



## Indigenous Wisdom and Folk Healing Practices among Urban Oromo's of Ethiopia: A Case Study of Jimma and Agaro Towns

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### **Abstract**

This study focuses on documenting and exploring the utilization, spiritual and philosophical aspect and preparation of traditional (folk) medicinal plants among urban Oromo's of Jimma and Agaro town, Ethiopia. A total of 14 informants within the age group of 43 to 79 were interviewed several times with regard to different folk medicinal plants. About 30 folk medicinal plants species were classified across three types, based on part of the plant used for medicinal purpose, have been documented with their corresponding scientific names in this paper. The study indicates that traditional/cultural/folk medicinal plants used by the urban Oromo's of Jimma and Agaro towns are under serious risk due to external and internal influences. The expansion and dominance of western culture, technology and scientific knowledge system has greatly impacting the younger generation from preserving the knowledge of their fore fathers in general, and folk healing wisdoms and practices in particular. Thus, attention should be given for the preservation of these plants and folk healer's wisdom.

**Keywords:** Folkloric; Folk Healer; Folk Medicinal Plants; Spiritual; Wisdom

### **1. Introduction**

Throughout their history, human beings have been using various types of medications to treat and prevent diseases. These medications included different beliefs and indigenous practices that have traditionally existed system of medicine, which are collectively known today as 'folk medicine'.

The history of folk medicine goes as far back as 3700 BC when the ancient Egyptians began utilizing long before the introduction of modern medicine (Singh, nd). Today, it is reported that about 75–90% of the population in the world relies on traditional medicine as their only healthcare system (Behailu., 2010). The report of WHO (2002) also asserts that majority of the population of developing countries, including 80% of the African population, primarily rely on folk medicinal plants for their healthcare. Among African countries, Ethiopia is one of the countries where about 60% of the plants are said to be indigenous with their healing potential (Bannerman et al., 1983). This is true in Ethiopia where nearly 80% of the population still relies on plants to prevent and cure various health problems (Dawit & Ahadu., 1993).

Similarly, the Oromo society had protected their own (and of course, their cattle's) health from various diseases by using traditional medicines made from natural plants, animal's body and medicinal

minerals. The Oromo have their own traditional health institution known as *warra cirreessa* or *ogeessa*, which literally means “traditional healers or experts” (Brehony., 1998). It presumes that folk medicinal plants can be fully effective and acceptable among the society if and only if it is the product of their philosophy, culture, wisdom, art, belief system, traditional practice, indigenous knowledge, etc. (Cotton., 1996).

The issue of folk medicine is, generally, among the least studied topics in relation to Oromo culture. Until recently only few works could be mentioned foundational in this regard. While Endalew's (2007), ethno-botanic work was essentially aimed at compiling and documenting medicinal plants in Chelya woreda (West Shoa), Lemessa et al (2013) study is bound to explain the ways how the Oromo explored haanquu beans as a cure to tapeworm and document its folkloric imperatives. Another work to be mentioned here is Etana's (2007), study goes a beyond documenting the traditional medicinal plants use to describe the role of indigenous healing practices to safeguarding curative plants. Yet, all the above works lack folkloric element though they approached the medicinal plants in different manners. Besides, they did not address the spiritual and philosophical aspects folk medicinal plants, as well as changes it has undergone and the factors that contributed to its continuity among the Oromo.

### **1.1. Objectives of Study**

The study aims to meet the following specific objectives:

- A. To assess the folk healing and curing practices among urban Oromo of Jimma and Agaro towns, Ethiopia;
- B. To assess societal attitude towards using of traditional medicine;
- C. To identify folk medicinal plants that exist among the urban Oromo communities in the Gibe region;
- D. To assess the ways of maintenance and transmission of the use of folk medicinal plants knowledge in the study area;
- E. To explore the philosophical and spiritual elements that are involved in the curative power of folk medicinal plants among the Oromo of Jimma and Agaro towns;
- F. To explain the challenges and prospects, if any, facing folk medicinal plants use among the urban Oromo of the Gibe region.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Defining Folk Medicine and Folk Medicinal Plants**

Folk medicine has been defined differently in various literatures. Some especially from the west used to define it (folk medicine) as “traditional medicine” to show uncivilized, non-scientific way of preparing and consuming medicines by the barbaric and irrational people who are from developing countries (Lemessa et al, 2013). The WHO (2001), defines folk medicine beyond the element of curing. Rather, it is the combination of units such as the knowledge and healing practice for the purpose of curing or preventing from illness may be physical or psychological; and, the knowledge must be inheritable to the across generations.

Above all, Yilma (1996) and Fassil (2001), provide a wider application of the concept of “folk medicine” as the use it to refer to not only to the healing and prevention of physical and mental ill-being but also the folk wisdom used to help societies cope them up natural and manmade challenges that could

affect the health of the living environment, their cattle and their health; and, this knowledge either verbally or in writing remains there for the coming generations.

