Use of Medicinal Plants in Traditional Tibetan Therapy System in Upper Mustang, Nepal

M. R. Pandey

National Trust for Nature Conservation-Annapurna Conservation Area Project

Received: 10.11.2006; Accepted: 15.12.2006

Abstract

The paper deals with 93 species of medicinal plants belonging to 74 genera spread over 35 families, which are used in traditional Tibetan therapy system by *amchis* (medical practitioners) in Upper Mustang.

Key words: Amchis, Medicinal plants, Tibetan therapy system, Upper Mustang

Introduction

Majority of total population of Nepal are traditional dependent on medicinal practices. According to an estimation of the World Health Organization, approximately 80% of the people in developing countries depend on traditional medicines for primary health care; a major portion of these involves the use of medicinal plants. As the traditional Himalayan medicine has affected the lives of people around the globe. Upper Mustang is also not the exception. Upper Mustang has characteristic features of Tibetan culture and environment, so Tibetan system of therapy has been practiced since time immemorial. Such type of traditional medicinal practice is a good example of traditional knowledge system, in which, parents to children passes down medicinal knowledge from generation to generation. This area has played a significant role in the historical processes of traditional Tibetan therapy system for understanding the development processes.

Upper Mustang has great wealth of medicinal plants and traditional knowledge. Medicinal value of plants is largely based

on the Tibetan system of treatment and *amchis* are skilled persons to prescribe them. *Amchis* or medical practitioners are the health service providers in the remote highland districts of Nepal such as Mustang, Dolpa, Humla, Mugu, Gorkha and Rasuwa. An Amchi is very much like a doctor having multiple skills who provides diagnoses and treatments (Bista *et al.*, 2002). *Amchis* are responsible for the conservation of high altitude medicinal plants having good knowledge of biology and ecology.

The study area (N 28° 47' 39" to 29° 19' 54" and E 83° 28' 55" to 84° 15'16") is located in the Trans Himalayan region of Nepal. It is the northern part of Mustang district extended up to the Tibetan autonomous region of China to the northeast, Dolpo district to the west and by peaks reaching more than 6000 m. to the south. It occupies the major portion (2567.55 sq. km.) of Annapurna Conservation Area (7629 sq. km.), the largest protected area in Nepal (33.7%). It is a cold high altitude steppe that falls in the rain shadow of Dhaulagiri Himal and the Annapurna massif to the south. The

ethnic composition of Upper Mustang is exclusively of *Lo* (Tibetan) origin and they are called as *Loba*. The caste system prevails differentiating the elite and high caste Bista followed by Gurung as middle caste and then Biswokarma as occupational caste.

This study is based on the various surveys carried out by National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)-Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP)/ Upper Mustang Biodiversity Conservation Project (UMBCP) for the effective biodiversity conservation in Upper Mustang area.

Materials and methods

The study was carried out in all seven Village Development Committees (VDCs) - Chhoser, Chhonhup, Lo Manthang, Tsarang, Surkhang, Ghami and Chhuksang of Upper Mustang during 2004 to 2005. Interviews were conducted with various *amchis* of Upper Mustang, practicing both in the area and Kathmandu. The information is based on the first-hand information gathered from *amchis* and through personal observation of author on the use of remedies. The information was also cross-checked with different *amchis*. The classification of plants is based on the Flowers of Himalaya (Polunin and Stainton, 1997; Stainton, 1997).

Results and discussion

In order to provide more detailed information on the most important and therapeutically

useful herbs/plants, 93 plants (Table 1) have been selected. In traditional Tibetan therapy, the herbal medicine includes mineral and animal products as well as plants, but this paper is focused only on medicinal plants that are found in Upper Mustang area. The recorded medicinal plants belong to 74 genera spread over 35 families (Table 2). Among them, Compositae is the largest family containing 9 species, followed by Labiatae (7 species). Gentianaceae, Polygonaceae and Ranunculaceae containing 6 species each and Primulaceae 5, where as Boraginaceae, Leguminosae, Rosaceae, Scrophulariaceae and Umbelliferae has 4 each.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to *amchis* Ghyatsho Bista, Tenzing Bista (Lama), Rinjin Wangel Gurung, Tashi Namgyal Gurung and Tenjing Dharke Gurung and local people of Upper Mustang for their valuable help through out the study. Thanks are due to Mr. Madhu Chetri, NTNC-ACAP/UMBCP for his valuable suggestions and Ranger Mr. Basudev Neupane for collecting information.

