



# Traditional Medicine of the Raji Tribe in the Central Himalayas with Cultivation, Preservation, and Sustainable Well-being

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Raji is tribal community staying in a remote location of Central Himalaya, India. The communities are mainly popularized for their wisdom, traditional knowledge & practices of medicinal plants in health care system, food value, and their role in biodiversity conservation. Besides this community is still vulnerable, and residing in steep hilly slopes near the Kali River. Their modest huts reflect a historical connection to the region and the challenges posed by the terrain. The Raji's unique system of disease classification and their reliance on traditional healing methods using indigenous plants are highlighted. The paper lists various diseases and the corresponding herbs employed by the Raji tribe for treatment. The Raji's cultural and ethnic diversity, along with their historical evolution from prehistoric Kiratas, adds depth to the narrative. Challenges such as deforestation, overexploitation of natural resources, and the potential loss of traditional knowledge are discussed. The article concludes by emphasizing the urgent need to address these challenges and integrate traditional practices with modern conservation efforts. Overall, it advocates for a holistic approach to ensure the well-being of the Raji tribe, the preservation of their cultural heritage, and the sustainable conservation of essential plant species in the Central Himalayan region.

**Keywords-** Tribal community, Raji, Medicinal plants, Cultivation, conservation, Central Himalaya, Uttarakhand

## 1. Introduction

India is a largest country of tribal population. The Raji tribes, also known as the "Little Rulers," "Van-Rawat" or "King of the Forest," "Van-Raji" or "Royal people of the Forest," or "Manush" or "man of the Forest," live in the relatively rough hill topography of Pithoragarh district and Didihat tehsil in the central Himalaya (2000–6000 feet from MSL on the steep slope) (Census of India, 2001).

Raji is one of the five tribes (Raji, Bhotia, Tharu, Jaunsari and Buxa) of Uttarakhand state in India and it possesses the status of PVTGs (Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups) as declared by the government of India. The Raji tribe is one of the smallest tribes of India and is educationally and economically backward tribe of Central Himalayan region of Pithoragarh and Champawat districts in Uttarakhand (Pandey and Sharma, 2015). They belong to the most primordial tribe in Uttarakhand and have non-Aryan Austro-Asiatic ancestry (Şarmā, 1994). Jauljibi, Jamtadi, Altadi, Kutachawrani, Madanpuri, Kimkhola, Bhaktirawa, Ganagaon, Ciphalthara, Khirdwari, and Bilheri are the villages where they live. The tribal people obtain healing from their own herbal remedies, local practitioners, and their traditional knowledge and comprehension of nature. Tribal cultures' usage of herbal remedies is influenced by their unique sociocultural customs, religious convictions, support for customary knowledge, and reliance on traditional medical practitioners. Because they reside in more remote locations than contemporary facilities, these people have a tight interaction with their ambient environment and ecology and essentially rely on it for their primary health care system. The Raji tribe is a primitive tribal community located in Uttaranchal State's Central Himalayan region. They are underdeveloped socially and economically. Since they are in danger of going extinct, their development and conservation require immediate attention. They have excellent knowledge of the local flora and fauna and they use this knowledge for therapeutic purpose. The geographical coordinates of Uttarakhand is latitude 28°44'N to 31°025'N and longitude 77°045'E to 81°01'E. The five latitudinal physiographic-geological zones that make up Uttarakhand's

physiography are the Taraibhabar, the Siwalik with Dun, the lower Himalaya, the great Himalaya, and the Trans-Himalaya region. The Raji tribes exist in the Uttaranchal region of the lower Himalayas, close to the Kali River forest. The Rajis are separated into two territorial groups according to their traditional distribution pattern; some of them reside in Kumauni, while others are over the Kali River in neighboring Nepal. Forest and tribes both have crucial role to perform. They have a long-standing relationship with forest and trees that are mostly based on the many products and services they receive from them as well as the fact that forest and trees are an integral part of their surrounding and culture.

The traditional knowledge and awareness of nature, along with the assistance of local practitioners and their own herbal remedies, enable the tribal people to become well. The Raji tribe gathers forage items including wild figs, berries, and vegetables from the forest. Their food consists of a variety of tubers and roots, including therapeutic one. A variety of leafy plants are gathered for food. NTFPs For the tribe, gathering wild honey from forest trees is an important occupation. In the monsoon season, people collect wild mushrooms from the forest. To heat homes and prepare food, wood is gathered. They graze their sheep, goats, and cattle in the forest. Natural fiber-producing plants are used to weave mats, baskets, and other household products.

