



# Ethnobotanical application of medicinal plants by the Gurung community of Siddhalek rural municipality, Dhading, Nepal

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**Abstract:** Ethnobotanical study of various indigenous communities has a significant role in the discovery of new medicine and treatment methods. In Nepal, there are 126 ethnic communities with rich indigenous knowledge and skills in medicinal herbs. We have selected the Gurung community of Siddhalek-2, Dhading because it is the only district of Nepal that stretches from the Himalayan range to the Mahabharat range that supports a high range of floral diversity and medicinal herbs due to ecological variation. The Gurung community migrated here from all over Nepal. Thus, they have valuable archaic knowledge. We conducted our study during June and July of 2020. The plants were carefully identified by showcasing them to the local people, concerning scientific databases and consulting the experts. Open interviews and group discussions with the local people, traditional healers, and the village head were conducted to get sufficient information about plants. Sixty different plant species belonging to 58 genera and 43 different families that could potentially cure more than 37 diseases and disorders are identified and documented in this paper. Among those 60 species, 43%, 25% and 32% were herbs, shrubs and trees respectively. The plant leaf is the most frequently used part. The Gurung community and other ethnic communities of Nepal are still following such traditional practices to solve health problems. Utilization and conservation of their indigenous knowledge and skills will help to identify and use plants along with their biotic conservation.

**Keywords:** Ethnomedicine, Ethnic group, Gurung Community, Indigenous knowledge

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## INTRODUCTION

The term ethnobotany was coined by Botanist John W. Harsberger in 1896. Ethnobotany is the scientific and systematic study of the uses and management of plants by people and it demonstrates how conservation of plants and local knowledge can be achieved by the study of natural and social sciences (Martin, 2010). Humans have always been interested in plants since the dawn of civilization. We have been dependent on plants for food, shelter, protection and remedies from diseases and injuries. The Ethnobotanical traditions have been inherited and experimented with for a long time. The oldest documentation about the medicinal value of plants in the Indian subcontinent is



reported in Rig-Veda (Singh et al., 2012). Ethnobotany is blooming these days due to the realization that a vast body of knowledge is contained in folk and indigenous culture, which is rapidly being lost in the modern period.

In Nepal, the first scientific study of the uses of medicinal plants was performed by Francis Buchanan. He had collected plants from 1802-1821 and was followed by Nathaniel Wallich in 1820-1821 (Rajbhandari, 2001). Being located in the central portion of the Himalaya with a high range of climatic, geographic and cultural diversities, Nepal is a great platform for ethnobotanical study and research. Nepal is gifted with 126 ethnic communities (Kadel et al., 2020). People of these communities utilize different kinds of plants using their authentic traditional knowledge and skills to cure various health disorders. About 215 species of plants were found to be used to cure 139 different diseases by major ethnic communities in hilly districts of Nepal (Miya et al., 2020). Medicinal plants are not only being used to treat diseases in local level but also they are traded in international markets creating employment (Lamichhane et al., 2021; Miya, 2021). Medicinal plants are reported to have reduced or fewer chances of side effects as allopathic medicines (Gahatraj et al., 2020).

The Gurung community is one of the ethnic communities and the main Gurkha tribe of Nepal. They are indigenous to the southern slopes of the Himalayas in Nepal. They are animists or followers of the Bon religion with a charming tradition and culture. The majority of them are dependent on high altitude pastoralism and animal husbandry. Some are employed by Gurkha soldiers, Indian and Nepal Army (Indigenous voice, 2006). Their population accounts 522,641 which is 1.5% of the total population (CBS, 2011). Documentation of medicinal plants used by this community is found rarely as very few studies have been conducted. The earlier studies in a few districts of Nepal have been performed by Coburn (1984); Manandhar (1987); Pohle, (1990); Bhattra et al.(2006); Gurung et al.(2008), Shah et al.(2019) etc. So, our study mainly focuses on documentation of medicinal plants and their traditional methods of application by Gurung community. Similarly, this study aims to disseminate the skills and knowledge to younger generations which will finally lead to the preservation of indigenous knowledge of the ethnic group and biotic conservation of flora.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