## **2.2. Utilization of Folk Medicinal Plants**

The use of traditional medicines is not something new phenomenon. It has been there for millennia, and would be the so long as human being exists although evidences are lacking as to where, when, how and by whom they were first used. Of course, some scholars indicate that medicinal plants were already in use 5000-4000 B.C in most parts of China, while others note that traditional plant medicines were well popular as early as 1600 B.C among Syrians, Babylonians and ancient Hebrews (Ibid). Nonetheless, the utilization of plants for medicinal case was very common before the emergence and expansion of modern bio-medical drugs (Cotton., 1996; Dawit., 1986).

## **2.3. Significances of Folk Medicinal Plants**

### **2.3.1. Health Significance**

Some figures show that more than half of the world population still using plants to treat various human and livestock illnesses (FAO., 1997). This is particularly true for Africa, where most people mainly in rural areas use medicines made from plants to treat themselves from diseases caused by larvae, toadstools, germs and protozoa (Dawit., 2001). The available literature on the subject matter shows that folk medicinal plants have significant role in Ethiopia as well. According to Behailu (2010), from among 4 people in the world 3 people depend on traditional. A report from WHO (2002), states that developing countries have similar experiences.

### **2.3.2. Environmental Protection**

The source of folk medicine is the natural environment or natural resources like plants, animals as well as medication minerals. Thus, humans need to protect the environment so that they can get accessed with the natural resources, plants and animals as well as minerals to heal from their illnesses. Besides, proper management and exploitation of the natural resources in a sustainable manner is required. Traditional/folk healers also possess wide range knowledge pertaining to flora as well as the protection and preservation of several plant species. Folk healers prepare and utilize the medicinal plants in the way that does not negatively affect the biodiversity. For instance, the traditional medicine among the Oromo in the Ambo area relies on the intactness of local biodiversity (Endalew., 2007). It is, thus, pertinent to understand strong linkage between environment and the practices of folk medicinal plants that contribute to the sustainability of both human and non-human life (Yadav., 2013).

### **2.3.3. Economic Significance**

According to Endalew (2007), folk medicinal plants in pure economic terms have a marketable value to be sold and bought in the market so that practitioners and folk healers can get earned by selling their medicines and knowledge. Thus, folk medicines would contribute to economic growth and reduces poverty in a given country. The massive sources with sustainable utilization of folk medicinal plants would lead to the development of economy and treatment practices that are natural (Yadav., 2013).

### **2.3.4. Socio-Cultural Importance**

Traditional medicines are part and Persil of the philosophy, wisdom, value and culture of a given community or society. In addition, folk medicinal plants have vital roles in building up social chain and linkage among folk healer and community. For instance, *Cirressa*, i.e. the traditional healers, have smooth relation with his/her community or patient (Endalew., 2007; Buckley., 1968).

## **2.4. Criticisms Against Folk Medicinal Plants Use**

According to Workineh (2000), the traditional healers are not capable of providing exact measurement of quality which would affect the officially prescribed concoction as well as the reputed effect of dosage. In such cases, there is the possibility of over dosage or under dosage in the medication process.

## **2.5. Changes and Continuities in the Folk Medicinal Practices in Ethiopia**

Whether intentionally or unknowingly everyone consumes traditional medicines may be in the form of food, drink or some other way. If you visit Ethiopian households, it is hard not to find traditional medicines. For instance, you would find for sure an onion for cooking, but not all people know onion has medicinal *Telo* (end). According to Asfaw et al. (1999), In Ethiopia, due to the proved curative feature of traditional medicines, and easily accessible and can be prepared easily at home more than 90% of the population uses folk medicines. Parts of Many plants species and variety of plants such as their coat, leaf, flower, fruit and so on have been used for medicinal purpose by Ethiopians for centuries up to date.

However, Ethiopia's folkloric traditional medicines and ingenious medicinal wisdom like in other developing countries are in a clear threat to extinct (Ensermu et al., 1992). As Abbiw (1996), Ensermu *et al* (1992), Zemed (2001), noted that in Ethiopia, traditional medicine is facing the problem of sustainability and continuity mainly due to the loss of plants that could be used as a source of medicine. This is related with natural and human pressure. According to Abebe (2001), the diversity of plants in Ethiopia is on the process of being eroded mainly due to human induced pressures. With the present ecological and socio – economic changes, the medicinal plants together with ethno botanical knowledge, may disappear and thus may be lost from humanity forever (Okello et al., 2009).

## **3. Methodology**

This research was designed to be descriptive case – study type of qualitative research. It utilizes essentially qualitative data generated from secondary and primary data sources.

*Key Informants Interview (KII)* with 14 Informants consisting folk healers (3), local elders (5) and experts (2) for both Jimma and Agaro towns. Besides, two FGDs (one in each town) were conducted with local elders and folk healers. The final means was personal observation: field visits were conducted to some selected sites where folk healers reside in both towns.

## **4. Description of the Study Areas**

Based on Fig. 1, Jimma town is found in southwestern part of Oromia National Regional State 356 kms away from capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. The town is the capital of Jimma Zone. It is located at average altitude of between 1725 -1789 m above sea level.

