among local people.

$$FU = \frac{N}{T} \times 100$$

Where,

N= Number of informants who used the medicine

T= Total number of informants interviewed

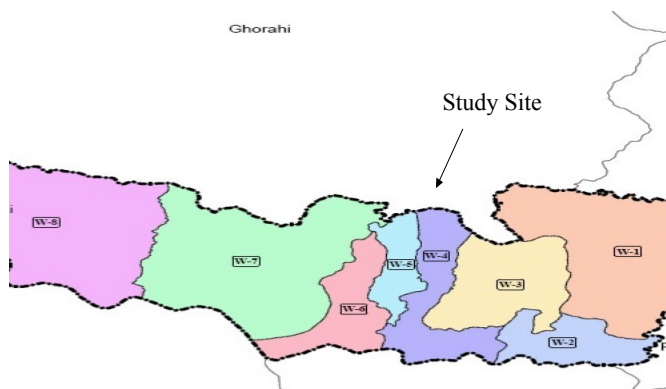


Fig 1: Map of Lamahi Municipality

## RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics

Traditional healers of Tharu community belong to age group of 30-90 years were interviewed. According to the result maximum traditional healers were between age group 61-70 years i.e. N=13 (37.14%), followed by 51-60 years i.e. N=11 (31.43%) and 71-80 years i.e. N=6 (17.14%) and dominated by male i.e. N= 30 (85.71%), only 14.29% (N=5) of traditional healers were female. The main sources of traditional healing knowledge were father, guru, self and mother. Majority of the traditional healers were learned from their father i.e. N = 15 (42.86%), followed by guru i.e. N=12 (34.29%), self-i.e. N=7 (20%) and mother i.e. N=1 (2.86%). Traditional healers of study area were illiterate (94%) followed by basic level (3%) and secondary level study (3%). Most of traditional healers were engaged in agriculture.

### Diagnostic Tools and Methods Used by Traditional Healers

Traditional healers applied different methods and tools to diagnose the diseases like examination or observation of eye, face, lips and tongue along with complaints of patient. Traditional healers who believed in spiritual belief (negative energy, ghost, witch) were diagnosed by observing rice (aksheta herne), using traditional mantra.

From this study most of the traditional healers diagnosed diseases by observation and complaint of patient i.e. N=19 (54.286%) followed by aksheta herne by using traditional mantra i.e. N=12 (34.285%) and touching body part i.e. N=4 (11.428%).

### Treatment Methods Used by Traditional Healers

Traditional healers possessed varieties of skill in treatment methods of different ailments. Most of them were prescribing medicinal plants, minerals and certain animals' product. Some of them used traditional mantra, aksheta herne and jharphuke to treat the disease.

From this study, most of the traditional healers treat the different ailments by using plant, aksheta herne and phukphak i.e. N=20 (57.143%) followed by aksheta herne and phukphak only i.e. N=8 (22.857%), body massage i.e. N=5 (14.286%) and yoga i.e. N=2 (5.714%).

### Distribution of Crude Drug

In the study area traditional healers used different parts of medicinal plant to treat the diseases. Among them fruits of plant were highly used by healers i.e. 25%, followed by leaves (21%), whole plant (16%) and bark (11%) as shown in Fig-2. These medicinal plants have different habit or growth form. From the listed plant species, herbs (44.74%) were maximum used by traditional healers followed by tree (34.21%) and shrub (13.16%). Very few percent of species have growth form of creeper (2.63%) as shown in Fig-3. The traditional healers use different dosage form for the treatment of diseases. The process of preparation of dosage form varies according to the types of diseases. The results of this study revealed that most of the traditional healers use juice and

decoction (28% each), followed by paste (20%), infusion (10%), powder (10%), oil (3%) and latex (1%) as shown in Fig-4.