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S N	Plant species	Family	Tibetan/l ocal name	Nepali Name	English Name	Part used	Medicinal use and action	Remarks
1	Allium fasciculatum	Amaryllidaceae	Rhi Ghokpa	Limbu	Wild garlic	Whole plant	Wounds and swelling	Used as vegetable and flavor
2	Allium hypsistum	Amaryllidaceae	Jimnak	Jimbu	Chives/Nep al aromatic leaf garlic	Whole plant	Cough, cold, gastritis and tonic	Used as vegetable and flavor
3	Arisaema flavum	Araceae	Dahpa	Timju	Cobra plant/Cobra lily	Root, rhizom e and flower	Fever, stomach problems, swelling, skin diseases, scabies, bone disease, uterus and menstrual disorders	Used as vegetable
4	Arisaema jacquemontii	Araceae	Dahpa	Timju	Cobra plant/Cobra lily	Root, rhizom e and flower	Fever, stomach problems, swelling, toothache, scabies, chest infection, uterus and menstrual disorders, anthelmintic and throat problems	Used as vegetable
5	Berberis erythroclada	Berberidaceae	Kerba Nakpo	Chutro	Barberry	Bark	Gall bladder and eye problems	
6	Betula utilis	Betulaceae	Takpa	Bhoj Patra	Himalayan Birch	Bark, resin, fruit and leaf	Antiseptic, hysteria, cuts, wounds, burns, jaundice, ear pain, asthma, cough, cold, internal injury and menstruation	Used as timber and fuel wood
7	Incarvillea arguta	Bignoniaceae	Uag Chhoy	Surya Pushpi	Bignonia	Whole	Tooth decay	Plant juice used
8	Incarvillea younghusban dii	Bignoniaceae	Ukche	Surya Pushpi	Bignonia	Root and fruit	Cough, ear problem and for quick release of placenta	,
9	Arnebia sp.	Boraginaceae	Mukchi	Marangi	Onosma	Root	Fever caused due to lung problem, blood purification, hypertension, cough and body pain	

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10	Cynoglossum sp.	Boraginaceae	Nema Jarma			Leaf, stem, flower and fruit	Swelling, bone fracture, cuts and tumors	
11	Lindelofia sp.	Boraginaceae	Dewa Yuchung			Whole plant	Cuts, wounds and swelling	
12	Maharanga emodi	Boraginaceae	Dhimok	Marangi	Onosma	Whole plant	Hypertension, fever caused due to lung problem, blood purification, skin diseases, rheumatism, urinary disorders and as hair tonic	Roots mixed with mustard oil render the hair black and red colour is extracted from root bark and is used for food stuff
13	Lonicera hypoleuca	Caprifoliaceae	Tukser	Masino Kanike	Honey suckle/Wild honey suckle	Whole plant	Kidney problems	
14	Chenopodiu m album	Chenopodiaceae	Niew	Bethe	Lamb's quarter/Fat hen	Seed, tender leaf and stem	Stomach trouble, piles, peptic ulcer, fracture, bone improvement and anaemia fever	Young leaves are eaten as vegetable and is a good source of iron
15	Anaphalis triplinervis	Compositae	Taygun	Himali Buki Phool	Everlasting	Leaf and flower	Food poisoning, diuretic and heat therapy	
16	Arctium lappa	Compositae	Chisyung	Tine	Common or Great burdock	Whole plant and seed	Intestinal problem, nerve building, chronic diseases like ulcer, stomach pain and gastritis, fever by wind, plant paste is used for blisters, burns, pimples	
17	Artemisia biennis	Compositae	Sar Bung Karpo	Tite Pati	Mug wort	Whole plant root	Cough and cold	Used as incense as well
18	Aster stracheyi	Compositae	Lungmi Chhewa		Aster	Flower and leaf	Wounds, poisoning, contagious fever and headache	