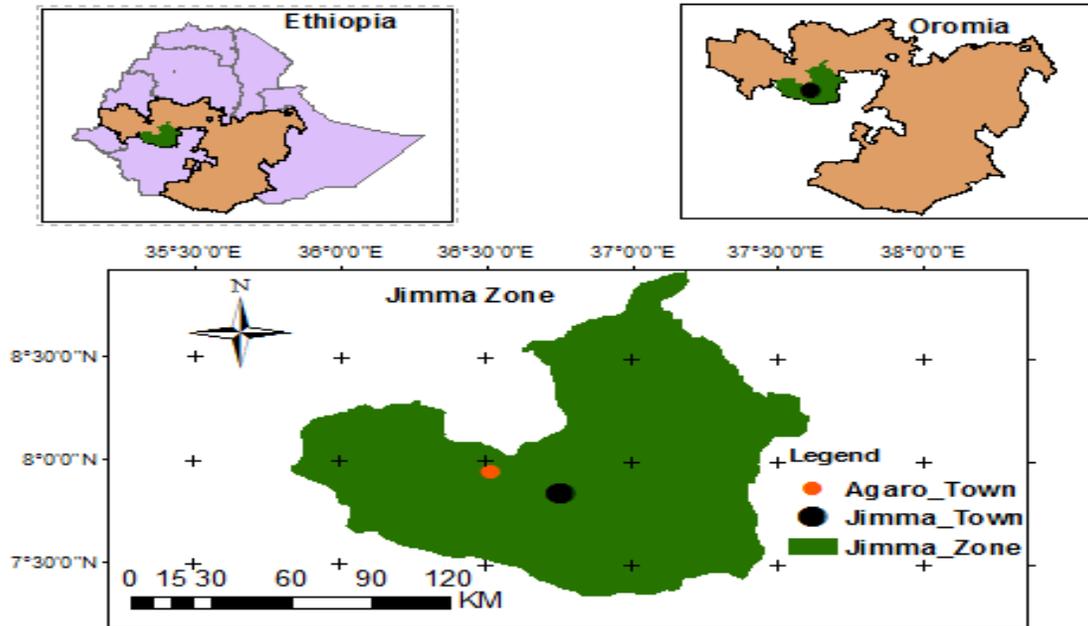


Fig. 1 Map of the study area

Source: Municipal administration of Jimma zone

On the other hand, Agaro town is small but historically well known town found at 390kms south west of capital city, Addis Ababa, and 45 kms far from Jimma town. It is situated approximately at an absolute location of 7° 49'N latitude and 36° 39'E longitude. The Town is bounded by Bulado choche peasant Association (PA) in the north, dalacho, Oomoo Bakkoo and Oomoo Guridde PAS in the south, chedero suse PS in the East and Elbu sayo and koyee seja PAS in the west. The Town is divided into five administrative gandoota. The town with a total area of 8km<sup>2</sup> based on the general view.

## 5. Discussions and Results

### 5.1. The Oromo's Conception of "Health"

The Oromo's conception of 'health' incorporates various aspects of human wellbeing that includes physical, mental and social farewell state. For the Oromos, the mere absence of disease or infirmity does not signify a healthy life<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, in the life of urban Oromos of Gibe region, the concept of health, i.e. 'fayyaa' have a vigorous place. In their belief, health is perceived to be the special gift from, and asset provided by creator, i.e. *Uumaa* or *Waaqayyo*. This was reflected in discussions made with elders as well as several poems, proverbs and songs recorded that reflect the values of health among the local people.<sup>1</sup>

The Oromos pay great value to the human and cattle's health, *fayyaa*. Some of these are "*fayyaan qabeenyaa qabeenya caalu*," meaning "health is special wealth". They also uphold that "*fayyaan harkaa qaban warqeedha*," meaning "health is a gold in our hands" and "*fayyaa buleessi waan hunda qaba*" to mean "healthy man have everything."

### 5.2. The Identifications of Folk Medicinal Plants

<sup>1</sup> Interview with *Abbaa maccaa*, 47, January 5, 2015, Jimma town.

According to data obtained from the informants, all species of plant and its parts are not used for medicinal purpose. The folk healers know and already identified which plant is used or not used for medicinal purpose. For instance, there are species of plants whose leaves only could be used for medication; while roots, fruits, coats, stem or/ and flower of other species could similarly serve the same purpose. Besides, the pastoral nature of the Oromo community in early times had enabled them identify various medicinal plants where ever they move their cattle and maintain this wisdom throughout generation.

### 5.2.1. Folk Medicinal Plants for Human Being

#### 5.2.1.1. Folk Medicinal Plants from Leaf

##### a) Leaf X

The name of this medicinal plant is intentionally left blank because its exact name is deemed not to be mentioned. However, the leaf of this medicinal plant is common to treat the disease called *hadhaa*. Sometimes *hadhaa* also known by the name '*koskosso*' in study areas. According to a folk healer from Agaro town, Ethiopia, *hadha* or *koskosso* is caused by insect which lives in warm areas or places like waste products of coffee. As one of the informants<sup>2</sup> stated *hadhaa* is an insect with six small legs. 'Hadhaa' is an Afaan Oromo term which implies a powerful poison. The six legs help to transmit this toxic to livestock or human beings.



Fig. 2 Folk healer utilizing Hadha's medicine to cure patient's affected hand

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Agaro Town, February 05/2014.

According to informants, the leave of this folk medicinal plant is used to treat this potentially risky disease. The root of this plant is very powerful to the extent that it might harm human body while being cut by *ogessa*.