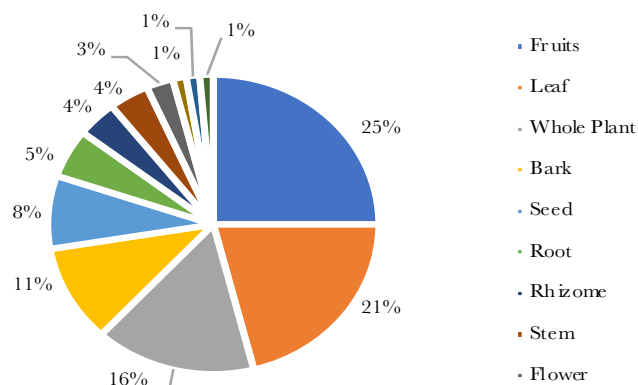


Fig-2: Distribution of Crude Drug on the basis of parts used

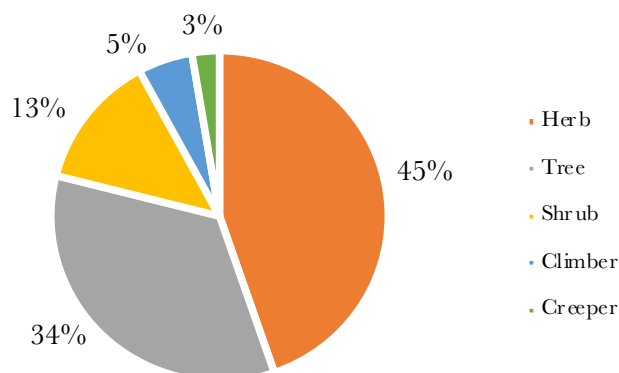


Fig-3: Distribution of Crude Drug on the basis of their form

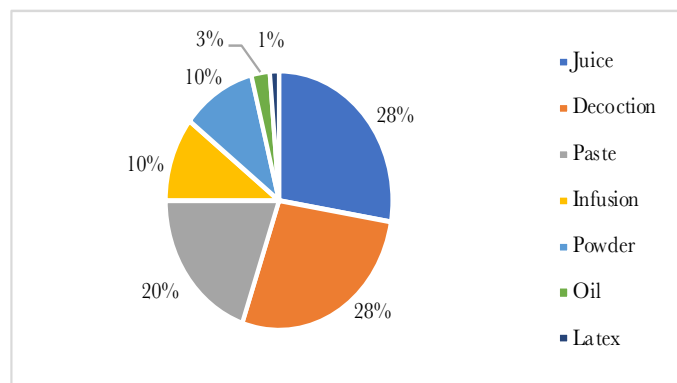


Fig-4: Distribution of Crude Drug based on Different Dosage Form

### Problem Faced by Traditional Healers

Traditional healers of Tharu community faced several types of problems during their practices among them disturbance in their household works, unavailability of medicinal plants, difficulties in collection of medicinal plants and suffering from witch (when traditional healers treated the patient suffering from witch then according to their believe witch take a revenge with healer).

## DISCUSSION

Traditional healing practices have arisen with the Tharu community's culture and heritage in study area. Traditional culture is still prominent in many areas, and western allopathic medicine has yet to reach them. However, in rural Nepal, modern health services are gradually displacing traditional treatment approaches. According to the findings of this study, elderly healers predominated and since the most of them are illiterate, they were unable to pass their knowledge to the younger generation in written forms, putting them on the edge of extinction. Here male and elderly healers were dominant, this finding was similar to that of research conducted by Khanal DP et.al<sup>5</sup>

Traditional healers used different methods and tools to diagnosed the diseases like examination or observation of eye, face, lips, tongue along with complaints of patient, aksheta herne and by touching body parts, this finding was similar to that of research conducted by Khanal DP et.al<sup>5</sup>, Dhimal. M et.al<sup>4</sup>, Baniya R. et.al<sup>27</sup>, Raut Bechan et.al<sup>3</sup>. The treatment of different ailments used by healers were by prescribing medicinal plants, minerals and certain animals' product. Some traditional healers who believed in spiritual belief used aksheta herne, phukphak and using traditional mantra to treat the pathological conditions of patient. This finding was similar to research conducted by Raut Bechan et.al<sup>3</sup>.