*Study area:* This study was conducted in Siddhalek rural municipality, ward no. 2 of Dhading district. It occupies an area of 106.09 km<sup>2</sup>. The population of the Gurung community in Siddhalek is 757 with 336 male and 424 female. Our study area's Gurung villages are settled by sharing borders with other ethnic communities such as Newar, Brahmin, and Kami. They are believed to have migrated here from Western and Northern Gurung villages from time immemorial. People of the Gurung community are majorly involved in foreign employment, animal husbandry and few are employed by Gurkha soldiers, Indian and Nepal Army. Their religious practice is a mixture of Buddhism, Hinduism and Shamanism. Dhading is one of the hilly districts that lie in the Bagmati province of Central Nepal with an area of 1926 km<sup>2</sup>. The population of the Gurung community in the district is 18,632 with 8,299 "Male" and 10,333 "Female". It is the only district of Nepal that extends from Mountain (Ganesh Himal, 7,422m) to Churevawar Pradesh of Terai (Chitwan). The district shares its borders

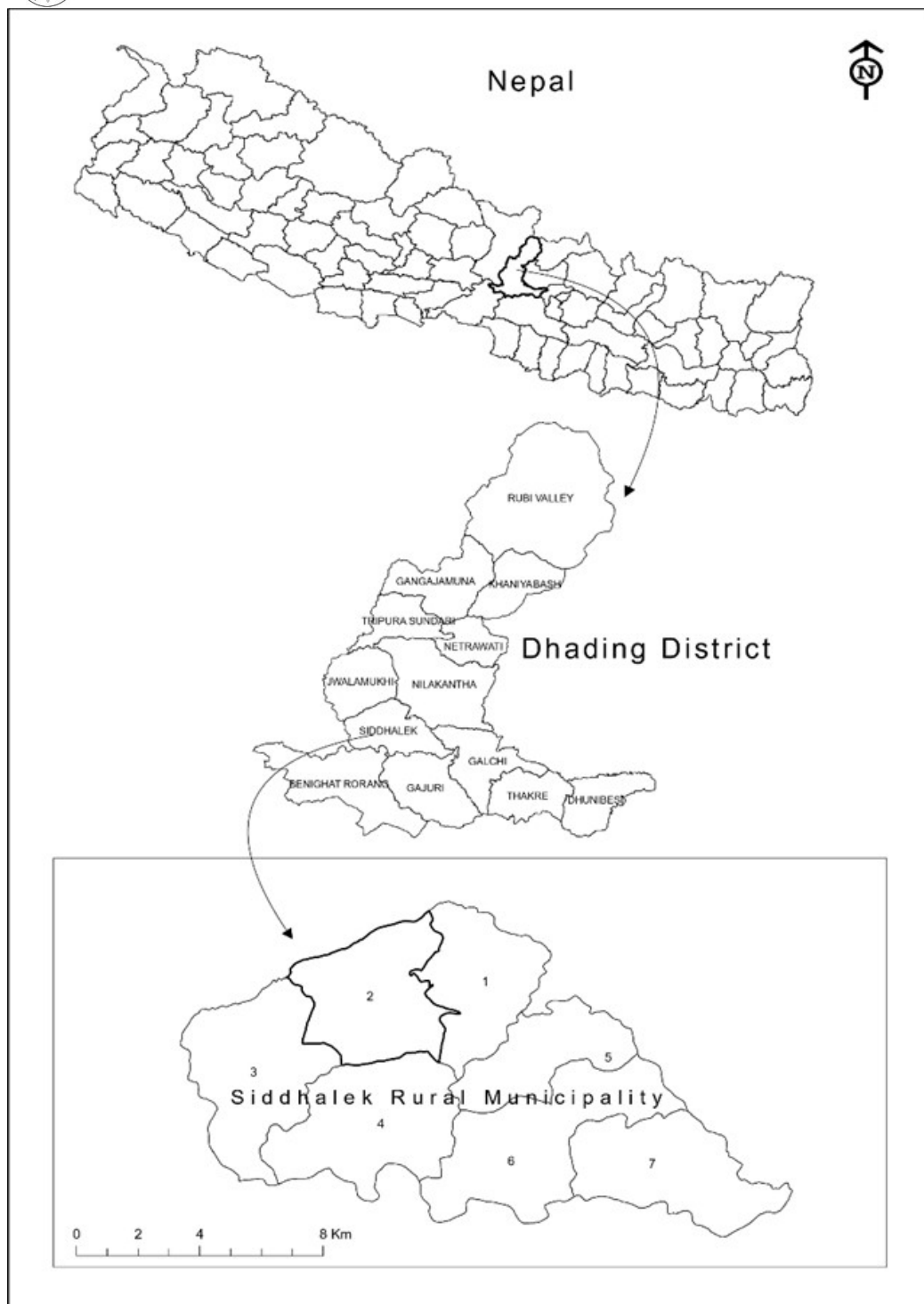


Figure 1: Map of the study area



with Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Kathmandu in the east, Gorkha in the west, Tibet, the autonomous region of China and Rasuwa in the North, Chitwan and Makwanpur in the South. It is extended from 488m to 7409m above sea level. The average annual rainfall is 2121.2mm. It ranges from 27.9711°N and 84.8985°E. At higher elevations, the climate shifts from upper tropical to nival. The upper tropical climate is dominant over a large area. The forest is mainly dominated by Katus (*Castanopsis indica*), Salla (*Pinus roxburgii*), Chilaune (*Schima wallichii*), Sal (*Shorea robusta*). The social structure is constructed with Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid culture, with much of Ghale, Gurung and Tamang in the North, Brahmin and Chhetri in the south and Newar in the centre. Dhading is also home to the Chepang community, the last nomads of Nepal. The majority of people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Eighty percent of the land in the district is used for agricultural purposes and the remaining twenty percent is forest.

