OLD ADVICES/TIPS AND HEALTHCARE PRACTICE AS A MALAY LOCAL KNOWLEDGE BASED ON MANUSCRIPT MSS3140 KITAB TIBB

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Abstract

Local knowledge can be considered as a set of information, guide and knowledge which is passed down from one generation to another as a living strategy and symbolises a uniqueness of a race. In the context of Malay people, it is a result of interaction and response of Malay community to the environment as a means to live and ways it could be beneficial for the community. This research is meant to study old advices or tips (petua) and practices (amalan) in traditional Malay medicine as written in Kitab Tibb; an old Malay manuscript. The study material is obtained from the National Library of Malaysia using the code MS3140. This research is a qualitative research and most of the time is spent by doing literature studies. The research also involves transliteration work on the Kitab Tibb from Jawi script to Roman and the data is analysed focusing on the tips and health practice which are gathered from the manuscript. The research findings show that element of local knowledge existed in the manuscript are about treating common health issues/illness among the Malays in the past, either from external or internal. This research is initiated by the will to understand historical, culture, wisdom, life experience and Malay weltanschauung in the context of medical field.

Keywords: Local knowledge, Kitab Tibb, traditional Malay medicine, old advice, tips (petua), healthcare practice (amalan).

1. Introduction

Manuscript is one of the most important source of documentation in studying and understanding all sorts of living way by the Malays in the past. Malay manuscript is referred as any handwritten work produced before the 20th century (within the early of 16th century until the early of 20th century) in Malay language using Jawi script (Siti Mariani S.M. Omar, 2002; Siti Hawa, 2009). The manuscripts contain various types of field which covered economics, socioculture, administration, governance and also letters (official and personal) about all aspects of living. This sums up the importance of Malay manuscripts as mentioned by Siti Hawa (2001) and Ding Choo Ming (2008). Malay manuscripts are regarded as the
strength in information keeping where it played important roles to record, report, teach, disseminate and channel knowledge about histories, laws, religion (especially about Islam), nationalism, traditional medicine, farming, construction and so forth (Siti Hawa, 2001). Ancient Malay manuscripts encompassed various wisdoms and life skills of the Malay community in the past such as astrology, medicine, poetry, dream prediction, figurative, language, carpentry, romance, calculations, agriculture, laws and sailing (Ding Choo Ming, 2008). They are considered as the outpouring of the souls of Malay people which contained philosophical thought, beliefs, needs and other life issues (Nyoman Weda Kusuma, 2007). The field of Malay manuscript writing was at the peak of its glory in the 17th century in line with the role of Aceh as the centre of Islamic studies around that time (Mahayudin, 2000).

*Kitab Tibb*, regarded as ancient Malay manuscripts of medical and health sciences recorded various ways to cure and heal illness/diseases by using natural ingredients which include flora, fauna, spices and roots believed (and also found) to be effective. According to Ding (2008), it was a common practice for a Malay manuscript to be repeatedly copied, resulting multiple versions of a same manuscript. For instance, there are 18 versions of *Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Annals) and 26 versions of *Tajus Salatin* in the collection of several libraries throughout the whole world. The same case can be seen on Malay medical manuscripts although it is yet to be confirmed whether there are similarities between the copies which are identified by different codes and serial number in different countries. *Kitab Tibb* in the collection of the National Library of Malaysia are coded with MSS as the initial, followed by numbers like 1292, 759, 1754, 2219 and so on. Whereas *Kitab Tibb* in the collection of Departemen Pendidikan dan Keguruan Jakarta are coded as M1.832 and M1.833 (Shaharir, 2003) while *Kitab Tibb* in the Netherlands are coded as Cod. OR. 6558, 1769, 4818(b), 8704, 8216, 1268B, 8733 and 7230 (Wan Ali, 1985).

Through *Kitab Tibb*, local knowledge of Malay community related with health were conveyed in many ways, one of it is in the form of advice/ tips and old practice which were commonly exercised by the Malays in the past and the knowledge were transmitted from generations to generations. Traditional Malay community utilized natural resources to maintain, treat and prevent illness as well as for healthy lifestyle. This is evidently seen in *Kitab Tibb* MS3140 which is used as the material in writing this research paper. This paper is written to address local knowledge in understanding the art of Malay advice and health practice of traditional Malay community as an effort to revive the intellectuality of Malay medical.