From the result, 76 species of plant belonging to 42 families were listed.

Among them majorities of plant species were herbs followed by tree and shrub. Majorities of traditional healers use juice and decoction of medicinal plant to treat the disease. This finding was similar to that of research conducted by Chaudhary C. et.al<sup>28</sup>, Ambu G. et.al<sup>14</sup>

The widespread collection of medicinal plants has resulted in the extinction of this precious plant. Many therapeutic plants, according to traditional healers have disappeared from their local forest, requiring them to go increasing distance to obtain plants that were formerly freely available close to their communities. Traditional healing practices pay special attention to the avoidance and regeneration of individual plant species, and while some species of medicinal plants are also cultivated in home gardens by Guruwa, their efforts at conservation and

**Table-1: Medicinal Plants with their Therapeutics Uses**

| S.N | Local Name/ Parts Used  | Scientific Name/ Family                      | Methods of Used  | FU    | Uses from Literature Review   |
|-----|-------------------------|--|--|-------|---|
| 1   | Tori/ laahi (Seed)      | <i>Brassica nigra</i> (Brassicaceae)         | Its oil was used to massage at the site of joint pain  | 31.43 | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-allergic <sup>23</sup>   |
| 2   | Kalo Beshar (Rhizome)   | <i>Curcuma angustifolia</i> (Zingiberaceae)  | About 5 gm of its powder of rhizome was boiled in water and taken orally to treat common cold/ paste was applied at the site of joint pain | 25.72 | Cough, bronchitis, antifungal, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory                                     |
| 3   | Ultakur (Root)          | <i>Achyranthes aspera</i> (Amaranthaceae)    | Its root was chewed/ paste was taken orally to treat fever/ jaundice   | 22.86 | Antidiarrheal, anti-inflammatory, anticholera, antifungal, headache, hepatoprotective <sup>20</sup> |
| 4   | Bhakimla (Fruit)        | <i>Rhus javanica</i> (Anacardiaceae)         | About 5 gm of fruit powder was soaked in water and filtrate was taken orally to treat diarrhoea  | 20    | Antidiarrheal <sup>10</sup>   |
| 5   | Kera (Apparent trunk)   | <i>Musa sapientum</i> (Musaceae)             | About 50 ml of crushed trunk juice with little amount of water was taken in diarrhoea  | 17.14 | Antidiarrheal, antimicrobial, antioxidant <sup>21</sup>   |
| 6   | Gurjo (Stem)            | <i>Tinospora cordifolia</i> (Menispermaceae) | Its stem was cut into small pieces and chewed twice a day to treat diarrhea/ joint pain/ jaundice  | 17.14 | Fever, jaundice, diarrhoea, pain, asthma, bone fracture   |
| 7   | Ghiukumari (Gel)        | <i>Aloe vera L.</i> (Liliaceae)              | Its leaf gel was applied on the head in fever/ applied at the site of joint pain/ wound/ cut/ taken orally for kidney stone                | 17.14 | Diuretic, anti-inflammatory, immunomodulatory, wound, analgesic <sup>24</sup>                       |
| 8   | Tulsi (Leaves)          | <i>Ocimum sanctum</i> (Lamiaceae)            | Some fresh leaves were boiled with water and taken orally to treat common cold   | 17.14 | Anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antioxidant, respiratory disorder <sup>25</sup>                       |
