

The Potential of Traditional Post-Natal Malay Medicine heritage as an Ecotourism Product

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Abstract

Traditional medicine in the Malay community is a traditional custom of the ancestors. Malay traditional medicine is very unique and different from other peoples or ethnicities. For several reasons, the younger generation needs to be more knowledgeable about traditional medicine. Traditional medicine is closely related to midwifery, which is increasingly forgotten. All kinds of plants found around are considered wild plants and plants that grow without knowing the function of each plant. This traditional medicine is one of the ecotourism products for the Malay community that needs to be protected. The research results answer the objective of explaining the rules of traditional medicine for midwifery post-natal and listing the types of plants and how to use them. This qualitative study uses ethnographic methods, which are interviews and participation observations with key informants related to the cultural traditions of this Malay community. This research also obtained information using documents and library studies. The research findings will contribute to Malay locality products in ecotourism. Since traditional medicine is a knowledge the Malay community should be proud of, inherited by current and future generations. Efforts from all parties are essential.

Keyword: Traditional Medicine, Malay, Ecotourism, Post-natal

Introduction

Malay traditional medicine was inherited from ancient times again, even though it has contributed to human health in the past decade. Traditional medicine carries different concepts and practices with other terms such as alternative medicine, modern medicine, traditional medicine, Sufi medicine, and ethnic medicine. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) data, 80% of the earth's population uses flora and fauna as their main medicine (WHO, 1993). Flora and fauna are used not only in the Malay community's

traditional medicine but also as raw material in modern medicine (Jaroli et al., 2010). Using flora and fauna in traditional Malay medicine offers unique opportunities for eco-tourism. Activities such as excursions to traditional herb gardens or demonstrations of natural ingredients in treatments can be tourist attractions while increasing awareness of local culture's biological diversity and richness.

According to a report by Marques (1997), of 252 ingredients that WHO has selected, 11% are plants, and 8.7% are from animals used in medicine. Meanwhile, based on the World Research Institute (2000), 150 medicines from the United States were identified, and 27 of them are animal-based. The use of animal and plant sources and their effects on disease treatment are known to have been used by Western and Indian zoo therapists centuries ago (Rosner, 1992). The concept of zoo therapy practiced around the world, including in Western and Asian societies, provides inspiration for eco-tourism programs that emphasize species conservation and preservation. A visit to a conservation center or herb garden, where visitors can learn about the medicinal benefits of flora and fauna, will add value to the eco-tourism experience.

In Asia, using nature and traditional medicine provides many benefits in healing diseases. Among them are Chinese, Ayurveda, Kampo, Korean, and Greek traditional medicine, which have been practised in several regions of the world and have developed and been constantly used in the medical field (Haidan Yuan, 2016). Residents of the Great Wall of China also use various natural resources in their traditional medicine. According to the China National Corporation of Traditional and Herbal Medicine reports, the World Health Organization recognises nearly 1500 animal species used.

There is also traditional medicine of the Malay community that uses natural resources such as flora and fauna to treat diseases. Traditional medicine is associated with old meanings in terms of existence in a nation (Piah et al., 2015). The methods used for treatment, ingredients, and taboos are a culture inherited from long ago for the welfare of the local community (Ab Karim, 2018). Traditional medicine or other names are pre-scientific or alternative medicine. This medicine is very different from today's because it was used at a specific time and in a particular community. Malay Traditional medicine that uses nature as the main ingredient provides an opportunity to develop culturally-oriented eco-tourism. Through this initiative, visitors can engage in an interactive learning experience using natural materials in traditional treatments, which strengthens the understanding and appreciation of local cultural heritage.

Traditional medicine started with the community suffering from diseases, and it is believed that shamans can treat them; then, the shaman tries to use flora, fauna, minerals and substances that are believed to be used as medicine to give to patients. If the substance used is effective for treating the disease, then the substance will be used as the main ingredient. Shamans will first test the effective ingredients to cure diseases (Razak Karim, 2018). The tradition intends to gather all the past practices created by the community to be used when sick. Traditional knowledge regarding using natural materials in medicine, inherited by *bomoh* or shamans, offers valuable insights for eco-travel programs. Including workshops or learning sessions on these practices enriches the traveler's experience, helps maintain traditional knowledge, and promotes sustainable use of natural resources.