*Data collection and analysis:* We surveyed our study area during June and July of the year 2020. A total of 54 respondents were taken during our fieldwork from the age group of 30-85 years. Proper identification and information of plant species were collected by open interview and group discussion with elderly people and traditional healers. The information was further made valid by the common response of villagers, consulting the experts, reviewing recently published articles from google scholar and research gate. We compared our field information with earlier studies of ethnobotany in Gurung communities (Coburn, 1984; Manandhar, 1987; Pohle, 1990; Bhattra et al, 2006; Gurung et al, 2008 and Shah et al, 2019) and also analyzed the success of people in applying those plants as remedies to make the information more valid.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We surveyed 54 informants in total (26 male and 28 female). They aged between 30 to 85 years as shown in the table 1. Their religious practice is a mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism. The more the age, the deeper was the ethnobotanical knowledge in them. Among our informants, 21 were illiterate. Out of those, 14 were females and 7 of them were males. Similarly, 18 of our informants had the basic level of education (9 males and 9 females). Eleven of our informants had secondary level of education (7 males and 4 females) and the remaining 4 informants had acquired higher levels of education.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondent

Age Group	30-45 years	45-55 years	55-65 years	65-75 years	75-85 years
Men	4	9	7	6	6
Women	11	3	6	2	6

The Gurungs of Siddhalek rural municipality of Dhading proved to be rich in ethnomedical culture. We documented 60 different species belonging to 58 genera and 43 different families (Appendix). Out of these plant species, 43% were herbs, 32% were trees and the remaining 25% were shrubs by habit (figure 2). Leaves of 18 species were used; figure 3, followed by bark (11 species), fruit and seed (10 species each), latex (3 species), flower, shoot and tuber (1 species each). Leaves being used to treat maximum numbers of disease were also concluded by Miya et al. (2020). A similar study was done in Gorkha district, a neighboring district of our study area (Srijana et al, 2019). The different parts of plants either consumed directly or by specific procedures for