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19	Inula sp.	Compositae	Mhanupat a	Puskar Mul/Rasan a	Inula	Leaf and root	Anaemia, gastritis, fever, gall bladder problem, heat promotion and digestion	
20	Leontopodiu m jacotianum	Compositae	Tah	Himali Buki Phool	Edelweiss	Flower and leaf	Heat therapy for cold originated diseases	Used as incense as well
21	Saussurea gossypiphora	Compositae	Kuth	Kapase Phool	Costus/Kut h	Whole plant	Gynaecological and menstrual disorders, hysteria, cuts, bruises, cough	Also used to guard against evil spirits
22	Soroseris hookeriana	Compositae	Solgong Serpo			Whole plant (flower	Fever, fracture, hypertension and purgative	
23	Taraxacum officinale	Compositae	Khur Mang	Tuki Phool/Dud he Jhar	Bitter Wort / Dandelion	Root	Chronic disorders of kidney and liver and also used as tonic, laxative and antirheumatic	
24	Juniperus indica	Cupressaceae	Lha shuk	Dhupi	Juniper	Fruit and leaf	Kidney, lung, gall bladder and liver disorders, skin and lymph disease, fever, cough, paralysis of limbs, disorder of uterus and gum swelling	Used as incense and as flavor in some cosmetics and drinks
25	Juniperus squamata	Cupressaceae	Syug Chher	Dhupi	Juniper	Fruit and leaf	Removal of accumulated body fluid, sleeping problem, kidney problems, bleeding, skin disease and wound infection	Used as incense as well
26	Pterocephalu s hookeri	Dipsacaceae	Pangchi Dhobo	Panri Mendo		Whole plant (Leaf, flower and fruit)	Food poisoning, fluid accumulation in the body, cough, cold, contagious fever, infection, dysentery, gout, arthritis, blood disorders	

27	Hippophae tibetana	Elaeagnaceae	Tora	Bhuin Chuk	Seabucktho rn	Fruit and seed	Gastritis, chest pain, lung problem, digestive disorder, liver pain, fever, blood purification, external use on	Ripe fruits are used to make juice which is considere d as highly
28	Ephedra gerardiana	Ephedraceae	Chhe Dum	Somlata	Ephedra	Whole plant	skin for bone pain Hypertension, cardiac trouble, bleeding, indigestion, asthma, increase blood quantity in body, eye trouble, gastritis, bronchial disorders, cough, wounds, headache and rheumatism	Also an important source of Ephedrin e. This plant is also a substitute of Amonum subulatu m (Cardamo m) in Amchi and Ayurved use
29	Rhododendro n anthopogon	Ericaceae	Dhali Karpo	Sunpati	Rhododendr on/Anthopo gon leaf	Flower and leaf	Stomach, liver and lung disorders, T.B., indigestion, antiallergic against potato, vomiting, appetizer, sore throat, phlegm disease, as pain killer and longevity	Flowers are locally used to prepare tea. Essential oil obtained from leaves are used in high grade perfume. Leaves and flowers are also used as incense with juniper

30	Rhododendro n lepidotum	Ericaceae	Dhali Karpo	Sano Chimal	Rhododendr on	Flower and leaf	Digestion, appetizer, bile and lung diseases, back pain, cold and blood disorders and bone diseases	Leaves are used as incense
31	Rhododendro n nivale	Ericaceae	Dhali Nag Po	Sano Chimal	Rhododendr on	Flower and leaf	Sinusitis, arthritis gout and common cold	
32	Gentiana algida	Gentianaceae	Pangen Chhuwa	Hans Phool	Gentian	Flower	Lung disorder and skin diseases	
33	Gentiana robusta	Gentianaceae	Khyi Chye Karpo	Hans Phool	Gentian	Flower , stem, leaf and root	Diarrhoea, food poisoning, headache, T.B., urinary system and bile disorder, swelling, cough and fever	
34	Gentianella moorcroftian a	Gentianaceae	Dhumpu/ Tikta			Whole plant	Fever	Infusion of plant is put on the baby 's forehead to reduce fever (Febrifug e)
35	Gentianella paludosa	Gentianaceae	Chyag Tig Nagpo			Root	Headache	
36	Halenia elliptica	Gentianaceae	Tikta/Cha kting			Leaf and stem	Liver and bile disorders, fever, headache, cough and cold	
37	Swertia sp.	Gentianaceae	Tikta	Chiraito	Swertia/Chi retta	Whole plant	Fever, jaundice, indigestion, cough, cold, blood and gall bladder problems	
38	Geranium donianum	Geraniaceae	Ligadur	Raklamul	Geranium/C rane's bill	Root	Fever, cough and bodyache	
39	Geranium nakaoanum	Geraniaceae	Ligadur	Raklamul	Geranium/C rane's bill	Root	Fever, cough and bodyache	
40	Geranium pratense	Geraniaceae	Ligadur/P or	Raklamul	Geranium/C rane's bill	Root	Fever, cough and bodyache	Not considere d as of good quality compared to G.