Method

The research uses a qualitative method by using ethnographic research. The information was collected through fieldwork in the Malay community of Pasir Mas. The main purpose of this fieldwork was to obtain primary data as the main data; then secondary data was also obtained from various sources to support the primary data to make it easier for the researcher to explain the issues of the research. The ethnographic approach was used throughout the fieldwork, namely collecting data from several villagers such as midwives, several aged people and several young people. This approach made it easier for the researcher to get information directly from informants. The researcher took approximately one month to be with the informants to understand the cultural practices of the Malay community in Kelantan. This research has 3 informants labelled as (IR1, IR2, IR3). Throughout the research, information was obtained from interviews and participant observations. The researcher also used the method of document review. The researcher uses various documents related to the issue studied to add information. The loose documents were used to illustrate the data collection process and references throughout the research process. In the research, the information obtained was analysed using NVivo 12 software. Using this software, the researcher can easily classify the data according to the theme (Thematic Analysis) set. The questions were asked using the Kelantan dialect. The informants chosen speak the Kelantan dialect to make it easier for the researcher and respondents to understand each other. The information and data obtained are detailed and analysed so that the research results are easy to provide.

Malay Traditional Medicine

The Malay use herbs and flora to cure ailments such as diabetes, high blood pressure, eye pain, bruises, artificial injuries, wounds, ringworm, insect bites, fever, earache, stomach ache and so on (Omar et al., 2010). Plants used in traditional medicine have a rationale. Plants also have a variety of tastes, including bitter, sweet, sour, spicy, hot, cold, and so on. Each plant flavour has its function; spicy is said to remove fat and chelate to treat wounds, hot plants will cure cold diseases, and vice versa, cool plants will cure hot diseases. For example, a headache is treated with *Peperomia pellucida* (*Daun Ketumpangan*), which means the leaves are pounded and placed on the forehead. The leaves of this plant are cold and very suitable for removing heat from the head (Omar et al., 2010).

The parts of plants often used in traditional medicine are stems, leaves, shoots, roots, twigs, fruits, flowers, bark, and sap. Its use is based on the type of plant to be used and the type of disease. The ways of use for plants include rubbing, sweeping, wrapping, drops, pastes, poultices, gargling, drinking, bathing, spraying, massaging and being used as amulets or talismans. For external use, such as wipes, rubs, pastes, and poultices are used to shrink wounds, sores, swelling, kill germs, repel wind, used for massage and so on (Omar et al., 2010).

Plants used as medicine must be identified first to avoid being mistaken because they have different properties and benefits. The measurements used must also be correct so that there are no side effects that can cause harm. Plants have two main functions: to cure diseases and avoid getting sick (Omar et al., 2010). Malay Traditional Medicine will identify the types of plants, how to use them, their purpose and effects, as well as the benefits that can be derived from them, such as *Epiphyllum Oxypetalum* (*Bakawali*), stems, *Orthosiphon Aristatus* (*Misai Kucing*), lemongrass, guava, ginger, *Centella Asiatica* (*Pegaga*), tamarind, *Phyllanthus* (*Dukung Anak*) and many more.

In the Malay community in Kelantan, midwifery knowledge is used to care for mothers during pregnancy (prenatal) and after birth (post-natal). In midwifery, this includes care procedures followed by massaging, burning, herbal baths, *barut* and *pelepas*. The Malay community often uses this matter. Despite that, there are still many procedures that still need to be practised. Village midwives treat pregnant women and are also one of the people consulted to use traditional medicine that uses natural plants due to much knowledge inherited from ancestors. However, it differs from the practices practised in other states, including Sarawak, where every term used varies significantly from the Malay community. In the context of eco-tourism, these practices offer travelers a unique opportunity to explore and experience first-hand the rich heritage of traditional Malay medicine while contributing to maintaining and promoting the local economy through authentic and responsible cultural tourism.

