

Indigenous Beliefs and Health Care Practices of the Thadou Kukis

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Abstract

The issue of health and sickness has been one of the important aspects of human existence. Diseases have been one of the primary causes of mortality. For long, cultures worldwide relied upon plants and animals-based medicine that available in their natural surroundings as their primary health care system. This therapeutic knowledge, derived as a result of community ecological interactions is transferred and passed down from one generation to another are referred to as traditional medicinal knowledge and are extensively used in the treatment of illness. Traditional medicinal knowledge and practices vary across cultures depending upon the available flora, fauna, vegetation, and others. The paper seeks to look into the Thadou-Kukis' concept of health and illness. The various beliefs and cultural practices concerning health and sickness pertaining to an individual as well as the community's perception and response to illness. The applications of various flora and fauna product in the therapeutic treatment of diseases.

Keywords: Beliefs, Cultural Practice, Diseases, illness, Traditional medicine, Thadou-Kuki

1. Introduction

Every society irrespective of its simplicity or complexity evolved its belief and practices concerning health and treatment of ailments, generally refers to as traditional or folk medicinal practices. The World Health Organisation defines traditional medicine as sum of the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health and the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness (World Health organisation, 2023). It is a framework of healing and health practices, that encompass a body of beliefs and practices isolated in various ways from the social and cultural 'mainstream' and intriguingly unaffected by modern medical knowledge systems (Connor & Hufford, 2001). This medicinal knowledge has no official status and is primarily transmitted orally and the mode of transmission is what made these health and healing practices traditional. The terminology is comprehensively used to denote traditional Chinese medicine, Indian ayurveda, Arabic Unani any other forms of indigenous Medicine.

Traditional medicine therapies involve the use of medicinal herbs, animals' parts or minerals (Holliday, 2008). Forest resources such as flora, fauna and minerals have been the repositories of medicinal compound such as alkaloids (cocaine, ephedrine, caffeine, nicotine) anti-bacterial as well as antifertility compound (Colfer, et.al, 2006). Besides the knowledge of using animals and animals derived treatment of human diseases have been prevalent among communities since antiquity.

Conor & Hufford (2001), conceptualised health practices and beliefs with human bodily harmony or balance; interrelation of mind, body and spirit; magical or supernatural elements; vital force of essence; thought and emotions; energies and transference; concern with underlying causes; and the moral tone. The existence of generalists and specialist therapeutic practitioners such midwives, massagers, bonesetters, herbalist, magico-religious and spiritual specialist of various kinds in the folk/traditional medical system. Foster in "*Medical Anthropology*," attribute causes of disease to be of naturalistic or personalistic. Naturalistic as that sickness as result of exposure to naturally occurring risks in one's environment. Those believed to have been caused by supernatural intervention be it human or non-human i.e., God, ghosts and malevolent spirits were qualified as personalistic (Quilan, 2011).

Studies relating to traditional health care practices in the context of north-east India and Thadou-Kuki in particular have been limited to the documentation of traditional medicinal plants, its preparation technique and usage. The community understanding of health and illness and the applications of various medicinal plants and animals parts in the therapeutic process that manifest in the beliefs system and cultural practices of the people have remained a gap area in academic discourse. In this note, the paper seeks to examine the traditional health care beliefs and practices of the Thadou-Kuki of Manipur.

2. Method and Materials

The Thadou are one of the Kuki-Chin ethnic groups, comprising of multiple clans that are again subdivided into many eponymous branches (Shakespeare, 1893). They represent the dominant speaker of the northern Kuki-Chin sub group within Tibeto-Burma linguistic family and are largely concentrated in the present Indian state of Manipur and its adjoining states of Nagaland and Assam. In the context of the present study area i.e. Manipur, they found are scattered in the hilly districts with significant concentration in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi district (Haokip, 2011).

The Thadou-Kukis looked upon the natural environment as source for their health care and a means to treat ailments. Consequently, these ecological interactions enable them to gain knowledge about the various medicinal flora and fauna that are available in their natural environment and accord various beliefs and practices concerning health and illness. These frameworks of knowledge and practices as passed on from generations and forms the traditional medicinal practices of the people. Studies on the traditional medicine and practices of the people mostly centred around the taxonomy of medicinal plants and herbs.

Nonetheless, their notion of health and illness and their various belief and cultural practices associated with health care. The usage of animals and their body parts in the treatment of ailments besides medicinal plants and herbs remained a lacuna that warrant for an investigation. In this context, the papers seek to made a details inquiry into the traditional medicinal practice of the Thadou-Kukis. Information of the research work is gathered from primary source through personal interview with individual practicing traditional medicine. Vernacular works concerning the life and lore of the people offers a valuable insight into the health care beliefs and practices and is often employed. Furthermore, information is also gathered through published books and journal relating to traditional medicinal practices, specifically those of the Thadou-Kuki are also included.

3. The People Understanding of Health and Illness

The concept of health and illness encompass a holistic view of the state of human being as healthy or unhealthy in terms of their physical, mental and social well-being. The Thadou-Kukis notion of health and illness is purely a functionally one and is closely associated with the ability and inability to do their normal work assign to their respective age and sex in the society. The term '*damlou*' would be used to denote illness of all kinds and '*Mi damthei*' to an individual free from ailments sickness, where '*Mi*' signifies an 'individual' and '*Damthei*' as healthy living. Foster (1978), ascribes causes of sickness to be of personalistic and naturalistic and traditional medicinal practitioner includes shamans, midwives, bonesetters, herbalist and others (Bode, 2005). The identification and method of diagnostic for sickness was done primary through inspections, auscultation, olfaction inquiry and palpation (Liu, 2011). In this regard, the people reason two different causes of sickness, one that is believed to be associate with supernatural and malevolent spirits.