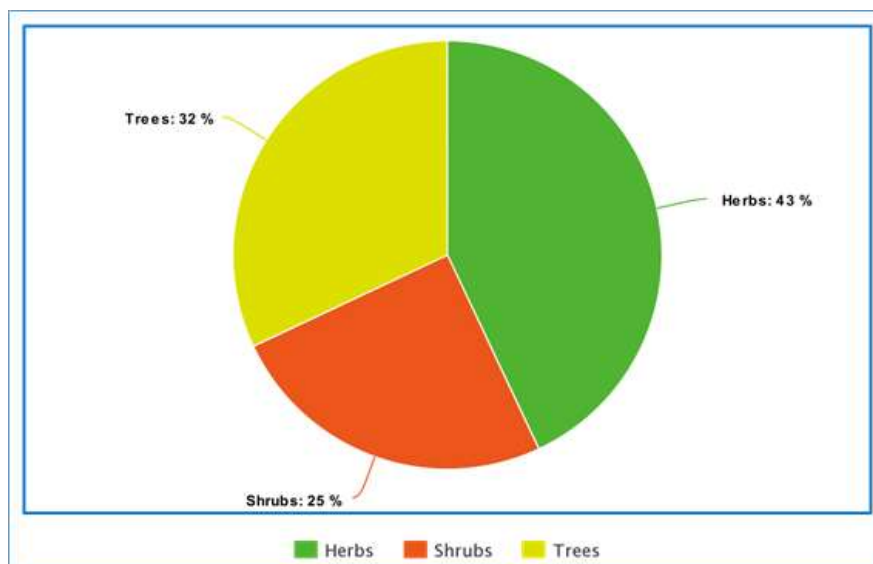


Figure 2: A pie chart showing the classification of plant species by habit

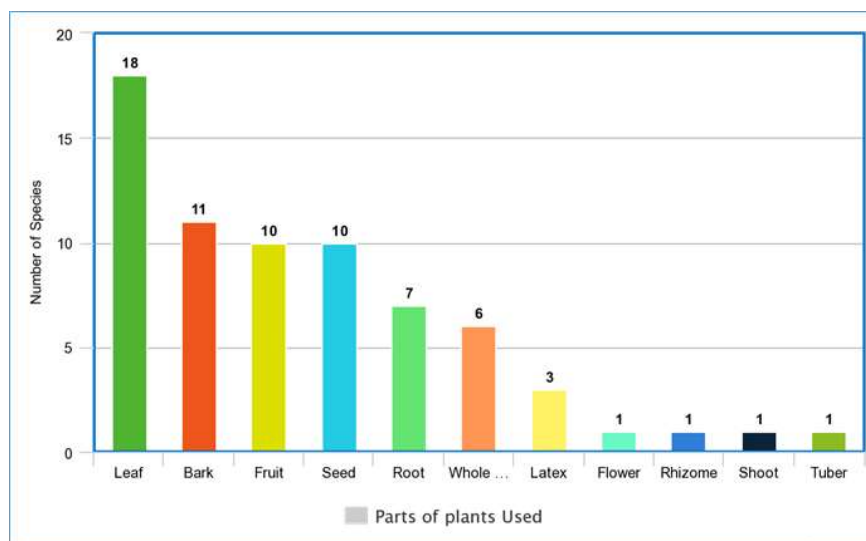


Figure 3: A bar graph showing parts of plants used

curing more than 37 different diseases and disorders. Some plants were used for curing multiple diseases. Their medical significance has been proved by science as well. Comparing our findings with the earlier studies from other Gurung villages exposed that most of the species mentioned were similar but there is quite a difference in their application methods. Reviewing previous studies in ethnobotany of Gurung communities; Coburn, 1984; Manandhar, 1987; Pohle, 1990; Bhatrai et al, 2006; Gurung et al, 2008 and Shah et al, 2019, we found a new species; *Hypericum perforatum* (Orale) of the family Hypericaceae being used. Its paste is used to treat the burnt area by the local people. Similarly, we found a novel application of *Bombax ceiba* (Simal).