Post-natal Mother Care

The desire to become a mother is a dream for every woman. The post-natal phase is to recover the mental and physical state after childbirth because, in this phase, the mother is in a weakened condition and needs care to restore health as before pregnancy and childbirth. Post-natal is treatment after birth from the third trimester of pregnancy to 40 days. The custom for traditional care is called a period of abstinence, while in Kelantan, it is called '*dapur api*'. Many taboos are prescribed for both mother and child. During that period, mothers are encouraged to get adequate rest and care for nutrition and health. Following traditional medicine, care for postpartum women needs to be maintained with therapy. Among the practices and care of the mother after birth are massage, *bertungku*, herbal bath, wearing *barut*, *berdiang*, *rombak dapur* (*pelepas*), food care during abstinence, reproductive management and baby care (KKM, 2017).

For traditional medical practices, the appropriate abstinence period is 100 days, while the minimum period is 40 days. IR1 and IR2 support this:

"Kalu ore kampung dulu dulu gak dio pate sungguh la, ore loni sakit pat puloh hari pade doh" (IR1)

Meaning: People in the past abstained, but people nowadays only 40 days are enough (IR1)

"Setengoh ore pat puloh hari setengoh ore seratus hari, hok paling molek gak seratus hari laa" (IR2)

Meaning: Some people have 40 days, some people have 100 days. The best period is 100 days (IR2)

i. Massage

Maternal care after childbirth begins with massaging, *bertungku*, herbal baths and using *barut*. The practice of massaging is an essential matter for post-natal maternal care. Traditional medicine's mass includes a full body massage and a special massage on the abdomen and breasts.

According to informant IR2, the care of mothers who deliver normally and surgically is quite different. Mothers who deliver surgically cannot be massaged because they want to keep the surgical wound until it heals completely.

"Beranak biaso nga beloh ni bezo sikit, branok belah tok leh nk tuku, xleh berurut. skalo klu beranak biaso ni lepas pate kito brurut nok betul balik orat nk akat peranakkan. Keno brurut tiga kali sele dua hari, kiro dua hari skali lah. (IR2)

Meaning: Mothers whose normal labour process and caesarean section (C-Section) are slightly different. Caesarean section cannot '*bertungku*' and massage. In normal labour, we have a massage to lift the uterus and return the veins to normal. Massage every 2 days for 3 times. (IR2)

According to traditional medical knowledge, the massage practice is performed on the third day of birth. The duration of the massage is not fixed and is at the discretion of the birth mother. According to the midwives, the frequency of massage is either consecutive or alternate.

Informant IR1 said to massage intermittently for every other day or every three days for three times. Massage activities are good in the morning and evening and take 30 minutes to 1 hour. The massage sequence starts from the feet and ends with the head. The material used during massage is cooking oil mixed with herbs or hot massage oil. The benefits of massage for mothers after birth are that it can soften the veins, lift the uterus, remove stretch marks and laxity, and improve blood flow. IR1 supported this, she that:

"Ngurut ni nok bui urat jadi lembut, nok suruh naik mula peranakkan, ore tino ni klu beranak peranakkan jatuh, brurut ni nok wak naik mula lah. Nok betul betul balik orat toksey bui masuk angin, lenguh, betul orat tokol-tokol" (IR1)

Meaning: With this massage, the veins will become softer, and the uterus will rise. If women give birth, the uterus falls, and the massage returns to normal. Veins are normal; wind cannot come in, reducing fatigue. (IR1)



Figure 1: The village midwife is giving a massage.

ii. *Bertungku*

Bertungku is an important part of the period to help the body recover, relax the mind and invigorate the skin. *Bertungku* is a massage practice that uses hot stones. This practice is the same as massaging, which starts on the third day after birth or according to the mother's wishes. According to IR3, *bertungku* is practised after the third day of childbirth throughout the post-natal period. However, mothers who deliver surgically are not recommended to *bertungku* because of wounds that have not healed.