Therefore, its root is not used to treat the diseases. This medicinal plant can be grinded and preserved up in a secret place. Its dosage is given depending up on the power or status of the patient. In the study areas, folk healers go to the forest and river areas to collect various types of medicinal plants and preserve them in safe areas according to their character. Folk healers argue that this is also secretly

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Abbaasalam Abbaadula (62), Jimma, on 10th of February, and Sheikh Mohammed Dayessa (66), Agaro, on the 5th of March, both in 2015.

under taken based up on the societal knowledge and culture. The nature of this medicine is known by collecting all poisons from the blood system of the patient to one place<sup>3</sup>. Then after, one or two days, it is changed to liquid like abases and finally flood out of his/her body by using ‘thorn’ or sharp materials. But, folk healers prefer thorn than any other sharp metals to avoid the possibility of infection.

### **b) Leaf X1**

The name of this medicinal plant, like the above one (See Medicinal Plant–b, above) is intentionally left blank due to the confidentiality and patent related rights of the folk healers. But, in both towns they use this medicinal plant to treat illness which called desert wound (*Madaa gammoojjii*). It comes from the skin *michi* when it is highly itching. *Hoksisu*, which is a series skin rash. This disease seriously damages the skeleton and even goes up to cancer level if it is not treated at its early stage.

### **c) Damakase (*Ocimum Lamifolium*)**

*Damakase* is a medicine for ear illness/disease by itching or smashing its leaves until it gives liquid to be dropped into the patient’s ear. Then after, the ear has to be covered by cotton after 1 or 2 days till it dries and the power of that disease which has gone deep inside the ear automatically is believed to cure the illness.

The folk healers believe that if the patient could not get the necessary treatment at the early stage of the disease, it may result in deafness. According to the informants<sup>4</sup>, this medicine is also given based on the duration of the disease for 3 and more days as determined by the folk healer. And *damaakasee* is also very curative medicinal plant to treat *michii* in the area.



Fig. 3 Damaakasee

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Jimma Town, March 05, 2015

### **d) Papaya and Andoodee (*Carica Papaya* & *Phytolacca Dodecandra*)**

The leaf of papaya is used for the disease called *madaa gammoojjii*, i.e. the desert wound. This medicinal plant is believed to cure twelve diseases in the study areas. According to the information obtained from the respondent<sup>5</sup>, the leaf of papaya and ‘*handode*’ are mixed with each other and grinded well by folk healer. Then, given to the patient suffering from the problem of unpleasant smell of leg. It is

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Abbaazinab Abbaafita, 54, Jimma town, February 12, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Abdurlekim Ideris, 44, January 05, 2014, Agaro town.

<sup>5</sup> Sheikh – Kamil Sheikh – Abdu, 57, January 06, 2014, Jimma town.

applied at the evening after he/she washed his/ her legs by the warm water and lubricates (*dibuu*) the medicine for three to seven consecutive evenings.

**e) *Waleensuu, Ejersa and Bisaannaa (Erythrina, brucei and Olea Hoth Setteri)***

By collecting the leaves of these medicinal plants and grinding, their mixture is used as an anti-pain for wounded body. Because, this medicine has the nature of worm down and repairing the affected body part of human being. In addition, this medicinal plant is claimed to be good for eye disease like night vision in the area.

**f) *Tamboo (Nicotiana Tabacum)***

According to my informants, this medicinal plant is not only for livestock it also used to treat a person who affected by *dhalaandhula* insect. Especially, children seen while they affected drinking water with their mouth from river carelessly. Lastly, the leaf of white tobacco (tamboo adii) used to control Nasal bleeding epistaxis which is literally called (*funuuna* in afan Oromo). The local folk healer cut the leaf of 'tamboo adii' white tobacco and insert it in the nose of the patient by massaging gentle on the palm. After a few minutes bleeding epistaxis or stop amazingly.



Fig. 4 A patient getting Folk Treatment with Tamboo Adii to cure Nasal Bleeding

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Agaro Town, April 17, 2015

**g) *Harmaguus (Scientific Name Is Unknown)***

In study area, *harmaguus* is effective to treat minor burns and skin problems. However, it might possibly be too dangerous if not properly administered during treatment. Traditionally, this medicinal plant used to treat the patient who is burned by the fire. Firstly, it helps to control the wound and minimize the possibility of its expansion to the other body parts. According to the informant<sup>6</sup> this

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Kasech Dirriba, 48, February, 12, 2015, Agaro town.

medicine has a potential to dry the wound and protect the infection. In addition, this medicinal plant has the smells can kill and protect flies from the wounded body part.



Fig. 5 Harmaguus Plant

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Agaro town, January 06, 2015

#### ***h) Andoodee (Phytolacca Dodecandra)***

In the study area the leaf of Andoodee is operative medicine for diseases such as ‘*madaa mataa*’ (the wound of head skin). Skin diseases called ‘*Baarile*’ and ‘*Roobbii*’ is believed to be caused by *gorora*, saliva of other person when touches the face). And this folk illness most of the time found on children’s face. For this folk medicinal plant has the nature of soft like soap, it is easy to wash the affected face of the patient with it. Sometime people of the area use *handodee* as soap to wash their cloth. According to the informants, this should be continued at least for three to five days<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>7</sup> Interview with Kasech Dirriba, 48, February 12, 2015, Agaro town.