								donianum and G. nakaoanu m
41	Cordyceps sinensis	Нуросгеасеае	Yarcha Gumba	Yarcha gumba		Whole plant	Asthma, aphrodisiac, lung and kidney disorders and energizer like vitamin	
42	Ajuga lupulina	Labiateae	Jinting	Rato Paat	Bugle	Seed, leaf and flower	Fever, sinusitis, infections, menstrual disorders, swellings, skin diseases and paralysis	
43	Dracocephal um heterophyllu m	Labiateae	Jibkar	Jibkar		Leaf and flower	Oral diseases, toothache and liver disorder	
44	Dracocephal um tanguticum	Labiateae	Tiyanku	Tiyanku		Leaf, flower and stem	Fever, stomach problems and as blood purifier	
45	Elsholtzia sp.	Labiateae	Jirung Serpo	Ban Silam		Whole plant	Anthelmintic and antibacterial	
46	Phlomis rotata	Labiateae	Takpak		Phlomis	Flower and leaf	Bone problems, accumulation of serous fluids in the bone, skin and wound part of the body, headache, fever, cough, worm infections and swelling caused by cold	
47	Salvia hians	Labiateae	Simthik	Aape	Sage	Leaf	Eye infection	
48	Thymus linearis	Labiateae	Maktok/M akta	Ghode Marcha	Thyme	Leaf and flower	Appetizer, stimulant, blood purifier, digestive and lungs problems and gum and tooth problems	Leaves are used as flavor and substitute for tea and chilly
49	Astragalus sp.	Leguminosae	Syehekar	Bhya		Seed	Urine blocked, intestinal pain and fever	and chirty

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50	Caragana gerardiana	Leguminosae	Jhomo Shing	Kanda	Caragana	Heart wood	Blood pressure, menstrual disorder, skin diseases, cough, heart pain, blood disorder and eye problems	Heart wood is used in blood pressure
51	Caragana jubata	Leguminosae	Jhomo Shing	Kanda	Caragana	Heart wood	Blood pressure and menstrual disorder	
52	Oxytropis sp.	Leguminosae	Senak			Whole plant	Dog- bite	
53	Asparagus sp.	Liliaceae	Nye Shing	Kurilo	Asparagus	Root	Tonic, sexual debility, diarrhoea, dysentery, excessive menstrual bleeding, urinogenital disorders, skin disease and rheumatism	Root is also used as an alternativ e to soap
54	Polygonatum sp.	Liliaceae	Rahnge	Khiraunla	Solomon's Seal	Root	Uterus problem, digestion, cold, bile disorder, aphrodisiac, increase regenerative fluids, beneficial in cold wind disorders and as tonic to restore vitality	Roots are eaten raw and the plant is also used as fixer in painting canvas/w alls
55	Malva verticillata	Malvaceae	Chyamba Pho	Lafe Saag	Chinese Mallow/Pop py mallow	Stem, leaf, fruit and flower	Removal for accumulated body fluid and treatment for wound infection, fever, diarrhoea, kidney and urinary problems	Also used as vegetable
56	Dactylorhiza hatagirea	Orchidaceae	Wang-lak	Panch Aunle	Orchid	Rhizo me	Dysentery, dirrhoea, skin burn, chronic fever, eye pain, expectorant, aphrodisiac and nervine tonic	
57	Corydalis megacalyx	Papaveraceae	Tonzil Serpo	Bhoot Kesh/Karm e Jhar	Corydalis	Whole plant	Chronic fever, jaundice, bile fever, wounds, cough, ulcer	