"Skalo ore tuku lepas tigo pat hari beranak, panas batu sungai pahtu balut-balut dale kain hok letok daun kunyit dan daun pandan atah perut nak bui kecut orat" (IR3)

Meaning: It is common for people to *bertungku* after three or four days of giving birth, heat the river stone, wrap it in cloth, and then place turmeric and pandan leaves on the stomach to soften the veins. (IR3)

According to IR3, river stones will be heated over a fire, wrapped using turmeric and pandan leaves, and then wrapped in thick cloth. Next, it is placed on the abdomen and the kidneys to shrink the veins. The benefits of squatting are to shrink the uterus and veins, smooth the production of postpartum blood, avoid a bloated belly and preserve youth, release wind, lighten the body, prevent stretch marks, and tighten the uterus (KKM, 2017).



Figure 2: River stones are heated over a fire.

iii. Herb Bath

Herb bath, called '*mandi teresak*' in Kelantan, is a practice that has been practised for generations. Herb bath is highly recommended for mothers after birth. According to Malay traditional medicine, take an herbal bath after birth, on the first or second day of delivery. This herb bath is usually after a massage and *bertungku*. Typically, herb bathing is done three times during the post-natal period. Coincides with the interview with IR2, which is:

"Hok keno wak lagi gak mandi teresak lepas kelik spital gak esokkannya kito wak la mandi teresak ni. Skalo gak ore buat tigo kali, ado jah jugok hok buat lebih, haa dio beraso sedak gak buat lebih. Mandi teresak ni buke ko ore tino lepas beranak jah ko ore tuo tuo hok sakit pun boleh" (IR2)

Meaning: Having an herbal bath after returning from the hospital. It is customary to do it three times, but some people do it more than three times according to their comfort. This herbal bath is not only after childbirth but also for sick older adults. (IR2)

KKM (2017), the ingredients often used for this herb bath are pandan leaves, fragrant lemongrass leaves, galangal leaves, turmeric leaves, patchouli leaves, kaffir lime leaves, and ginger leaves. However, based on interviews with IR2, the ingredients used are not fixed but can also be replaced with other suitable leaves. The statement is as follows

"Daun kito ambik daun kunyit, daun lima purut, daun serai wongi, daun pandan, daun kudu, daun tmesu nga daun sirih kalu takdok boleh jah guno daun lain, kade"

kito payoh jugok nok cari, ambik jah hok ado tepi tepi rumah daun hok boleh guno"
(IR2)

Meaning: Take turmeric leaves, kaffir lime leaves, fragrant lemongrass leaves, or pandan leaves with betel leaves; if there is none, you can substitute other leaves; it's usually hard to find; just take the one that's by the house. (IR2)

The leaves will be boiled first, after being warm filtered, then used for bathing in the morning. Boiled herb leaves are used to cover the seat when bathing. According to medical practitioners, the herbal bath starts at the feet first and ends at the head. Herbal baths are said to refresh the body, improve the veins in the body, perfume and eliminate the smell, and beautify the body (KKM, 2017).



Figure 3: Herb leaves boiled in a pot.

iv. *Barut's use*

Barut's use is strongly encouraged to get the body before pregnancy. Three to five meters long, a piece of cloth is tied from the bottom of the breast to the hip. The use of *barut* a day after childbirth or up to forty days. For optimal effects, it is advisable to wear for 100 days. According to IR2, the *barut* is worn at night for a few hours after bathing.