Fig. 6 Andoodee plant

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Agaro town, May 13, 2015

**i) Dimbilaala (*Foeniculum Vulgare*)**

According to one of the informants<sup>8</sup>, the leaf of this folk medicinal plant uses to treat chronic diseases like diabetes and blood pressure. This medicinal plant found in the resident's garden by cultivation. The leaf of this plant is collected from garden and cooked for about one hour. Then it is given to the patient early in the morning before breakfast for at least three to five days<sup>9</sup>.



Fig. 7 Dimbilaala plant

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Jimma Town, April 14, 2015

**j) Eebicha (*Vernonia Amygdalina*)**

In study area, *Eebichaa* is common plant which uses as ethno-medicinal plant. Most of the time, it is found in the wild areas. But, it also found in home garden by cultivation. Traditionally, sometimes women use its leaves as ingredient added to prepare local beer '*Farsoo*'. For the reason that *Eebicha* is easy for planting and fast growing plant species they use it as a fence. According to information obtained through both FGDs and interview, the leaf of '*Eebichaa*' is effective remedy to treat the patient who victimized or suffered with malaria in study area. After its leaf is collected and cooked, the soup taken by small coffee cup once daily at bedtime for at least five to six days.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Abbaasalem Abbaadula, 62, march10, 2015, Agaro town.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Bultu Abbaatemam, 53, February 10, 2015, Jimma town.



Fig. 8 Eebichaa plant

Source: Photograph taken on field work in Jimma Town, April 15, 2015

### ***k) Andoodee (Phytolacca Dodecandra)***

In the study area the leaf of Andoodee is operative medicine for diseases such as ‘*madaa mataa*’ (the wound of head skin). Skin diseases called ‘*Baarile*’ and ‘*Roobbii*’ is believed to be caused by *gorora*, saliva of other person when touches the face). And this folk illness most of the time found on children’s face. For this folk medicinal plant has the nature of soft like soap, it is easy to wash the affected face of the patient with it. Sometime people of the area use *handodee* as soap to wash their cloth. According to the informants, this should be continued at least for three to five days<sup>10</sup>.



Fig. 9 Andoodee Plant

Source: Photograph taken on field work in Agaro town, May 13, 2015

<sup>10</sup> Interview with *Kasech Dirriba*, 48, February 12, 2015, Agaro town.

### 1) *Dimbilaala (Foeniculum Vulgare)*

According to one of the informants,<sup>11</sup> the leaf of this folk medicinal plant uses to treat chronic diseases like diabetes and blood pressure. Currently, many people have series problems with both diseases in the study area. According to data obtained through interview, there is no effective and appropriate medicine in modern health care centers. But, in both towns people refer to use folk medicine, and they argue that as it is more effective than biomedicine. This medicinal plant found in the resident's garden by cultivation. The leaf of this plant is collected from garden and cooked for about one hour. Then it given to the patient early in the morning before breakfast for at least three to five days<sup>12</sup>. Previous report has also shown that the juice of the fresh or dried leaves is used to stem nosebleeds and the plant is also known for its anti-fertility properties. Studies record the traditional use of an oral application of the fresh Fennel leaf as an antifertility remedy (Desta., 1995).

#### 5.2.1.2. Folk Medicinal Plants from Root a) *Banjii (Stereospermum Kunthianum)*

The root of this medicinal plant uses to treat teeth illness. After it is collected by folk practitioner from where it available used as medication by holding it on affected teeth.



Fig. 10 Banjii plant and its fruit

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Agaro Town, May 13, 2015

According to one of the informants, it is good if it is used by heating on the fire. In other way, it uses as solute to clean mouth gum and toothache only early in the morning before having breakfast so that it can treat effectively.

Besides, its fruit uses to treat this illness in the form of fumigate. After it added in the fire, the patient with teeth illness fumigates or smokes.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Interview with *Abbaasalem Abbaadula*, 62, March 10, 2015, Agaro town.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with *Bultu Abbaatemam*, 53, February 10, 2015, Jimma town.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with *Hajimohmed Bati*, 57, March 7, 2015, Agaro town.

**b) Hidda Reeffaa (*Zehneria Scabra*)**

The root of this folk medicinal plant is not grown independently as a plant. But, *hidda reeffaa* is grown or found on the other plants as parasite; mostly of the time ‘*hidda reeffaa*’ is a root found on the huge trees and it is not found everywhere; rather it is available in areas of forest coverage. The root of this folk medicinal plant is grinded and boiled with sugar to treat the mother gave birth (delivery and who aborts in order to cleans unwanted bloods and dirty liquids out of their body.



Fig. 11 Hidda Reeffaa Plant

Source: Photograph taken on field work in Agaro Town, February 05, 2015

**c) Papaya (*Carica Papaya*)**

Papaya is common fruit plant which has much significance in the study areas. And, it plays a vital role in health care or medication. People use its parts to treat different disease and illness. Thus, the root of papaya is very crucial remedy for malaria. Since malaria is common illness in these areas people use papaya for both prevention and healing. Accordingly, after it's root dogged out from soil and dried in the sun and grinded gently. Then it is given to patients to drink by boiling it continuously at least for three to five evenings. After drinking, the patient should have to sleep wearing various comforts that can make him/ her warm.