The juicy form of this plant is applied on scalp to get rid of dandruff by women in our study area. The majority of plants are being used to cure similar health disorders as reported in previous studies though they are applied in different forms. According to Shah et al, 2020, *Artemisia vulgaris* (Tite pati) is used to treat fracture and muscle pain by the Gurung community of Gorkha but it is being used to treat scabies by the Gurungs of Siddhalek. Shah et al, 2020 also reported that *Ficus semicordata* (Khaniyu) is used to treat high fever whereas it is being used to treat bone fracture according to our respondent. Similarly, Coburn, 1984 reported the use of *Elsholtzia blanda* (Rudilo) in skin disease whereas it is being used to treat pneumonia and fever in our report. Such difference in ethnobotanical uses within the same ethnic community might be because of geographical and climatic variations in their settlement.

## CONCLUSION

This study documents the use of traditional ethnobotanical techniques to cope with human illnesses. The Gurung community of Dhading district has been using plants as treatments for a long time. The treatments seem very effective in the absence of modern medicines. These traditional practices are slowly declining due to the invasion of modern medicines and desperation from younger generations. Ethnobotanical knowledge bears a great value and is the field for vague scientific experimentation. The next life-saving medicine could be ethnobotanical! Thus, proper documentation and research are necessary and encourageable.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are thankful to all informants of the Gurung community, Siddhalek-2, Dhading for sharing their knowledge. We are also grateful to Mr Deepak Gautam for his proper guidance and encouragement in this work. Our sincerely thank to Mr Subash Gurung, senior GIS officer of Dro Nepal Pvt.Ltd for providing map of the study area.

## DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The study did not receive any funding. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Appendix

No	Binomial denomination	Family	Local name	Part	Diseases	Preparation
1.	<i>Acorus calamus</i>	Acoraceae	Bojho	Rhizome	Cough & tonsillitis	The rhizome cut into small pieces is dried and consumed.
2.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Rutaceae	Bel	Fruit	Diarrhea	The fruit juice is consumed as a cure to diarrhea.
3.	<i>Aloe vera</i>	Asphodelaceae	Ghiukumari	Gel	Burnt area	The leaf's leathery gel is applied to burnt areas.
4.	<i>Allium hyssistum</i>	Amaryllidaceae	Jimbu	Leaf	Cough & cold	Dried leaves are boiled and the decoction is consumed to cure cough and cold.
5.	<i>Anomum subulatum</i>	Zingiberaceae	Alaichi	Seed	Cold	The seed is chewed directly.
6.	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Asteraceae	Titepati	Leaf	Scabies	Fresh leaves are grinded and the paste is applied during baths.
7.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Meliaceae	Ncem	Leaf	Toothache	The decoction of leaves is gargled.
8.	<i>Bauhinia variegata</i>	Fabaceae	Koirala	Bark	Back pain, diarrhea	The Bark and flower are grinded and juiced for ingestion.
9.	<i>Benincasa hispida</i>	Cucurbitaceae	Kuvindo	Fruit	Coolant	The fruit is consumed freshly or after drying.
10.	<i>Bombax ceiba</i>	Malvaceae	Simal	Root	Dandruff	Juice from grinded root is applied as a hair wash.
11.	<i>Brassica campestris</i>	Brassicaceae	Tori	Seed	Back pain	The oil extracted from seeds is applied.
12.	<i>Callicarpa macrophylla</i>	Verbenaceae	Dangelo	Fruit, root	Fever, sore throat, and tongue	Freshly plucked fruit is consumed for sore throat and tongue. Similarly, the root is grinded to paste and applied to forehead to treat fever.
13.	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Caricaceae	Mewaa	Fruit, leaf	Jaundice, dengue	The fresh fruit and leaf juice are consumed.
14.	<i>Cassia fistula</i>	Fabaceae	Raajbrikshya	Fruit	Constipation	Fruit is consumed freshly or in dried form.
15.	<i>Cassia tora</i>	Fabaceae	Taapre	Seed	Cough	Seed is dried and consumed.
16.	<i>Centella asiatica</i>	Apiaceae	Ghodtaapre	The whole plant	Urinary disorder, coolant	Four teaspoons of the whole plant juice are consumed six times a day.
17.	<i>Chelanthus dalhousiae</i>	Chilanthoidae	Raanisinka	The whole plant	Stomach ache, gastritis	The whole plant juice is consumed.
18.	<i>Chenopodium album</i>	Amaranthaceae	Bethe	Leaf	Back pain	Leaf boiled in water is consumed.
19.	<i>Citrus limon</i>	Rutaceae	Kaagati	fruit, leaf	Antiseptic, choked voice	Fresh leaf is chewed to cure choked voice and the fruit juice is used as an antiseptic.