The utilization of herbal remedies by indigenous populations is influenced by their unique sociocultural customs, religious convictions, backing for customary knowledge, and access to traditional medical practitioners. These individuals depend heavily on their natural surroundings and ecosystem for their primary healthcare needs, as they reside in isolated places where access to modern facilities is limited. *Vasa Justicia adhatoda* is given in common cold and bronchitis, Kala-bansa *Barleria cristata* Leaf paste is applied externally in dermatitis, Aak *Calotropis procera* (Aiton) R. Br. Powder of dried leaves mixed with jaggery given orally before sunrises for 5 days to cure migraine. Juice of whole plant is administered orally, it acts as Abortifacient, Kilmora *Berberis aristata* DC. Root juice mixed with water is dropped in eyes to cure redness and infection (Ram Prakash 2015).

The western Himalayan state of Uttarakhand is endowed with a diverse range of forest resources, particularly aromatic and medicinal plants. Compared to other regions of India, this region is home to the majority of medicinal plants [4]. Numerous plants and trees serve a variety of purposes. These trees are known as "*Kalpavriksha*" in ancient literature and are significant to the local population's economy and sociocultural practices. The Vedic writings and Hindu mythology describe "*Kalpavriksha*" as a celestial tree that grants all wishes (Joshi, Chandra et al 2018).

The aborigines mean "*Adibasi*" in Indian language. "Original" and "inhabitants" are denoted by the terms *adi* and *basi*. The Scheduled Tribes (S.T.), "*Anusuchit Jati*," "*Vanjati*," "*Vanbasi*," "*Pahari*," and "*Adimjati*," among other terms, are the constitutional names for various people communities or groupings. Comparing the usage of these herbal medicines to modern medicine, like Kutki *Picrorhiza kurroa*, Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera*, etc. Ayurveda and other traditional systems highly value kutki for liver health, although modern medicine frequently employs synthetic medications for liver detoxification. Many people use kutki since it is a natural hepatoprotective agent that doesn't have the possible negative effects of medications. Anti-anxiety and antidepressant drugs, which can have a number of negative effects, are often used in modern medicine. Whereas ashwagandha naturally balances stress hormones like cortisol, providing a safe and holistic approach to mental health. The Raji tribe's usage of herbal medicines shows the potential of natural remedies in promoting health and healing diseases, in addition to reflecting their deep understanding of the local flora. Since they offer comprehensive, long-lasting comfort without the negative effects associated with synthetic medications, these medications frequently outperform modern medicines. However, due to the industrialization and the loss of traditional knowledge, it is important to record and save this valuable medical legacy. They are also readily available in communities (Ram Prakash 2015).

Firstly, geographical region of tribal community (Raji) was identified, documented their traditional-cultural practices, agricultural practices, cultivation & conservation of approaches towards medicinal plants.

## Review literature

### 1.1. The Rajis

The Rajis were a community of roving hunters and gatherers that lived until recently. They are also known as *Van Rawat*, *Van Raji*, or *Van Manush*. According to Crooke, the Raji, also known as Rawat, were a people who lived primarily off of data cultivation and the construction of wooden watercraft. They were also found in Askot and in smaller numbers across Kumaon's lower Himalayan peaks. Considered as one of the indigenous groups in the Kumaon Himalayas, they assert that they originated from the ancient *Kirata* people. They are more commonly referred to in this area as Ban Rawat, which translates to "the king of the forest." The Rajis are the least developed tribal community in the area, both socially and economically. The Raji people's primary economic resources are their lands and forests. They nowadays work in agriculture, animal husbandry, tailoring, and other related fields careers. Women all wear *salvaar* and men wear paint-shorts. Raji tribes worship all the aspects of nature. But now Raji tribes keep many idols and images of Hindu gods and goddesses and do the same worship. Raji tribes are in very poor condition both socially and economically. A community's social structure, patterns, and traits reveal its socioeconomic status and cultural legacy. In the past, the Raji community's social structure, clan, religious beliefs, customs, ways of life, and life cycle were all rather clear-cut and basic. These days, the Raji group's social beliefs, rituals, customs, and religious beliefs become more

complicated and complex due to the influence of the nearby Kumauni community. They make an effort to fit in with the social and cultural norms of the Kumauni community, which is the nearby dominant society. In the current circumstances, the traditional occupation of the Raji community hunting and gathering—is hardly noticeable. Farming, fishing, carpentry, and wage labor in agriculture are now their common sources of income. Although many of them are now bilingual and speak Hindi or Kumaoni as well, they still speak Raji, a Tibeto-Burman language. Rice, millet, and maize make up their diet. In the forests, they often collect for fruits, tubers, and wild roots.