According to IR2, the ingredients used are turmeric, salt, lemon juice, lime and yeast. The use of the *barut* accelerates the body's slimming process. In addition, the other benefits are to stomach and tighten the skin. IR2 stated this

"Pakai barut perut ni ikut suko la nok bubuh gapo, kalo ore buh kunyit, garam, pecek lima nipis, kapur pah ragi. Kunyit nga garam ni guno maso mulo mulo barut perut jah pahtu takpo doh la toksey bubuh pun." (IR2)

Meaning: Wear this *barut*, you can put anything. Most people place turmeric, salt, five thin, lime and yeast. This salt turmeric is used early, and then it is not put. (IR2)

In ancient times, using three to five meters of *barut* cloth was customary. However, there is now a wide selection of *barut* fabrics on sale and modern croset of various shapes, whether laced, zipped, bowed or glued. According to IR2, many young people prefer modern croset because of its easy and uncomplicated usage.



Figure 4: *Barut* usage

v. *Rombak Dapur* (Release)

The mother's care after birth ends with the traditional *rombak dapur*, or in the state of Kelantan called "*pelepas*", after 40 days of abstinence. This ceremony is done for the mother to avoid than *meroyan* and disturb health. Coincides with the experience told by IR1 following a person who did not do the process of *pelepas* and *pelepas* not following the right way, she said:

"Ado ore setiu, dio pelepas tapi tok keno nga caro. Tok laki dio bowok mari jupo nga kito nga keadaan bini dio tok nanok make tok buat kijo gapo duk menung. Ruponyo bini dio keno nyakit muye sebab pelepas tok keno caro. Ado jugo ore mari kat kito, sembilan bule dah beranak baru nok pelepas, dio kato nok tido tokleno duk sakit tapok kaki" (IR1)

Meaning: The people in Setiu, the release did not follow the right way. The husband took his wife to see the midwife because she could not work and was brooding. The wife is affected by the *Meroyan* disease. Some people come to see midwives after nine months of giving birth to get rid of pain in the soles of their feet" (IR1)

To carry out the custom of 'releasing', methods and materials need to be used. Every midwife has different materials to use. Among the materials used by IR1 are thread, rice, betel, glutinous rice, cold powder, coconut, cloth and RM1.20 money. The procedure for performing the 'release' ceremony starts with a flower bath. Then, the mother stands upright while holding the baby, facing the door. Midwives will roll the thread as a loop and then put it on the mother from head to toe three times, along with incantations and prayers for safety. Then, in the last round, the thread will be tied and thrown out to signify that the mother and child have been released.



Figure 5.14: Materials used for the *pelepas* ceremony.

Conclusion

Malay traditional medical culture is very beneficial to all who practice it. The current generation has increasingly less practised traditional medicine of the Malay community in Kelantan. Traditional medical practices must be preserved and inherited from generation to generation so they are preserved. Traditional Malay medical practice in the care of mothers after birth is very helpful to the community, starting from the first day of abstinence until 40 days or 100 days. This practice helps mothers who give birth restore their bodies and emotions. All the abstinence and practices followed properly can positively affect the mother. However, in this modern age, the development and facilities provided by the government to the community provide many benefits and facilitate daily affairs. Likewise, the development of contemporary medicine has positively impacted the community because it enables every day experiences. However, there is also a negative impact where the current generation is no longer exposed to traditional medicine. The study conducted is expected to help and be a reference to the reader to jointly maintain this traditional medicine so that future generations can know its uniqueness.

This research makes a significant contribution in both theoretical and contextual terms to the field of traditional Malay medicine, particularly in the context of postnatal care. Theoretically, it closes a gap in the existing literature by providing a more in-depth understanding of traditional Malay medical practices, enriching academic knowledge, and opening up opportunities for further studies. This is important because it offers a new perspective and helps construct a more inclusive traditional medicine theory. Contextually, this study helps maintain and promote Malay cultural heritage, especially in sustaining traditional practices rich with history and identity. It also increases awareness and understanding among modern medicine practitioners and practitioners, promoting dialogue and collaboration between modern and traditional medicine for a more holistic approach to health. In addition, this study contributes to the development of eco-tourism related to Malay culture, which not only supports the maintenance of this traditional custom but also assists in local economic development through responsible and sustainable tourism. Overall, this study is essential in advancing the academic and practical understanding of traditional Malay medicine and has far-reaching implications for the health and tourism sectors.

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