



'Training in Medicinal Plant Conservation and Cultivation'

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Ladakh Society for Traditional Medicines (LSTM) - a Leh (Ladakh,

people, they being the major users of the resource.

Bangalore was the principal consultant for this training programme. 25 participants including amchis, local NGOs, social workers and farmers attended this training programme. The training was conducted using a semi-structured format and in an interactive and participative mode. The participants were exposed to conservation concepts by drawing examples from around Ladakh.



The main objective of this training was to enable participants in having a clearer idea of the conservation needs, various conservation strategies and their role in such initiatives.

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They were also exposed to the diversity and threat status of medicinal plants used in Indian systems of medicine. By the end of the training, the participants were able to list out and prioritise various threats to the local medicinal flora. With fair understanding of various conservation strategies, they were able to appreciate the role they could play in conservation of herbal wealth of the area. The LSTM team assisted the principal consultant in interpreting local terms and in conducting the course.

India) based NGO - organised a 5-day training programme on various aspects related to medicinal plant conservation for amchis, village representatives and NGO workers under its NOMAD-RSI assisted 'Integrated Medicinal Plants Conservation Project'.



This project has evolved out of the ongoing initiative by LSTM to revitalise the traditional Tibetan medicine. LSTM has been, under this initiative, sponsoring formal education of Ladakhi youth in Tibetan medicine, interacting with traditional amchis (doctors of Tibetan medicine) across the region and undertaking research on various aspects of the Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan medicine) system. Since local plant resources form the major raw material for Tibetan health care practices, LSTM, during the course of its work became increasingly aware of the difficulty of access and increasing scarcity of the medicinal plant resources. Through this project the LSTM seeks to address the issue of threat to the medicinal plant resource and build up their populations to the size that these start becoming easily available for Tibetan medicine. LSTM is attempting at conservation of medicinal plants and augmentation of their populations through the active participation of amchis and the local





Aged over 75 years, the Senior Amchi of Ladakh, Amchi Tsering Paljor was the senior most participant in the training programme. He not only brought his experience of more than 60 years with Tibetan medicine to the training course, but also willingly shared the same with the participants many of whom were just entering the profession. He also set an example for the younger participants through his inquisitiveness and keenness to learn more about medicinal plants and their conservation. I could get a few exclusive moments with him to know more about his life and experience with Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan medicine), summary of which is presented below.

Born at 'Kere' village in Yangthang (Ladakh) to a practising amchi, he was, however, initiated into the Tibetan medicine as an eleven years boy by his maternal uncle, an amchi of repute himself. He remained under the apprenticeship of his uncle till about 24 years of age. During this period he read the literature on the subject and gained practical experience about raw drugs, formulations and the basic tenets of Sowa Rigpa. The apprenticeship culminated with a short visit to Mount Kailash in Tibet along with his uncle, during which he was exposed to the richness of the Tibetan medical traditions. This visit kindled in him a desire to learn more about the subject and saw him returning to Tibet the very next year. There he worked as apprentice to the senior Lamas and gathered more knowledge on the subject. He also got an opportunity to work as apprentice to the personal

amchi of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and got an insight into the finer points of the Sowa Rigpa. During this period he also enrolled himself in school at Lhasa and learnt Pharmacy and Astrology considered a vital part of Tibetan medical traditions. He returned to his village when he was about 25 years of age, passed the community test in front of expert Amchis

and was ceremoniously admitted as village amchi. Since then he has been a practicing Amchi. Somewhere down the line he also set up his practice at Leh.

Amchi Paljor practices Sowa Rigpa the classical way and bases his diagnosis on the principles of Jung-wa-lna (Panchmahabhuta) and Nespa gsum (Tridosha). He employs all the three tools for diagnosing a patient i.e. (i) visual diagnosis tongue and urine analysis (ii) touch pulse examination, and (iii) questioning case history, family background, present condition). Like other Amchis, he is a general physician but has acquired specialisation in treating arthritis, jaundice, epilepsy and kidney stones. He still detoxifies the raw ingredients himself, prepares the compositions and gets powders/ tablets prepared in his presence. He uses about 300 plant species, 50 minerals and metals and 20 animal parts to prepare his

formulations. He sources his raw material from various markets and from wild collections. He feels very sad at the fast pace at which populations of medicinal plants are getting diminished.

Over the years he has mastered techniques of hydrotherapy and uses it effectively for treatment of arthritis, gout and rheumatism. He is also an expert in acupuncture and maintains an impressive assemblage of acupuncture equipment. He has travelled to many countries including the USA, France and Spain for promotion of Sowa Rigpa and patients come to him from across the world. He was instrumental in setting up an "Amchi Sabha" and remained its president till 2001. Whereas younger Amchis keep on seeking his blessings, he has taken his nephew an institutionally qualified Amchi as his apprentice.

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