**Fig 1: Structure, Pattern and characteristics of Raji House.**



**Fig 2: Distribution of Saplings of Multipurpose tree species (Horticultural and Medicinal) among Raji tribe (Particular Vulnerable Tribal Group) of Pithoragarh, Uttarkhand**

## 2.2. Engagement with the surroundings

In Uttarakhand, the Raji tribe is among the endangered tribes. Mostly located in the Central Himalayan states of Uttarakhand, namely in the districts of Pithoragarh, Champawat and Udham Singh Nagar. They were nomadic (cave dwellers) at beginning. Back then, they were nomadic food gatherers without any permanent place to call home. They survived on produce from the jungle. They gathered wood from the wilderness and crafted wooden objects. However, the Indian Forest Act of 1927, the Forest Policy of 1894, the Wood Crisis, and other environmental issues make their lives tough. Right now, they are growing. They also possess a very tiny amount of agricultural land. They grow virtually few vegetables and generate little amounts of low-quality cereals. Their irrigation relies on the rainfall.

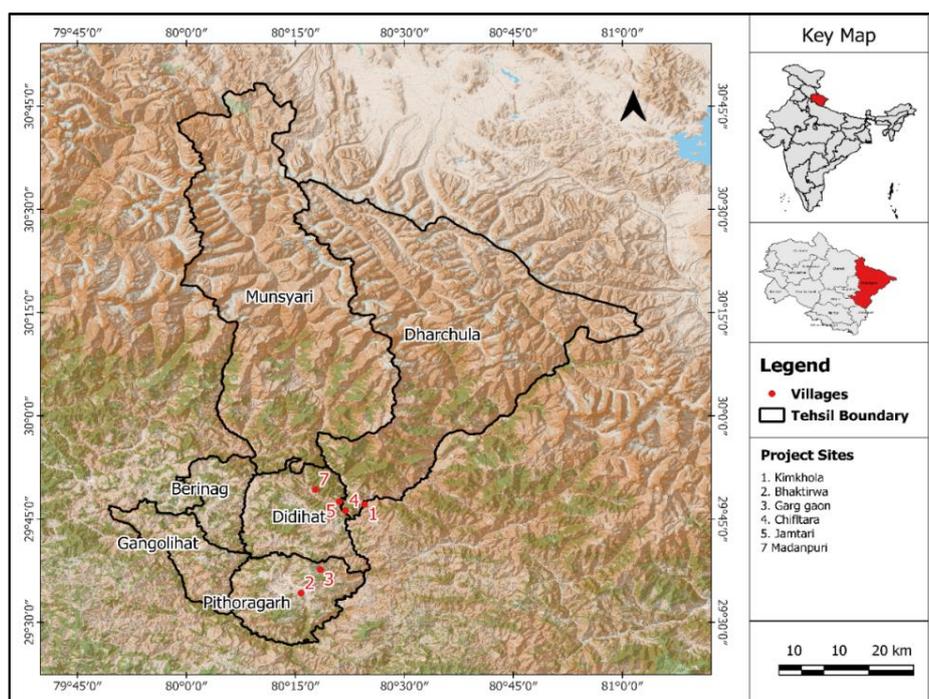
## 2. Research methodology

The research design of the present study is based on literature review and field surveys. One week pilot study was conducted before main research in which gathered basic information were identified and addressed the various issues. Field information & demonstration were conducted to define the opportunities, scope, activities and goals of the project. Stakeholder participated to discuss what will be the outcomes of the project on potential environment, social, and economic. Various training programs and workshops were organized to enhance the livelihood of Raji community through medicinal plants cultivation (Pandey and Pandey, 2007).