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							and blood disorder	
58	Meconopsis horridula	Papaveraceae	Aachyak/ Serngon	Kyaser	Himalayan Blue Poppy	Root, leaf and flower	Bone fracture, kidney problems, remove accumulated body fluid and as pain killer	
59	Plantago major	Plantagiaceae	Tharam	Isabgol	Ripple grass	Seed, leaf and root	Diarrhoea, dysentery, intestinal problems, fever, bruises and as tonic	
60	Bistorta sp.	Polygonaceae	Lakang/Pa ngram	Khaldi/Rak tyaulo	Hypertensio n, diarrhoea, lung and intestinal disorder	Root and fruit	Blood pressure, diarrhoea, lung and intestinal disorders	
61	Oxyria digyna	Polygonaceae	Chhumach i	Sano Padamchal	Mountain sorrel	Rhizo me, leaf and flower	Fracture, joint pain, lymph disorder and urine retention	
62	Rheum australe	Polygonaceae	Chutra	Padamehal	Himalayan rhubarb	Whole plant (Root and petiole)	Bone fractures, sprain, indigestion, bloated stomach, gastritis, swellings, sores, menstrual and blood disorders, bile fever and as anthelmintic	Leaf stalks are eaten raw and used as pickle. Roots are used as substitute of tea. Also used for colouring wool and as fixative
63	Rheum moorcroftian um	Polygonaceae		Padamchal	Himalayan rhubarb	Root	Fever, gastritis and swellings	Leaf stalks are eaten raw and used as pickle. Roots are used as substitute of tea
64	Rumex nepalensis	Polygonaceae	Shyomang	Ban Palungo/H alhale	Sorrel/Yello w doek	Whole plant	Fever, cough, blood clotting, excretory system and oral disorders, joint pain, wounds,	Leaf stalks are eaten raw and used as pickle

	D						lung and liver diseases, constipation, sores and skin diseases	
65	Rumex patientia	Polygonaceae	Shyomang	Ban Palungo/H alhale	Sorrel/Yello w doek	Root	Swellings and constipation	Leaf stalks are eaten raw and used as pickle
66	Androsace muscoidea	Primulaceae	Pangatum		Rock Jasmine	Flower	Fever and urinary problems	
67	Androsace sp.	Primulaceae	Pangatum		Rock Jasmine	Leaf and flower	Cough, lung and throat problems	
68	Androsace strigillosa	Primulaceae	Gatik- chungwa		Rock Jasmine	Flower and leaf	Fever, body swelling and lymph disorder	
69	Primula macrophylla	Primulaceae	Shang Dril Nagpo	Primula	Prime Rose/Primu la	Whole plant	Food poisoning, fever, indigestion, dysentery and ulcer	
70	Primula sikkimensis	Primulaceae		Primula	Prime Rose/Primu la	Flower	Fevers of lung, blood vein disorders and diarrhoea	Generally used in case of children
71	Aconitum naviculare	Ranunculaceae	Pogmar	Bish	Aconite/Ati s root	Tuber	Fever, gall bladder disorder, food poisoning and communicable diseases	
72	Anemone rivularis	Ranunculaceae	Supka Karpo	Pati Dhuk	Pasque flower/Ane mone	Fruit and seed	Wound, accumulation of serous fluid in the body, gastritis, liver and bile disorders, cough, cold and for heat production	
73	Anemone rupicola	Ranunculaceae	Supka Karpo	Pati Dhuk	Pasque flower/Ane mone	Seed	Indigestion	
74	Clematis tibetana	Ranunculaceae	Ngihmong	Junge Lahara	Old man beard	Root, stem, leaf, flower and fruit	Removal of accumulated fluid from the body, cold tumours, cough, cold, indigestion, joint pain, swellings, constipation,	