**d) Qobboo (*Ricinus Communis*)**

This medicinal plant is used to treat *kormommuu* (Hemorrhoids) disease most of the time which found around sex organ of human being. The root of *qobboo* plant is digged out from the soil and grinded. Then, it tied on the wounded part of the patient's body. This medicine is given for three consecutive days

until it destroys all roots of the disease. According to the folk healers of the study areas, large number of the patients use this folk medicine since there is no effective bio-medicinal drug.



Fig. 12 Qobboo Plant

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Agaro Town, April 10, 2015

**e) *Root X***

Even though the name of this medicinal plant is not identified, it has a white root which is used to treat a disease called '*ukaa*' or cough and asma.

Being prepared in the form of powder and has to be taken through nose with finger. Since it has the acidic nature of burning the nose by repeatedly sneezing. Through this, it cleans and opens the breathing organs of the patient. According to our informant,<sup>14</sup> this folk medicine can be reserved in home for a long period of time<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with *Bultu Abbaatemam*, 53, February 10, 2015, Jimma town.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with *Canne Kibret*, 64, on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2015, Agaro town.



Fig. 13 Anonymous Folk medicinal plant to treat Asma in study area  
Source: Photograph taken on field work in Agaro Town, January 12, 2015

**f) *Shulti (Malva Verticillata)***

In the study areas, folk healer uses the root of '*shulti*' plant to abort unwanted pregnancy. This medicinal plant widely used both in Agaro and Jimma town.



Fig. 14 Shulti plant

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in Jimma Town, February 12, 2015

In addition, the root of *shultii* is used to treat woman on the delivery period. Specially, when woman is not fully complete the process after giving birth (*Obbafachu*). This root enable to give her complete delivery and help her to drop the placenta. This is locally known as "*obbaatii*" or placenta. If the woman is unable to do that success fully, this medicine is patted and massaged on lap or graclis (*sarbaa*);

around her sexual organ. This folk medicinal plant has the power of pulling down ‘obbaati’ grime fluid which comes after delivery<sup>16</sup>.

### **g) Migira (*Pennisetum Schimperii*)**

In the area if the Snake replanted (afuufe) human being, the root of migira is very fundamental folk medicinal plant. Its root of grads is also a medicine for this illness. In case, if the snake bites human being, after bleeding the specific area or the affected body part by snake, then putting the medicine on the bleeding parts of that body. This plant is found in Jimma town around the health center. In preparation process, this medicine doesn’t choose special time or day. The amount of this medicine given at one time for the patient is half of coffee cup. But, if the patient is child, swallowing one time (liqimsu tokko) is enough. In addition, in study area keeping its cleaning is also a necessary activity to empower this medicinal plant. In this way the folk healer have to wash ‘Janabaa’ while he collects, prepare and treat patient.

### **h) Gizawwaa (*Withania Somnifera*)**

The root of Gizawwaa ‘*Withania somnifera*’ is well known folk medicine to treat the disease that is caused by darabastu (Spider) in the study area. Darabastu (Spider) is a type of insect with six legs that cause disease if it touches human body. This insect has a powder like poison. Therefore, if this insect touches parts of the human body it attacks and creates wound. The major symptoms of this disease are vomiting (hoqqisiisuu) and showing a kind of water like abscess or fluid. This poison is carried by insect and can affect human body if it moves over the wearing clothes and body.

## **5.2.1.3. Folk Medicinal Plants from Fruit**

### **a) Qobboo (*Ricinus Communis*) and Asiraa**

The fruit of ‘qobboo’ helps as remedy to treat the patient suffered with leg attacking insect ‘*Muuyalee*’. *Muuyalee* is a type of insect which lives in dust. Most of the time this disease affects peoples who walk on bare foot. However, the urban Oromo of the study area have traditional medicine to heal this illness. First, the fruit of these two medicinal plants peeled and combined together. After it crushed gently in the tidy mortar, it is tied topically on the wounded leg of the patient to kill ‘*muuyalee*’ insect and to avoid its nucleus<sup>17</sup>.

### **b) Siinfaa and Sanaabi (*Lepidium Sativum*)**

Both *siinfaa* and *sanaabi* are communal folk medicinal plants in the area. The fruit of these plants use as remedies for women that gave birth recently to avoid any illness after delivery including spiritual illness (like *waan lafaa*). According to our informant, first folk healer combines the fruit of ‘*siinfaa*’ and ‘*sanaabi*’ with proper amount and mix with table salt and cold water. Mostly, the pregnant woman takes before delivery to prevent stomachache.

### **c) Eebicha (*Vernonia Amygdalina*)**

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Abbaajabir Abbaamilki, 72, February 12, 2014, Jimma town.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Abbaasombi Abbaafoggi, 51, February9, 2014, Jimma town.