2. Literature Study

Atikah Abdul Azam (2016) in her research article titled *Sumbangan Amalan Petua dalam Falsafah Melayu* (The contribution of Old Advice/ Tips in Malay Philosophy) has focused her study in the aspect of health tips in connection with the nature. The research finding has concluded that old advices or tips were considered as guidance of living by local community. Traditional community had verbally inherited old advices although living among younger and modernized generations who can write who will then jot down whatever being told by older generations. Common practice which were influenced by Malay philosophy and belief were closely related to the philosophy of nature revolved around the traditional Malay living environment.

A study by Aishah @ Eshah Haji Mohamed and Abd. Aziz Bidin (2011) titled *Wanita Melayu Dan Tumbuhan Ubatan: Satu Analisis Budaya* (Malay Women and Medicinal Plant: An Analysis on Culture) has discussed the use of medicinal plants during labour and confinement among Malay women from the perspective of culture. The main focus of the research was
to identify medicinal plants commonly used for that purpose. The research results showed that the usage of medicinal plants were influenced by the Malays’ beliefs on body balance, magic and values. It was also found that *buah kembang semangkuk* (Scaphium) with addition of coconut oil were widely used to aid during labour. Besides *buah kembang semangkuk*, plants that are bitter and spicy herbs like tumeric and ginger were boiled and consumed as hot drinks or taken raw or even used as an ingredient to be applied to women’s body after giving birth.

Salmah Omar (2010) through her research titled *Penjagaan Kesihatan Masyarakat Melanau Islam Kampung Jepak, Bintulu, Sarawak* (Muslims Melanau Community Healthcare in Kampung Jepak, Bintulu, Sarawak) has conducted an ethnographic research on health. The focus of her research was mainly about the way Muslims Melanau care about their health. Based on the research, it was found that the habits of eating and using plants in cooking among Muslims Melanau community which are still being practiced are influenced by Melanau’s customs, values, beliefs, knowledge, experience and skills. This shows that Melanau community are still intact with their cultural values passed down through previous generations.

A research by Syarifah Suraya Syed Jamaludin (2010) titled *Penjagaan Kesihatan Wanita Melayu Kampung Selarong, Perak* (Malay Women Healthcare in Kampung Selarong, Perak) examines the practice among Malay women in Perak for their healthcare. The research findings showed that Malay women played an important role in taking care of their family members’ health as well as theirs. With the state of their economy, women in Kampung Selarong managed their households by using various natural resources available in their surroundings.

A research titled *The Desi Ways: Traditional Health Practices of South Asian Women in Canada* by Hilton, et al. (2001) examines the traditional ways and practice of Asian women in Southern Canada to care for their health. Most of the women involved in the research had shown that they were still using traditional ways of healthcare which they inherited the knowledge about it. The women chose to use their knowledge because they were influenced by their family members, attitude, problems, beliefs and effectiveness of the traditional practice. The research findings showed these women were either practicing their traditional ways on a regular basis or only during crisis. For women to meet their health needs, the preparation must be suitable with the culture and to respect other’s choices or decisions either to practice traditional ways in their lives or not.

Based on the literature studies, we can see the importance of healthcare and varieties of modern as well as traditional ways people use in taking care of their health. In fact, research on Malay community healthcare has been done although the focus was not particularly on old advices/ tips and practice as provided in *Kitab Tibb*. Therefore, this research is to identify and to present old advices/ tips of traditional Malay community found in MS3140 *Kitab Tibb*.

3. Research Method

This is a qualitative study where literature review is used mainly to serve the research objectives. Transliteration is done on MS3140 *Kitab Tibb* from Jawi script to Roman script. Then, text analysis is done after gathering data on old advices/tips and health practice found in the manuscript and analysed from the perspective of Malay local knowledge in medicine.

3.1 The Concept of Local Knowledge

Local knowledge is referred as all forms of knowledge, beliefs, understanding, determination, vision, customs or ethics which influence human life among ecological
society (Keraf, 2002). Besides that, local knowledge is an explicit knowledge that emerges from a long period and evolve with the community and their environment in the shared local systems. According to Husni Thamrin (2011), local knowledge is a system in the manner of social, political, cultural, economic and boundary that exist in the midst of local community. The characteristics present in local knowledge is the characteristics which are dynamic, sustainable and acceptable by its community.