## 3. Data analysis and Results

### 3.1. Objective 1: to identify the Geographical area of Raji Tribes.

Originally hunter-gatherers, the Rajis, descendants of prehistoric *Kiratas*, were early settlers in Uttarakhand. However, as different ethnic groups invaded the region, the *Kiratas* gradually disappeared, and the Rajis, claiming descent from Askot princes, remained in Kumaun and Nepal. They are considered early settlers compared to Nagas and Khasas and are one of the two Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) among the five tribes in Uttarakhand. The Raji population is primarily found in Pithoragarh and Champawat districts, with nine villages and 682 people in Pithoragarh and one village with 123 people in Champawat.



**Fig 3: Location map of study area.**

The Raji people live in cluster settlements on steep hilly slopes and forest areas near the Kali River, at elevations ranging from 2000 ft to 6000 ft above sea level. Their modest huts are situated amidst dense forests, reflecting their historical connection to the region and the challenges posed by the terrain (Kundu and Pal)

### **3.2. Objective 2- To investigate the issues and agricultural and preservation practices used by the Raji tribe.**

The Raji tribe relies heavily on agriculture, which shapes their social structures, cultural customs, and financial activities. Studying the ways in which agriculture affects the Raji people's everyday lives, provides for their livelihoods, and ties in with their cultural identity is necessary to comprehend the complex role that agriculture plays within this community. Primary food resource- Agriculture has now become the primary food resource for Raji tribe. Raji community is completely dependent on crop cultivation. They mainly cultivate millets, maize, and other pulses. These crops provide necessary nutrition.

- Medicinal plants biodiversity- The vast biodiversity of the Himalayan region is well known, especially in regards to its medicinal plant diversity. The Raji tribe are experts in the applications of medicinal plants. Identification and medical use of these plants depend heavily on this traditional knowledge. As native to the Himalayas, many of the region's medicinal plants are unique to it and cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Their conservation is particularly crucial because of this. The tribe integrates medicinal plant cultivation with traditional agroforestry practices. This approach not only conserves the forest ecosystem but also ensures the sustainable use of resources.
- Obstacles and Prospects for the Future- Sustainable harvesting - Establishing and putting into practice sustainable harvesting methods to guarantee the medicinal plants' sustainability. Emphasized the importance of preserving biodiversity and protecting natural habitats. Participants were encouraged to cultivate medicinal plants responsibly, avoiding overharvesting and promoting sustainable harvesting techniques.
- Climate change - Understanding the impact of climate change on plant species and developing strategies to mitigate its effects. They have a huge knowledge about traditional medicinal plants and their uses but they don't have scientific knowledge regarding microbial conditions, favorable condition for plants and others like poly house for better cultivation of medicinal plants. Through workshop the detailed information about how to cultivate the medicinal plants under favorable condition and sustainable harvesting of plants, livelihood as well. Workshop aimed empowerment the Raji Tribes.
- The workshop on enhancing the livelihood of the Raji community through medicinal plants cultivation was a significant step towards sustainable economic development and empowerment. By leveraging their traditional knowledge and natural resources, the Raji community is poised to improve their livelihoods while contributing to the conservation of medicinal plant species.

### **Challenges-**

Conservation and maintaining ecological balance have become significant global challenges, particularly in India. Mountainous forests face considerable anthropogenic pressure, including lopping for fuel and fodder, illegal harvesting, grazing, and forest fires, leading to degradation. Recovery in many areas is complicated,

posing a threat to the livelihoods of millions, especially in the Himalayan region. Tribal communities in this region rely on forests for sustenance and primary healthcare. But deforestation, agricultural commercialization, and the monetization of the medicinal sector have created various challenges. The overexploitation of natural resources and the rapid transformation of tribal culture in the modern era pose a risk of losing valuable traditional knowledge. Therefore, urgent attention is needed to address these challenges and ensure the long-term conservation of essential plant species and traditional knowledge systems.

Historically, tribal and rural communities in India relied on basic preparations of medicinal herbs for various treatments. Herbal remedies are not only cost-effective but also considered as safe with minimal side effects. However, factors such as overexploitation, loss of natural habitat, and poor seed germination rates contribute to the decline of important medicinal plant species. Preserving indigenous knowledge through ethnobotanical and ethno medicine studies is crucial for the conservation and sustainable utilization of biological resources (Ram Prakash Research Scholar Department of History B.B.A.U., Lucknow, U.P).

### Conservation-

The plants which are used by Raji tribes to cure their diseases, we can use them conservatively in all these ways.

- 1- Educational workshops on sustainable harvesting.
- 2- Encourage agroforestry practices to promote both conservation and livelihoods for the Raji tribes.
- 3- By being aware of how important it is to conserve plants.