				1			wound	
							infection, as appetizer and for heat production	
75	Delphinium sp.	Ranunculaceae	Jakang	Nirmasi	Aconite/Lar kspur	Leaf and flower	Diarrhoea, intestinal disorders, wounds and used to kill lice	
76	Thalictrum sp.	Ranunculaceae	Chag Kyu	Bansuli/Da mpate	Meadow rue	Root, leaf and flower	Wounds and infection, fever, antiseptic and poisoning	
77	Cotoneaster sp.	Rosaceae	Chadung	Dhalke Phool	Cotoneaster	Whole plant	Menstrual disorder and joint pain	
78	Potentilla fruticosa	Rosaceae	Pemma Nhakpo	Bhairab Pati	Shrubby cinquefoil/ Bush cinquefoil	Stem, leaf and flower	Breast diseases, stomach and lung disorders, indigestion and dysentery	Plants are also used as incense. Leaves are used as a substitute for tea
79	Rosa macrophylla	Rosaceae	Segoe Fo	Jungali Gulab	Wild Rose	Fruit	Fever, diarrhoea and bile disorders	Fruits can be taken raw and also used for making wine.
80	Rosa sericea	Rosaceae	Se Gyoh	Bhote Gulab	Wild Rose/Himal ayan Rose	Flower , fruit and bark	Fever, jaundice, liver, bile, wind and lung diseases, menstrual disorders, poisoning, lymph fluid disorder and as tonic	Ripe fruits can be taken raw. Flowers are used as facial wash. This plant is used as herbal tea.
81	Salix sp.	Salicaceae		Bains	Willow	Stem	Venereal disease, uterus problem, fever and arthritis	
82	Lagotis kunawurensi s	Scrophulariaceae	Hoanglen	Baraka	Lagotis	Whole plant	Diarrhoea, T. B., Pyrexia unknown origin (PUO) and excess bleeding from the wound	

83	Lancea tibetica	Scrophulariaceae	Payokcha wa			Root, leaf, flower	Lung and urinary bladder problems	
						and berry	mainly urine blocked,	
							wound infection, fever,	
							cuts, wounds, menstruation	
							problem, heart disease and	
							problems of veins	
84	Pedicularis longiflora	Scrophulariaceae	Lukru Serpo	Jumre Jhar	Lousewort	Flower and	Food poisoning,	Also used as hair
						whole plant	stomach and lymph fluid	dye
						1	disorders, T.	
							B., diarrhoea, asthma, wound	
							infection, premature	
							ejaculation,	
							fever due to disorders of	
							liver and gall	
85	Verbascum	Scrophulariaceae	Nho Sarje	Gan	Mullein	Whole	bladder Swellings,	
0.5	thapsus	Scrophulariaceae	14110 Sarje	Puchchhre	Within	plant	asthma, cough,	
						and	blood disorder,	
						root	bleeding, wounds and	
							cuts	
86	Hyoscyamus niger	Solanaceae	Langh Thang	Bajra Bhang	Henbane	Seed	Sinusitis, intestinal	
	niger		Che	Dilang			parasites,	
							diarrhoea and	
							worm infections	
87	Stellera	Thymelaeaceae	Ri Jyakpa	Ramro	Stellera	Root	Poultice for	Smell of
	chamaejasme			Phool/Reke mukta			swellings and fractured	the flower
				mukta			bones, for	headache.
							massage,	
							antiseptic for cuts and	
							wounds,	
							analgesic, infectious	
							diseases,	
							gastritis and	
							ulcer	

88	Carum carvi	Umbelliferae	Gyoh Nge	Bhote Jira	Himalayan Caraway	Whole plant	Cold, cough, fever, food poisoning, eye infection, gastric dysfunction, stomachache and carminative	The seeds are used for the preparatio n of massage oil for baby. The powder of the seed is employed to flavour vegetable s and curries
89	Cortia depressa	Umbelliferae	Tang Kyun			Flower and leaf	Fever, rheumatism, sedative and stomachache	
90	Heracleum lallii	Umbelliferae	Tukar	Bhoot Kesh		Root and fruit	Stomach disorders, earache, leprosy, joint pain and blood pressure	
91	Selinum tenuifolium	Umbelliferae	Tunak	Jwane Ghans/Bha draji	Ragwort	Root	Antiseptic, gastritis, hemorrhage, cough and cold	
92	Nardostachy s grandiflora	Valerianaceae	Pangpyo	Jatamasi	Spikenard/ Valerian	Whole plant	Lung, heart and liver problems, wounds, cough, cold, chronic fever, fever due to poisoning, spleen disease, intestinal parasites, hypertension, tumours, swellings, high altitude sickness, headache, epilepsy, hysteria, skin diseases, throat trouble, lumbago, ulcers, rheumatism, paralysis and diuretic	Whole plant is used as incense with Rhododen dron anthopog on, Tanacetu m nubigenu m and Juniperus spp.
93	Viola biflora	Violaceae	Ta Mig	Panhelo Ghatte Phool	Violet/Wild pancy	Whole plant	Wounds, fractured bones, bile and head disorders	