In other words, local knowledge is the local value of a specific community. The value considered legit and becomes the mould that shapes up the way a local community act towards something. Cultural value of a community consists of the concept and way of life for a community which greatly influence the way people lead their lives. These local values serve to regulate people to live in a society. Therefore, everyone will have rules and values to follow and agreed upon by all its members (Sesilia Seli & Mohamad Mokhtar Abu Hassan, 2017, p. 209).

In general, local knowledge is also about basic knowledge of local community gained from their experience and collection of knowledge on certain issues (Kamonthip, 2007, p. 1). Roikhwanphut Mungmachin (2012, p. 176) has described local knowledge as in the following passage:

“… basic knowledge gained from living in balance with nature. It is related to culture in the community which is accumulated and passed on. This wisdom can be both abstract and concrete, but the important characteristics are that it comes from experiences or truth gained from life”. (Roikhwanphut Mungmachin, 2012, p. 176)

This view of idea shows the connection of local knowledge to cultural aspects which are practiced by the community throughout generations. The knowledge is used as a guidance to perform daily activities, including to socialize with people in the surroundings. Nyoman Utari Vipriyanti (2008, p. 4) said that local knowledge is an element of traditional culture that is rooted in the life of a person and the community which also related with activities like agriculture, construction and etcetera. Based on the definition by Kamonthip (2007) and Nyoman Utari Vipriyantu (2008), we can say that local knowledge that belongs to a certain community is a knowledge obtained and learned from experience in life which is inherited and passes down from one generation to another.

Local knowledge is also considered as a collective of knowledge practiced by a community in a certain area. That is the case with the Malays in the past that had used natural resources for the benefit of health as written in Kitab Tibb. The manuscript which is coded as MS3140 tells the details of method and health practice using raw material like flora and fauna. Therefore, this article analyses some old advices and practice using flora and fauna which are local knowledge in healing certain types of illness.

4. Research Findings

Malay local knowledge in the field of medicine as found in MS3140 Kitab Tibb comprises of Malay wisdom and intellectuality in traditional Malay medical. The writings in the manuscript transmitted information on Malay old advices and practices for healthcare. According to Harun Mat Piah and Zawiyah Baba (2014), Kitab Tibb is considered as the masterpiece of Malay people in the past especially diagnosing an illness and the way to heal it. Table 1 consists some of the findings of this research which is related to Malay old advices and practice in healthcare.
Table 1. Malay old advices and practice in healthcare as written in MS3140 *Kitab Tibb*: The manuscript of traditional Malay Medicine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illness/Disease</th>
<th>Old Advice (Tips)/Ingredient</th>
<th>Method of preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baby in breech position</td>
<td>Prepare air selusuh</td>
<td>Draw the picture and soak it in the water (<em>air selusuh</em>). Drink the water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrauterine fetal death</td>
<td>Prepare <em>air selusuh</em> for the dead baby</td>
<td>To be written on a paper and tie it on the left arm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving birth</td>
<td>Prepare <em>air selusuh</em> for the mother in labour.</td>
<td>To be written on <em>daun keladi hitam</em> (a type of Alocasia leave), soak in water and pour on the chest to the belly of the pregnant mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To cure an illness/disease</td>
<td></td>
<td>To be drawn on a piece of paper, tie it on the body or head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisoned</td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw on a piece of paper or white cup and drink the water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloody cough</td>
<td>Skin (not mentioned what type of skin), vinegar, rock sugar</td>
<td>Soak the skin in vinegar overnight then mix it with rock sugar the next day before consuming the drink in the morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sore headache</td>
<td>Lime leaves, mustard seeds, vinegar, banana leaf.</td>
<td>Crush the lime leaf and mustard seeds and mix with vinegar, place it in banana leaf and cook. Put it on the head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stung by snake, scorpion and centipede</td>
<td>Garlic, salt, lime leaf, vinegar.</td>
<td>Crush garlic and mix it with lime juice and vinegar. Drink it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw on black tin and soak it in water. Drink it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amenorhea and irregular menstruation</td>
<td>A handful of <em>daun meniran</em> or <em>dukung anak</em> (phyllanthus niruri) 3 shallots, a pinch of black cumin (<em>Nigella sativa</em>), a pinch of <em>sahang sulah</em> (<em>Piper nigrum</em> L.).</td>
<td>Mill <em>daun meniran</em>, shallots and black cumin, mix with water and place it in a hot pot. Consume in the morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach ache</td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw and place it on the stomach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleeding or abscess from genital area</td>
<td>A <em>pandan</em> leaf, sugar and tamarind</td>
<td>Burn the <em>pandan</em> leaf into ashes, mix it with sugar and tamarind water. Consume the drink in the morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period pain</td>
<td><em>Pandan</em> (branch), chili leaf, tamarind and shrimp paste.</td>
<td>Crush all the ingredients together. Recite <em>selawat</em> three times when cutting the <em>pandan</em> branch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>Ingredients</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s illness of having/feeling cold</td>
<td>Water, the skin of Spanish cherry (bunga tanjung) and skin of rambutan.</td>
<td>Boil all ingredients and drink the water in the morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>Potter wasps nest, garlic and vinegar</td>
<td>Mill the nest of potter wasps with garlic then add in vinegar. Applied the mixture to the pubic area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest pain</td>
<td>Jasmine leaf and turmeric.</td>
<td>Mill all ingredients and apply it on the chest area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barren woman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw on a piece of paper, put it on the arm or on an unproductive tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>Cancer in the thighs: 3 turmeric</td>
<td>Rub the turmeric on a pole and apply it the painful area (thighs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cancer in the stomach: 3 turmeric, white cumin, garlic and pucuk rambang.</td>
<td>Crush all ingredients and drink it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Old advices/tips and health practice were often used by the Malays as a prevention or antidote to cure illness or disease. From MS3140 Kitab Tibb, advices and health practice were explained systematically, consisting of introduction, explanation and ingredients as well as methods to be used in a treatment. The list of illness/diseases are the common ones in the Malay community. This paper discusses only a few advices and practices which are related to general illness and women illness including among pregnant women. Examples of general illness which used roots or herbs in treatment as written in Kitab Tibb was headache. For instance:

*Bab ini, ubat kepala ngilu. Ambil daun limau nipis dan biji sawi, maka pipis airnya cuka yang masam, bubuh pada daun pisang. Hangatkan dahulu, maka bubuh pada kepalanya yang sakit itu, āfiat olehnya. Bismilhai al-rahman rahim.* (MSS3140, p. 7)

The quote shows that lime leaf and mustard seeds were used in treating soaring headache. The preparation for the ingredients were to mill both lime leaf and mustard seed, mix them with vinegar and place it in banana leaf. After heating the banana leaf (with all the mixture inside), place it on the painful area.

Local knowledge in using natural resources as written in Kitab Tibb for treatment caused by insect or venomous stung was using garlic, salt, lime juice and vinegar, as described in the excerpt:

*Bab ini ubat segala bisa-bisa atau ular atau kala atau lipan. Ambil bawang putih dan garam, maka pipis/lumat. Lumat-lumat maka bubuh air limau nipis campur dengan cuka yang masam, minumnya, āfiat olehnya.* (MSS3140, p. 7-8)

Besides using all the ingredients mentioned above, *du’a* or prayer was also recited as follows:

*Bab ini, ubat orang kena sengat sekelian yang bisa-bisa, maka inilah doanya dibaca barang di mana tempat negeri yang kena sengat itu, sebutlah negerinya.*

(MSS3140, p. 7-8)
The following excerpt is about treatment to help cure general illness like constipation:


The method is a bit rare and unique since instead of using herbs or plants, potter wasps nest was used with garlic. The preparation of the ingredients involved milling the nest, garlic and mixing them with vinegar. The mixture is then applied on the abdominal part, avoiding belly button.