| 9   | Aduwa (Rhizome)         | <i>Zingiber officinale</i> (Zingiberaceae)   | Its rhizome was cut into small pieces and boiled in water to drink for common cold   | 17.14 | Antioxidant, treat flu and cold, stimulant, headache <sup>16</sup>                                  |
| 10  | Ghortap (Whole plant)   | <i>Centella asiatica</i> (Apiaceae)          | Fresh plant was chewed or its juice was taken in diarrhoea   | 14.29 | cough, diarrhoea, cold, respiratory troubles and constipation <sup>9</sup>                          |
| 11  | Amrut (Leaves)          | <i>Psidium guajava</i> (Myrtaceae)           | Fresh and young leaves were chewed to treat diarrhoea  | 14.29 | Antidiarrheal, antiproliferative, antimicrobial <sup>22</sup>                                       |
| 12  | Harro (Fruit)           | <i>Terminalia chebula</i> (Combretaceae)     | Dried fruit was chewed/ pressed under the teeth to treat common cold   | 14.29 | Cough, cold, respiratory troubles and constipation <sup>8</sup>                                     |
| 13  | Barro (Fruit)           | <i>Terminalia bellirica</i> (Combretaceae)   | Dried fruit was chewed/ pressed under the teeth to treat common cold   | 14.29 | Cough, cold, respiratory troubles and constipation <sup>8</sup>                                     |
| 14  | Bojo (Rhizome)          | <i>Acorus calamus</i> (Acoraceae)            | Its rhizome was cut into small pieces and pressed under the teeth to treat common cold   | 14.29 | Bronchitis, chest pain, cough, fever, diarrhoea, inflammation <sup>33</sup>                         |
| 15  | Aaph (Bark)             | <i>Magnifera indica</i> (Anacardiaceae)      | Bark was crushed to extract the juice and about 20 ml was taken in diarrhoea   | 11.86 | Antipyretics, antidiarrheal, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory <sup>19</sup>                           |
| 16  | Anar (Fruit peel)       | <i>Punica granatum</i> (Punicaceae)          | Its fruit peel was chewed or crushed to extract juice and taken to treat diarrhoea   | 11.86 | Diarrhoea and dysentery <sup>8</sup>  |
| 17  | Saipatri/ Geda (Leaves) | <i>Tagetes sp.</i> (Asteraceae)              | Its leaves were pressed and applied on the head to treat fever/ applied on back for back pain  | 11.41 | Anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial <sup>13</sup>   |
| 18  | Neem (Leaves)           | <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Meliaceae)        | Its leaves were crushed to prepare paste and applied on the head for fever/ wound/ cut   | 11.41 | Anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antifungal, immunomodulatory <sup>12</sup>                        |
| 19  | Sapgut (Whole plant)    | <i>Senna occidentalis</i> (Fabaceae)         | Its paste was prepared and applied at the site of snake bite.  | 5.71  | Fever, typhoid, malaria, hepatitis  |
| 20  | Pudina (Whole plant)    | <i>Mentha spicata</i> (Lamiaceae)            | Paste of Mentha spicata and sugar was prepared and taken orally to treat diarrhoea   | 5.71  | Antidiarrheal, abdominal pain, cold, headache, sinusitis <sup>11</sup>                              |
| 21  | Jangra (Bark)           | <i>Lannea caromandlica</i> (Anacardiaceae)   | Its bark was crushed to extract juice and taken orally to treat diarrhoea  | 5.71  | Antimicrobial, antifungal, toothache  |