20.	<i>Cleistocalyx operculatus</i>	Myrtaceae	Kyamuno	Leaf	Sinusitis	Leaf is steamed or smoked.
21.	<i>Cratogeomys unilocularis</i>	Capparadaceae	Siplegaan	Leaf, tender shoot	Hypertension, kidney stones	Young leaf and tender shoot is boiled and squeezed to remove bitterness. It's then consumed in form of vegetable and pickle.
22.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Poaceae	Dubo	The whole plant	Haemorrhage, stomachache	The whole plant juice is consumed.
23.	<i>Delphinium cooperi</i>	Ranunculaceae	Nirmasi	Root	Food poisoning	Root is grinded to paste and mixed with water for consumption.
24.	<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i>	Dioscoreaceae	Gittha	Tuber	Chest pain	Steamed tubers are consumed.
25.	<i>Diplolnem abutyraeae</i>	Sapotaceae	Chiuri	Seed	Wound	Seed is grinded to paste and applied.
26.	<i>Erythrina stricta</i>	Fabaceae	Faledo	Bark	Diarrhea, body coolant	The bark is grinded and juiced for consumption.
27.	<i>Esholtzia blanda</i>	Lamiaceae	Rudilo	Leaf	Fever, pneumonia	The leaf is grinded to paste and applied to forehead.
28.	<i>Fagopyrum dibotrys</i>	Polygonaceae	Phaapar	Seed	Body coolant	The seed is grinded to flour and consumed.
29.	<i>Ficus racemosa</i>	Moraceae	Dumri	Latex	Cuts and wound	Milky latex is applied on cuts and wounds.
30.	<i>Ficus semicordata</i>	Moraceae	Khanaayo	Bark, latex	Bone Fracture, cuts	The tourniquet made of its bark is used in bone fractures and the latex is applied to stop bleeding from cuts.
31.	<i>Girardinia diversifolia</i>	Urticaceae	Chaalnesissno	Leaf	Tonic	Leaves are cooked together with maize powder in water and ingested.
32.	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	Hypericaceae	Oraale	Leaf	Burnt area	Leaves are grinded to paste and applied on burnt areas.
33.	<i>Jatropha curcas</i>	Euphorbiaceae	Sajjiwan	Latex	Wound	The latex is applied to cure wounds.
34.	<i>Juglans regia</i>	Juglandaceae	Okhar	Fruit	Liver cirrhosis	The fruit is grinded together with lemon and <i>Oxalis corniculata</i> and juiced.
35.	<i>Lyona ovalifolia</i>	Ericaceae	Angeri	Leaf	Scabies	Leaves are grinded to paste and applied on skin.
36.	<i>Macrotyloma uniflorum</i>	Fabaceae	Gahat	Seed	Body coolant, Kidney stone	Seeds are cooked and consumed.
37.	<i>Mallotus philippensis</i>	Euphorbiaceae	Sindure	Bark	Abdominal disorder	The bark is grinded and juiced for consumption.
38.	<i>Melia azedarach</i>	Meliaceae	Bakaino	Bark	Anthelmintic	The bark is grinded and juiced for consumption.
39.	<i>Mimosa pudica</i>	Fabaceae	Lajjawatijhaar	Root	Diarrhea	The root grinded to paste is consumed.
40.	<i>Myrica esculenta</i>	Myricaceae	kafal	Bark	Menstrual disorder	Its bark is boiled together with <i>QJanatubark</i> . The decoction prepared is ingested then.
41.	<i>Nyctanthes arbor tristis</i>	Oleaceae	Parijat	Leaf	Asthma, cough	The leaf is grinded and juiced for consumption.