The Malays also used pandan leaf in treatment, for instance to stop blood and abscess coming out from genital parts. The preparation for this treatment was to burn a piece of pandan leaf until it turns into ashes. Later, mix the ash with sugar and tamarind water. This mixture is consumed every morning until fully cured. According to Sri Yadial Chalid and Zulfakar T. S. (2009, pp. 224), pandan leaf has active antioxidant properties. An excerpt from Kitab Tibb regarding the treatment:

Bab ini, ubat lelaki atau perempuan selalu keluar darah atau nanah pada zakarnya atau perempuan yang keluar darah daripada farahnya, maka ambil seurat pandan. Maka bakar, ambil abunya campurkan dengan gula, jawa. Maka minum ketika pagi, āfiat olehnya. (MSS3140, p. 12)

Besides general illness, MS3140 Kitab Tibb mentioned about common illness among women. For examples, it mentioned about period pain and coldness. In order to ease period pain, pandan branch, chili leaf, tamarind and shrimp paste were crushed together. An excerpt about the treatment is as follows:

Bab ini ubat senggugut, ambil batang pandan yang muda, didaunya lada itu satu cangkir, lagi asam jawa sedikit, belacan sedikit. Maka tumbuk lumat-lumat. Jikalau menebang batang pandan itu, bacakan selawat tiga kali, tahan nafas dahulu baru tebang. (MSS3140, p. 13)

As also mentioned in the above excerpt, selawat should be recited three times while getting the pandan branch.

Old advice and practice for treating Amenorhea and irregular menstruation which are usually caused by hormone imbalance, aging and stress are written in the manuscript as follows:

Bab ini, ubat orang tiada datang bulannya atau penyakit yang terhenti-henti daripada keluarannya darah. Maka ambil daun meniram segenggam dan bawang merah laki-laki tiga dan jintan hitam sejempuk lima jari dan sahang sudah sejempuk lima jari. Maka giling, maka taruh air kira-kira banyaknya dan lagi ambil tembikai bakar sampai merah, kemudian maka masukkan pada ubat yang tersebut di tembikai tadi, maka kasi minum pada pagi-pagi hari. (MSS3140, p. 13)

Tips and practice for irregular menstruation was to use certain types of herbs such as daun meniran or dukung anak, onions, black cumin, sahbang and pepper. The preparation for these ingredients was to mix everything, mill and bring them to a boil. The boiled ingredients shall be consumed every morning. The herbs used are rich with beneficial properties, for instance the juice from shallots is known to be good for menstruation.


(Muhammad Amir Wan Harun, 2015, p. 16), dukung anak is known for a variety of chemical properties like phenolics, lignans and xylans which are thought to heal and prevent illness.

Next, is writings related to pregnant women. The manuscripts had mentioned about labour, intrauterine fetal death and baby in breech position. Treatment for all the three issues with pregnant women involved air selusuh which meant to ease and aid the patients. Excerpt from Kitab Tibb regarding the treatment is as follows:

Ini air selusuh orang beranak, maka surat pada daun keladi hitam, maka diisikan air, cucurkan pada dadanya lalu ke perutnya, nescaya keluar anaknya. Inilah rajahnya.

(MSS3140, p. 3)

The following excerpt is about preparing air selusuh for mother in labour. The method involves writing a talisman on daun keladi hitam which is then filled with water. The water is then poured onto the mother’s chest until the stomach. The purpose in doing so was to help delivery process and ease the pain of labour (Aishah @ Eshah Mohamed & Abd. Aziz Bidin, 2011, p. 131).

There is also advices and practices for married women with infertility issues in Kitab Tibb. The talisman and excerpt is as follows:

Bab ini, ubat perempuan yang tiada bernak dengan izin Allah Taala disurat pada kertas, diletakkan pada lengan atau di pohon kayu yang tidak berbuah dengan segera Allah Subhana Wa Taala jadi berbuah. Inilah surat.

(MSS3140, p. 16-17)

Old advices and practices in healthcare and treatment for various illness written in MS3140 Kitab Tibb shows that the Malays community had extraordinary abilities in treating illness. This also means that traditional medical knowledge was transmitted from one generation to another which was recorded in writing to ensure its sustainability. In addition,
traditional medical knowledge can be considered as a spectrum of local knowledge owned by Malay people.

5. Conclusion

The discussion in this article shows the local knowledge of Malay people in the field of traditional medicine. Old advices/ tips and healthcare practice available in MS3140 Kitab Tibb depicted the persistence and wisdom of the Malays in searching for antidote to cure common illness among Malay people in the past. This also shows that Malay medicine was used and tested for its efficacy since a long time ago and passed down from one generation to another. Ingredients used in Malay medicine which were mainly natural resources shows the way Malay people relate with nature through adaptation, thus creating harmony and balance with their environment. This resulted in admirable wisdoms especially on Malay medical local knowledge.

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