In study areas people use the fruit of this medicinal plant as alternative if there is no ‘*Suufii*’ plant. Both ‘*suufii*’ and ‘*Eebicha*’ used interchangeably to treat a patient with evil eye; especially children. Accordingly, the fruit of this medicinal plant roasted on the iron plate; ash mixed with ash of hyena’s hair and then given to the patient at bed time. According to data obtained through interview, there is no problem regarding its dosage. Research notes other traditional uses for headache (as a dressing), paludism (malaria) ague fever, stomachache and diuretic. The smoke of the burning root is commonly inhaled for ‘*Satan beshita*’ or ‘devil disease’ (Asres., 2001; Desta., 1994).

#### **d) *Papaya (Carica Papaya)***

Papaya is common medicinal plant among the urban Oromo of Gibe region. The primary usage of papaya is also not for medical purpose rather society uses it as fruit product. In addition, it uses as medicinal plant to treat or heal the stomach ache nervous conditions in study area. First, the leaves of papaya collected by folk healer and gently, grinded in the traditional mortar and its soup given through the mouth to the patient. So, it kills intestinal parasites and cleans stomach’s problem. Traditionally, folk practitioners use their finger to control its over and under dosage problems<sup>18</sup>.

#### **e) *Caraddaama /Cilatamii (Ruta Chalepensis)***

*Caraddaama* or *Cilaatamii* has yellow flower and very small green leaves. Most of the time *caraddaama/cilatamii* planted in home garden. The combination of *Cilatamii* and *asabuuda* is an important folk medicine for ‘*dhiitoo*’ (Swelling) disease. Folk healers of the study areas state that most of the time ‘*dhiitoo*’ will observed in small size at early stage and their locations are not less than seven and also not more than seventeen areas of human body.

### **5.2.1.4. Folk Medicinal Plants from Seed**

#### **a) *Abasuuda Gurracha (Black Cumin)***

The seed of *abasuuda* plant has the role in healthcare system in study area. According to my informants, most of the time head ache is not independent illness rather it observed as the symptom of other disease. Culturally, *abasuuda* is given to the patient after carefully grinded and mixed with onion and honey. Then, the patient always takes one spoon of the mixture at morning for at least three days. According to the data obtained through interview, it must be taken before breakfast.

#### **b) *Nuugii (Guizotia Abyssinica)***

*Nuugii* is common oil seed in the study areas. People purchase *nuugii* from market for medicinal purpose. It roasted and grinded in a mortar, and finally, boiled (Ni *danfisama*) and given to treat the patient with dangerous *utaaloo* (*influenza*) and asma. This is consecutively taken for three evenings<sup>19</sup>.

#### **c) *Qullubbii Adii (Allium Sativum L.)***

*Qullubbi adii* is an effective medicine for ‘*dhullaa*’ disease in the study areas. In modern health center *dhullaa* treated through injection. But, according to one of the informants, injection is not a right

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Abbaasalem Abbaadula, 62, march 10, 2015, Agaro town.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Fatuma Abbaanagaa, 43, January 5, 2015, Jimma town.

and effective medication for this illness or disease. Because it spreads the *dhullaa* poison into the blood system of the patient<sup>20</sup>.

It has to be noted that *Qullubbii adii* is not long lasting for the patient to recover from this illness. In contrast to this, traditional folk healer can heal or treat the patient by grinding onion with soot ('*qaqaa*' in Afaan Oromo). By doing so, the patient has to take it at least for 3 to 7 days every morning time before breakfast. This cultural treatment destroys its root which deepens in the body system. Most of the time '*dhullaa*' found on the seven or seventeen areas of the patient.



Fig. 15 Qullubbii Adii (Garlic)

Source: Photograph, taken on field work in *Jimma* Town, February 12, 2015

**d) *Ulmaa'ee, Midhaan Bofaa, Reejjii and Heexoo (Clausena Anisata, Vernonia Auriculifera Hiern)***

The seed of all these folk medicinal plants mixed by folk healer with proper amount to treat patient with sun strike infection (*michi*) disease. According to the informants, folk healer combines half hand seeds of the above medicinal plants and gently crushes in a mortar. Then boils and give to the patient in the form of ash or steam at bed time. Besides, its liquid is taken if the patient is badly threatened, and finally, the waste product of this medicine is rounded over the head of three times by saying "*Xoosii kee fudhadhuu badi!!*"-meaning get off with your bad sprit. This implies that they are ordering the bad fortune to get out of the patient.

**e) *Talbaa (Linum Usitatissimum)***

People in both Jimm and Agaro towns, '*Talbaa*', an oil seed, used as folk medicinal crop to treat serious vomiting and stomach inflammation. According to the informants<sup>21</sup>, the preparation of this folk medicinal plant do not need expertise. First, it is collected and roasted on flat iron plate and grinded in tidy mortar. Then, its powder is dissolved in a glass of water and has to be given to the patient twice a day

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Bultu Abbaatemam, 53, February 10, 2015, Jimma town.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with *Abbaarashed*, 51, February12, 2015, Jimma town.

for three (3) to five (5) days in the morning and noon. Folk healers argue that many times people prefer this traditional medicine rather than bio medicine for there is no effective drug or treatment of stomach inflammation in modern health centers.

