## Module 3 Arguments and reasoning

### Handout

## Nepal’s rich indigenous medical knowledge is under threat

Adapted from a press release on the INASP webpage <http://www.inasp.info/en/news/details/241/>

A recent research article published in ‘Journal of Institute of Science and Technology’ explores indigenous knowledge systems in the Darai community living in the Chitwan Valley in Nepal, some 200 kilometres southwest of the capital Kathmandu. The article, available online on the NepJOL platform supported by INASP, describes this community’s usage of animal and plant products to treat various diseases and ailments as a result of rich indigenous knowledge.

The Darai people – better known for their skills in weaving bamboo baskets – use 28 animal species to treat 22 different types of ailments, and 76 plant species to treat 36 types of ailments ranging from simple diseases like common cold and headache to complex diseases like typhoid, the research found. In the case of animals, flesh, eggs, fat, bone etc. are used. In the case of plants, leaves, roots, fruits, flower, bark etc. are used. Mostly the products are consumed raw. They are also consumed as paste, cooked, dried, in liquor and powder form.

Darai is only one of the dozens of communities living in the hills, mountains and the plains of Nepal which has rich indigenous knowledge. Dr Singh has studied many of them and has found that the indigenous knowledge system is very rich. However, the rich knowledge of the community passed on from generation to generation orally is now facing a risk because of the swift modernization, introduction of the internet, easy access and availability of allopathic medicine, and the younger generation’s desire to migrate out of the village and adopt modern lifestyles. It is worrying that people are forgetting the traditional medicinal practices and depending solely on modern medicines. “For that exact reason, it is important to document the traditional knowledge,” says Dr Singh. “And we have done it in detail in a very scientific way.”

“Local people have suggested effectiveness and demonstrated success in the use of traditional medicines for curing and controlling diseases. While modern medicine has its own value, it is never sufficient alone to treat all types of illnesses.” says Dr Singh. “That is why an integrated system comprising of the best practices of different systems of allopathic and traditional systems should be applied in healthcare.”

“… modern medicines have been developed from certain compounds extracted from various types of plants and animals”, Dr Singh explains. As there is a huge value in the indigenous knowledge that hasn’t been put to use so far, Dr Singh concludes that research in this field should continue. He believes the focus of next research initiatives should be on extracting the molecules of the traditional medicines and putting them to scientific tests.

Dr Singh adds “We are working to set up a laboratory at the department for molecular research.” He believes that the article, along with the other research he has done on indigenous knowledge systems, could be an important stepping stone to conduct large-scale research to improve Nepal’s public health system.

Poudel, M. and Singh, N.B., ‘Medical ethno-biology and indigenous knowledge system found in Darai ethnic group of Chitwan, Nepal’, Journal of ‘Institute of Science and Technology’, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Aug 2016), pp. 103–111. This article is available online on the NepJOL platform, which is supported by INASP and maintained by TUCL.