| S.N | Local Name/<br>Parts Used       | Scientific Name/<br>Family                       | Methods of Used   | FU   | Uses from Literature Review  |
|-----|---------------------------------|--|---|------|--|
| 22  | Lawang<br>(Flowering buds)      | <i>Eugenia caryophyllus</i><br>(Myrtaceae)       | Its flowering buds were boiled and taken orally in fever/ roasted buds was chewed in common cold                                    | 5.71 | Cough, antifungal, antioxidant   |
| 23  | Semi (Root)                     | <i>Phaseolus lunatus</i><br>(Fabaceae)           | Its root was crushed and applied on the head for fever/ applied at the site of skin infection                                       | 5.71 | Fever, astringent  |
| 24  | Mangut<br>(Leaves)              | <i>Dracaena trifasciata</i><br>(Asparagaceae)    | Its leaf paste was applied at the site of bite/ its leaf was rubbed and inhale to cured snake bite                                  | 5.71 | Snake bite, scorpion bite, cold  |
| 25  | Bhomra<br>(Whole plant)         | <i>Solanum nigrum</i><br>(Solanaceae)            | Its paste was prepared and applied at the site of injury  | 5.71 | Mouth ulcer, hepatoprotective, anti-inflammatory <sup>30</sup>   |
| 26  | Bichkhopra<br>(Whole plant)     | <i>Side acuta</i><br>(Malvaceae)                 | Its paste was prepared and applied at the site of injury  | 5.71 | Cold, cough, wound, antioxidant, asthma, tuberculosis <sup>26</sup>  |
| 27  | Padamchal<br>(Stem)             | <i>Rheum australe</i><br>(Polygonaceae)          | Its stem was crushed into powder and prepared the paste to apply at the site of injury  | 5.71 | Antibacterial, antifungal, antioxidant   |
| 28  | Amchocha<br>(Whole plant)       | <i>Oxalis corniculata</i><br>(Oxalidaceae)       | It was rubbed/ crushed to make paste and applied on back to treat back pain   | 5.71 | Anti-inflammatory, antifungal, anticancer, antiulcer <sup>31</sup>   |
| 29  | Fari piper<br>(Fruit)           | <i>Piper longum</i> (Piperaceae)                 | Its fruit was boiled in water and taken orally to treat common cold   | 5.71 | Laxative, anthelmintic, carminative, tonic, antidiarrheal bronchodilator, anti-inflammatory <sup>17,18</sup> |
| 30  | Chiraito<br>(Whole plant)       | <i>Swertia chirata</i><br>(Gentianaceae)         | It was soaked in water (full night) and its infusion was taken at morning to treat diarrhoea  | 2.86 | Carminative, antipyretic, ulcer  |
| 31  | Suntola (Fruit peel)            | <i>Citrus sinensis</i><br>(Rutaceae)             | The peel of fruit was chewed to treat diarrhoea   | 2.86 | Diarrhoea, bronchitis, hypertension  |
| 32  | Kafal (Bark)                    | <i>Myristica esculenta</i><br>(Myricaceae)       | Its bark was crushed to extract juice and taken orally to treat diarrhoea   | 2.86 | Asthma, cough, bronchitis  |
| 33  | Laliguras<br>(Flower)           | <i>Rhododendron arboreum</i><br>(Ericaceae)      | Its fresh flower was chewed/ crushed and obtained juice was taken orally to treat diarrhoea   | 2.86 | Diarrhoea, dysentery, fever, constipation  |
| 34  | Kathar<br>(Flower)              | <i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i><br>(Moraceae)    | Paste of its flower and sugar was prepared and taken orally to treat diarrhoea  | 2.86 | Antibacterial, antifungal, antidiabetic, antioxidant   |
| 35  | Bair (Fruit)                    | <i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i><br>(Rhamnaceae)       | About 5 gm of its dry fruit powder was mixed into a glass of water and taken orally to treat diarrhoea                              | 2.86 | Ulcer, hepatoprotective, antioxidant   |
| 36  | Ritha (Fruit)                   | <i>Sapindus mukorossi</i><br>(Sapindaceae)       | Its fruit was crushed with water and taken orally to treat diarrhoea  | 2.86 | Asthma, skin infection, migraine   |
| 37  | Jam (Fruit)                     | <i>Syzygium cumini</i><br>(Myrtaceae)            | Its fruit was eaten/ its young leaves was chewed to treat diarrhoea   | 2.86 | Bronchitis, asthma, dysentery  |