42.	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	Lamiaceae	Baabari	Seed, leaf	Cold, fever	Seeds and leaves are grinded to paste and applied to forehead for curing fever. Leaves boiled in water are steamed for cold.
43.	<i>Oroxylum indicum</i>	Bignoniaceae	Tatelo	Bark	Rheumatic problem	Juice derived of bark and flower is consumed.
44.	<i>Oxalis corniculata</i>	Oxallidaceae	Chari amilo	The whole plant	Abdominal disorder, liver cirrhosis	The whole plant is grinded together with lemon and <i>Juglans regia</i> . Then the juice derived is consumed.
44.	<i>Oxalis corniculata</i>	Oxallidaceae	Chari amilo	The whole plant	Abdominal disorder, liver cirrhosis	The whole plant is grinded together with lemon and <i>Juglans regia</i> . Then the juice derived is consumed.
45.	<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>	Leguminosae	Simi	Leaf	Ringworm	Leaves grinded to paste is applied.
46.	<i>Phoenix humilis</i>	Arecaceae	Thaakal	Root, fruit	Pneumonia, urinary disorder	The root juice is consumed to cure pneumonia and fresh fruits are consumed for urinary disorders.
47.	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>	Phyllanthaceae	Amala	Bark	Diarrhea	The bark together with barks of <i>Pisidiumgujava</i> and <i>Cinnamomumtamala</i> is grinded and consumed.
48.	<i>Pisidium guajava</i>	Myrtaceae	Ambaa	Bark	Diarrhea	The bark grinded to paste and mixed with water is consumed.
49.	<i>Rhododendron arboretum</i>	Ericaceae	Laaliguras	Flower, bark	Bone prick, giardiasis	Petals of the flower is chewed to remove bone prick in neck. The bark juice is consumed to get rid of giardiasis.
50.	<i>Rhus chinensis</i>	Anacardiaceae	Bhakiamilo	Fruit	Diarrhea, gastritis	Fruits are consumed directly.
51.	<i>Schima wallichii</i>	Theaceae	Chilaune	Bark	Cuts	Bark is dried and grinded to powder and applied on cuts and wounds.
52.	<i>Scutellaria discolor</i>	Lamiaceae	Raatpaate	The whole plant	Fever	The whole plant is grinded to paste and applied to forehead.
53.	<i>Smilax ovalifolia</i>	Smilacaceae	Kukurdaine	Leaf, root	Tonic, menstrual disorder	Juice from leaf is consumed





54.	<i>Terminalia chebula</i>	Combretaceae	Harro	Fruit	Cough, throat sore	The fruit is roasted and chewed.
55.	<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>	Menispermaceae	Gurjo	whole plant	Abdominal disorder	The juice of leaf and decoction of stem is prepared and ingested.
56.	<i>Trigonella foenum</i>	Fabaceae	Methi	Seed	Maternal disorders	The seed soup is consumed during maternity to increase lactation and stop bleeding.
57.	<i>Viscum album</i>	Santalaceae	Harchul	Root	Bone fracture	The root grinded to paste is applied along with a toumiquet made of <i>Ficus semicordata</i> bark for cracked bones.
58.	<i>Vitex negundo</i>	Verbenaceae	Simali	Leaf	Fever	Leaf is grinded to paste and applied to forehead region.
59.	<i>Zanthoxylum armatum</i>	Rutaceae	Timur	Seed	Diarrhea	The soup of powdered seeds is consumed.
60.	<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i>	Capparaceae	Bayar	Leaf	Eye stye	Leaf is grinded into paste and applied to affected region