Depression is one of the most common psychiatric disorders with high mortality, morbidity and economic burden worldwide (WHO, 2001; Avissar and Schreibe, 2002; 2006). Depression is considered as syndrome referring to a constellation of depressive symptoms and nosological category (APA, 1994) is a combination of misery and lethargy (Wilner et al., 1995). Depression is heterogeneous disorder that affects ones mood, physical health and behaviour. Patients with major depression have symptoms that reflect changes in brain monoamine neurotransmitters, specifically norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine (Gold et al., 1988). According to International Classification of Diseases-10 (ICD-10) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV (DSM-IV) depression episodes are recognized as individual suffering from depressed or sad mood, showing loss of energy and diminished activity (Patel, 2001). Theoretical explanation of depression includes loss of interest, virtually in all activities, a significant reduction in productivity and negative impact on health (WHO, 2001).

Major depressive disorders have been traditionally considered as a neurochemical disorders etiologically (Kendel et al., 2000). For decades depression has been linked particularly to disturbance in serotonergic and noradrenergic neurotransmitters (Haddod et al., 2002). Major depression involves disturbance in emotional, cognitive, immune, autonomic and endocrine functions (Nestler et al., 2002a). Assessment of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) chemistry, neuroendocrine response to pharmacological challenge, neuroreceptor and transporter binding revealed that depressive patients show abnormalities in serotonergic, noradrenergic and dopaminergic system (Manji et al., 2001). Emotional, cognitive, immune, autonomic and endocrine system shares neurotransmitters, peptides, hormones and cytokines as well as their receptor as a common language to communicate with each other (Haddod et al., 2002; Fiservo et al., 2002; Tafet and Bernardini, 2003; Kovaru and Kovaru, 2005). This interplay is important during stress response. Stressful events are the precipitating factors for the onset of depression (Hayley et al., 2005; Sekot et al., 2005). Dysfunction in the
neurotransmitter levels result in the systemic effect with hyper activation of hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis (HPA) besides psychological and behavioral consequences (Haddod et al., 2002; Tafet and Bernardini, 2003) which result in hypercortisolemia causing a wide array of organ and immune changes (Duman, 2004; Gubb et al., 2004). One among the affected part is hippocampus which expresses high number of steroid receptors, has key role in declarative memory tasks and many other cognitive functions (Brown et al., 1999; Sheline et al., 2002). Depression is usually treated with the antidepressant drugs, which cascade serious side effects. So, currently and globally there is greater interest in herbal remedies.

Herbal medicines are an important part of the culture and traditions. Today, most of the population is reliant on herbal medicines for their health care needs. Apart from their cultural significance, this is because herbal medicines are more accessible and affordable (Mander, 1998). There is an increasing trend worldwide, to integrate traditional medicine with primary health care. Renewed interest in traditional pharmacopoeias has meant that researchers are concerned with determining the scientific rationale for the plant’s usage. Traditional knowledge help scientists to target plants that may be medicinally useful (Cox and Balick, 1994).

Herbs have been highly valued and used regularly for thousands of years by the world as the medicine of the masses. Man has always searched for herb that heals the body and soothes the mind and there has never been a shortage of vegetation to investigate with some 20,000 species that have been used by various cultures. Medicinal plants have been used to treat psychotrophic and behavioral conditions as anxiety, depression, seizures, memory impairment, dementia, insomnia, and drug intoxication. A new study published in Germany has found that St. John’s Wort, a medicinal herb is more effective than a popular antidepressant drug in treating depression.
Although developments in research and technology have increased the number of active compounds that could be used for depression treatment, and the knowledge about their mechanisms of action continued to advance (Sartorius, 2007), recent studies indicated that about 30% of depressive patients failed to respond satisfactorily to commercially available antidepressants (Papakostas et al., 2008). Therefore, it is urgent to explore more promising antidepressants for clinical needs of depressed patients. Nowadays, the use of traditional herbs such as traditional Chinese medicine, traditional Ayurvedic medicine and other folk medicines has provided us a prospective alternative in the treatment of depression (Singh et al., 2009; Yi et al., 2009).

The present study deals with the Phytochemical, Pharmacological and Toxicological evaluation of some indigenous plants for antidepressant activity.