### 3.3. Objective- To develop capacity & skill among the tribe in the field of medicinal plant cultivation through demonstration and dissemination of innovative technologies.

This objective has been achieved by different activities like training and workshops. Start by assessing the current knowledge and resources available within the tribe regarding medicinal plant cultivation. Understand the existing practices, traditional knowledge, and available resources. In this workshop we gave detailed information through herbs and horticulture. The Raji Tribe are socially and economically the most underdeveloped tribal community of Uttarakhand. They have a huge knowledge about traditional medicinal plants and their uses but they don't have scientific knowledge regarding microbial conditions, favorable condition for plants and others like poly house for better cultivation of medicinal plants. Through this workshop the detailed information about how to cultivate the medicinal plants under favorable condition and sustainable harvesting of plants, livelihood as well. This workshop aimed empowerment the Raji Tribes. This workshop is organized to educate tribal members about modern cultivation techniques including soil preparation, planting, irrigation, pest management, sustainable harvesting.

In skill development programs, implement skill development programs focused on various aspects of medicinal plant cultivation, such as seed propagation, nursery management, post-harvest handling, and value addition. Included customs and traditional knowledge the tribe's preexisting, valuable skills. Encouraged generation knowledge exchange. Underline how crucial it is to cultivate medicinal plants using sustainable methods, such as protecting biodiversity, harvesting plants ethically, maintaining ecosystems. For durable environmental and socioeconomic benefits, encourage the fusion of traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific approaches. By implementing these strategies developed the capacity and skills of the tribe in medicinal plant cultivation while promoting innovation, sustainability, and communitempowerment.



**Fig 4: Skill development and capacity building program conducted among Raji tribes.**

**3.4. Various medicinal plants used by Raji tribes in different diseases**

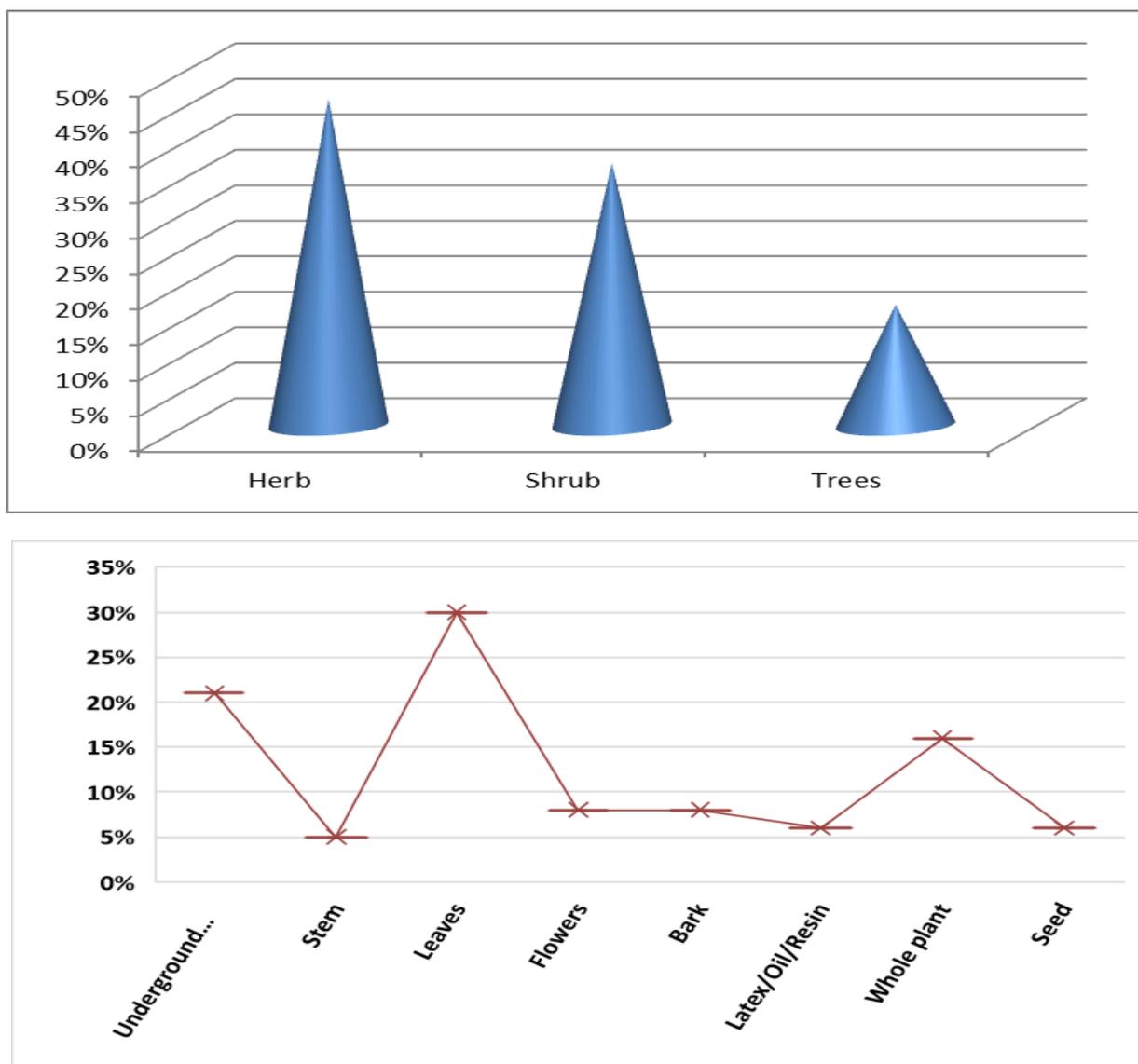
The Raji tribe has developed a unique method of disease classification through the use of their traditional knowledge, according to them the diseases are classified into three categories: Boils, chickenpox, weak vision, bleeding with cough, leprosy, and genetic disorders are among the diseases associated with the deities. Diseases associated with the spirits include high fever, intense headaches with red eyes. Diseases associated with the body include colds and coughs, cuts and wounds, diarrhea and dysentery, earaches, stomachaches, eye conditions, toothaches, asthma, urinary disorders and internal injuries like bleeding from the nose. The Raji tribe's traditional view of numerous health conditions is reflected in this classification. (Ram Prakash Research Scholar Department of History B.B.A.U., Lucknow, U.P).