### 5.3. *The Philosophical Aspects of Folk Medicinal Plants*

Oromo societies have their own philosophy for everything. In the process of preparing folk medicine, traditional healer follows society's philosophy. They have days, time, months as well as general calendar. As folk healer said, there is a selected days, times and months in which folk medicine have to be cut. For example there are plants that have to be cut in unfortunate days (*cagginoo*). Because, those selective days are taken as good fortune days. Also, ill and illness was considered as unnecessary thing that damages health and healthiness of human being as well as every living things. Moreover, healer counts medicinal plants when he/ she is cutting. If it is plants leaf he count and cut the normal one. If that plant has join part or sub-branch, healer cuts it by counting. Also, if medicinal part is its root, he counts and prepares medicine.

Similarly, there is a procedure how patients have to take the medicine. According to traditional healers in the study areas, when the medicine of '*dhiitoo miilaa*' is prescribed the patient is advised to stand by one leg. This indicates the philosophy of the society have an essential role. Because, they believe that number three is odd number. However, now a day this philosophy is not actively functioning among urban resident of Oromo's for the reason that most of folk medicine users and healers are alien religion followers. They consider indigenous way of treating illness as foolishness and merely practice it. They have already forgot the philosophy behind it. Rather, they develop it's medicinal only.

### 5.4. *The Spiritual Aspects of Folk Medicinal Plants*

The spirituality of folk medicine is not seen by neck eye. It accompanied with norms and normalization, '*laguu* and '*lagannaa*' (abstinence) of society. Spirituality and beliefs (religion) is tied with folk medicines. It is a wish and believes that society, patient as well as healers practice to attain support and safety from problem and illness.

For instance, among the society where this research is conducted, when medicine of snake bites is given to person it shouldn't touch the soil or it on the land. They pass that night by singing songs and entertaining the patient to make him/her not to sleep. If not it is believed that curing power of the medicine may weakened and the patient may die. The spirituality differs from medicine to medicine. For example, the spirituality of medicine which given to a person who attacked by rabies is a practice or performance that can be done by healer.

In this case, healer wakes up early in the morning and after praying his creator he goes to river then cut folk medicinal plant secretly. At this moment he should not speak. If speaking became must or needed, he speaks after he puts down that medicine on the other things. In the aspect of accompaniment with fortune, if someone cross healer when he was on journey to find or cut medicine he return back to home. Because, he believes that day is unfortunate day and also if that medicine cut, it will be useless. But, if that patient is seriously feeling pain and healer face someone on the road, he cut a grass called *irreessa* and give to that person; then healer go to find medicine. In short, there is spirituality in folk medicine. So, this is the one which add or increase its curing power<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Abbaajabir Abbaamilki, 72, February 12, 2015, Jimma town.

### **5.5. Dosage of Folk Medicinal Plants**

From the interview conducted with informants, the most widely used ways of determining the quantity of folk medicines are spoons, bottles, nail (finger pinches), and clay pots. It cannot be precise. According to the information obtained from folk healers, if the drug given is beyond the capacity of the patient, milk and liquid of ‘*shiro*’ (beans powder) is used to neutralize the power of the medicine.

### **5.6. Ways of Transmission, Current Status and Future of Folk Medicinal Plants**

During field work it has been observed that traditional medicine, folk healers incline to hide the character of medicinal plants used for different diseases because of lack of its confidentiality. In direction to confuse their trade, cultivation of the plants is not encouraged; therefore, all the gatherings are almost from the natural resources. The storage of the knowledge is solely depended on the collective memory of a few persons within the urban communities. It is kept under the guardianship of old men and women. This kind of transmission has a risk since human custodians can be damaged by mortality.

Some informant requested that the shortage of medicinal plants in urban area is one of the factors that enforced them to visit the expensive health organizations even for those diseases that could have been easily treated by remedial plants. Some healers also suggested that the scarcity of medicinal plants is now either forcing them to stop the practice or making the cost of the herbal medicine unusually expensive<sup>23</sup>.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Oromo communities in the study areas, like other similar groups in other areas, have an indigenous knowledge on their own way treating diseases and illnesses that people face in their domain. They have rules, regulation, norms, values, culture, tradition and philosophy of using natural resources in folk medication. Though, urban Oromo of Gibe region are found to have an imaginable knowhow of managing and utilizing folk medicinal plants wisely in health care system, the practice and wisdom is under clear imminent danger from discontinuity. Thus, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- a) Traditional medicinal plants and ingenious medicinal wisdoms are crucial wealth's of a given community. So, all concerned governmental should take into account this issue and design appropriate strategies to create positive attitude among the current generation by raising awareness about the folk medicinal plants and their utilization.
- b) The wisdom and skills of folk healers or practitioners must be protected through various ways such as legally registering or licensing so that they will be encouraged to make use of their knowledge confidently. This can also contribute to the respects of property or patent rights through certification.
- c) Developing agents or folklorists and related cultural experts should promote and work with folk healers and also encouraging its sustainability among the young generation.
- d) Folklorist and cultural experts should also focus on identifying, recording medicinal plants and promoting their utilization and cultivation in collaboration with the local administrators and folk healers.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Sheikhkamel Sheikhabdu, 57, January 6, 2014, Jimma town.

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