| 38  | Hurhur (Whole plant)            | <i>Cleome rutidosperma</i><br>(Cleomaceae)       | It was crushed to prepare paste and applied on the head to treat fever  | 2.86 | Antipyretic, antidiarrheal   |
| 39  | Gahat (Seed)                    | <i>Macrotyloma uniflorum</i><br>(Fabaceae)       | Its seed was cooked and taken orally with meal to treat fever   | 2.86 | Asthma, diuretic, bronchitis   |
| 40  | Jaiifar (Fruit)                 | <i>Myristica fragrans</i><br>(Myristicaceae)     | Its fruit was crushed and taken orally with water to treat common cold  | 2.86 | Stomach ulcer, diuretic, hepatoprotective  |
| 41  | Lashora                         | <i>Cardia dichotoma</i><br>(Boraginaceae)        | Its young leaves were boiled and taken orally to treat common cold  | 2.86 | Fever, headache, joint pain  |
| 42  | Madaar (Latex) + Marich (Fruit) | <i>Calotropis gigantea</i> + <i>Piper nigrum</i> | Latex of <i>Calotropis gigantea</i> and powder of <i>Piper nigrum</i> were mixed in equal amount to apply at the site of snake bite | 2.86 | Snake bite, respiratory disorder   |
| 43  | Mentha<br>(Whole plant)         | <i>Mentha piperita</i><br>(Lamiaceae)            | Its oil was used to massage at the site of joint pain   | 2.86 | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, joint pain, fever  |
| 44  | Methi (Seed)                    | <i>Tigonella foenum-graecum</i><br>(Fabaceae)    | Its seed was warmed with oil and massage at the site of joint pain  | 2.86 | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, arthritis  |
| 45  | Sowa (Whole plant)              | <i>Anethum graveolens</i><br>(Apiaceae)          | It was taken orally by cooking for joint pain   | 2.86 | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, back pain  |
| 46  | Chamsur<br>(Leaves)             | <i>Lepidium sativum</i><br>(Brassicaceae)        | It was taken orally by cooking for joint pain   | 2.86 | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory   |
| 47  | Rawaniya<br>(Leaves)            | <i>Blumea lacera</i><br>(Asteraceae)             | Its leaf paste was applied at the site of injury  | 2.86 | Analgesic, antidiarrheal, anti-inflammatory <sup>32</sup>  |
| 48  | Khursani<br>(Root)              | <i>Capsicum annum</i> L.<br>Solanaceae           | Its root was burned and ash was applied on head for fever   | 2.86 | Fever, cold <sup>8</sup>   |
| 49  | Lajawati jhar<br>(Leaves)       | <i>Mimosa pudica</i><br>(Asteraceae)             | Its leaf paste was applied at the site of skin infection  | 2.86 | Cut, wound <sup>9</sup>  |
| 50  | Patharchati<br>(Leaves)         | <i>Kalanchoa pinnata</i><br>(Crassulaceae)       | Its leaf was taken orally to treat kidney stone   | 2.86 | Kidney stone, antiurolithic <sup>29</sup>  |



management of these biological resources are minimal and insufficient to ensure their long-term availability.

## CONCLUSION

Our findings showed that elderly and male respondents were more active in traditional healing practices. The fact that the younger generation is uninterested in learning traditional healing procedures this indicates that traditional knowledge of treatments will be lost after certain period of time. Hence, traditional healing practices must be preserved. Different diagnostic tools and methods, therapeutic approaches, and traditional cures were used by traditional healers in our community. Among them, some were scientifically defined, while others require additional research in this subject.

It can also be concluded as herbs are the primary source of traditional treatments, followed by tree and shrub species. Fruits had been found to be the most often employed plant parts for the manufacture of traditional treatments, followed by leaves. The widespread use of some medical plants, their varied parts, and the usage of fresh plant materials possess possible dangers to the survival of medicinal plants in the study area.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

All the authors declare no competing interest