**Fig 5: Diseases and indigenous medicines practiced by the Rajis.**



**Fig 6: Medicinal plants used by Raji Tribes (*Thalictrum foliolosum*).**



**Fig 7: Graphical presentation of plant parts by Raji tribes**

Northern India's ancient medical practices, including Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine, are ingrained in the local way of life. Native American religious rituals and belief systems place a high value on medicinal herbs, which are regarded as gods. These include plants like *Origanum vulgare*, *Saussurea obvallata*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Cedrus deodara*, and others that are frequently utilized by the local populace and Hindus for both medical and religious purposes. Some plant species are used not only for human usage but also in animal husbandry for medical purposes. Since prehistoric times, plants have been a useful source of remedies. Ancient literature such as the Rig-veda mention the therapeutic virtues of plants. Medicinal plants are widely used in traditional and modern treatment worldwide.

**4.5: Plantation drive to promote agroforestry**

A large-scale plantation drive was organized in the study area and planted multipurpose tree species such as Guava, Leechee, papaya, Indian gooseberry, Neem, Pomegranate etc. All these plants are medicinal plants and will also provide an option to livelihood for Raji Tribe. 1000 sapling provided to tribe.



**Fig 8: Plantation drive in Project site**

#### **4. Conclusion and discussion**

The paper highlighted a traditional knowledge and uses of medicinal plants in the Central Himalayan region held by the Raji people. The Raji people, who are acknowledged as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, have strong ties to their natural surroundings and largely depend on their native medicinal plant species to cure their illness. The article emphasizes the value of traditional knowledge, biodiversity, and the financial potential of growing therapeutic plants. This study also emphasized that how medicinal plants are playing a significant role in socio-economic and cultural fabric of Raji tribes. The Raji people's distinctive approach to classifying diseases, their dependence on conventional medicinal practices, and their longstanding association with the local forests highlight the significance of safeguarding both the natural equilibrium and cultural legacy. The essay also highlights issues which the Raji tribe's face, including overuse of natural resources, deforestation, and the possible loss of important traditional knowledge. To ensure the sustainable protection of important plant species and the preservation of the cultural legacy of the Raji tribe, immediate attention is required to solve these issues.

In order to protect the Raji tribe's welfare and their environment, the article, taken as a whole, promotes a comprehensive strategy that combines traditional methods with contemporary conservation initiatives.

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