The other as a result of faulty play in the physical body conditions like that of physical injury and those others arising out of unhygienic lifestyle. They identify and diagnosed and sickness base on symptom shown and in combination with auscultation and palpitation. Treatment of sickness was based on the symptom and how the symptoms is perceived by the people and there exists a very thin line to differentiate the two causes of sickness. The traditional priest '*Thempu*' plays a very crucial role in the identification and treatment of diseases relating to personalistic sickness. Other medicinal specialist such as herbalist, bonesetters, midwives mostly address naturalistic ailments. In both personalistic or naturalistic sickness medicinal plants, herbs, animals and their parts or combination thereof is used in the therapeutic process.

4. Beliefs and Practices concerning Health Care Practices

Sumaraj (2001), broach preventive and curative measures as the two major form medical care practices. The adage "*prevention is better than cure*" in context of the people under study get reflected in their cultural-beliefs practices that concerned for healthy community living and also acts as a precautionary measure against sickness. These beliefs and cultural practices are either followed collectively by the entire community or by an individual depending upon their understanding and the nature of illness.

4.1. *Khojeh*

At times of epidemics outbreak such as widespread diarrhoea, *sensi* (Chickenpox), *sumphuh* (Smallpox) and others. The cultural practice of '*Khojeh*' was enforced, where restriction was placed on moving in and out from the villages. All the entrance and exit to the village was fenced off with tree branches and bushes in order to prevent further spread of diseases and is referred to as '*Dongkhana*'. They would construct another path ways for travellers to restrict them for entering the villages. The observance of *Khojeh* last for three or seven days and begins with the sacrificial of an animal such as mithun (*Bos frontalis*), porcupine, dog, monkey and others depending upon the gravity and magnitude of the epidemic. A scaffolding consisting of four pillars would be erected at the fence, where wide varieties of wild turmeric and its roots refer to as *ailhim*, *ailavom*, *Aijung* in local parlance was crushed into juice and store inside a bamboo tube '*gobong*'. A few of it was also sliced into piece and skew together with a bamboo piece '*Gokang*'. All these together with the roots of wild reeds, *sonsan*, *sonvon* and *theinghe-toi* was hanged at the erected post after a priestly chants and spells (Doungel,2024).

In the meantime, individual breaching such cultural norms was made to temporary dwell in the prepared structure with a mere provision of food and water. Later on, penalised by asking him to arrange feast referred to as *Salam- sat*. Once the period of observance is over villagers moving in out of the village would sprinkles their body with the *ai*-juice stored inside the bamboo tube. This reason lies with the belief that doing so one cannot get in contact with disease nor can he be the carrier of the epidemic diseases inside the village.

4.2. *Je-Chan*

Je-Chan is another belief system and practices intimately linked to health care tradition of the people. In practice, the literal meaning of '*Je-chan*' is to restrain oneself from doing specific task during treatment period, serving as a precautionary measure step to avert the transmission of diseases. The terms have wide implications depending upon on the context of illness and ones who's adhering to such practices (Kailal Lhouvum, personal communication, 8 April, 2022). To elucidate, in personalistic sickness the patient would be forbidden from intake of certain food items and restricted from moving in and out of the house. In some cases, it was imposed on the patient specific and at a time the entire family would be kept isolated from the rest of village. During which the healer would hang a tree branches '*theoboh*' at the house entrance so as to signify and alert others. In the same manner, the healer '*thempu*' would also refrain from sharing bed with his wife and adhere to certain restriction, with the belief that doing so would prevent the transmission and enhance the efficacy of the treatment procedure.

4.3. **Do & Don'ts:**

Echoes of the societal perception of health and illness also gets reflected in their totem, taboos and other belief and practices. Natural landforms and structure of enormous and unique size such as cliffs, mountain, deep ponds, patches of water bodies situated in the forest, giant leafless trees and tree with extended roots and others are held sacred by the

people. They believed that supernatural entities lived in such places and faulty intercourse with it or around such parameters would provoke the ire of these spirits ultimately leading to sickness and death. These places are revered and are usually avoided when encounter and sometimes sacrificial rituals was occasionally performed so as to pleased and avoid the wrath of these spirits (Haokip, 2019). Likewise, there exist several taboos that a husband and wife should adhere for the reproductive health. During pregnancy, the husband is prohibited from killing and dressing of animal for a feast, making of rice pounding log '*sum*', a bamboo cup '*Gotui thei*', collection of honey bee nor should he be in polemic disputes or quarrels with others. It was believed that by doing so, the pregnant wife would be susceptible to all kinds of misfortune and accidents during her pregnancy and post child birth (Kuki Inpi Meghalaya, 2025).

Similarly, pregnant women were prohibited from attending funerals, killing snake, bathing in marshes water, changing bed and facing the opposite direction of the hearth for the reproductive health. Following the birth of a child, the mother call upon her child to stay back at the home or goes along with her while returning from the field, as it is though that the child soul accompanies where ever the mother goes. It was the father obligation to mark the child head with hearth ashes or crushed ginger while taking the child out of the house at nightfall, so as to ward off unseen spirits that may hinder the child health (Lenthang, 2013). Restrictions were also imposed on pregnant women from intake of certain diet such as the meat of monkey, elephant, bear crab, mushroom, egg, bee pupa, pumpkin banana and those conjoint fruits and vegetables. At the same time encouraged to consumed certain food items like that of ash gourd, taro, ginger, honey, rice water '*Bu-twi*', local beverages '*Zu*' and others for their reproductive health (Chanu & Kumar, 2015).

In their mortuary custom, the case of unnatural death '*thise*' like those fallen from trees and cliffs, drowning, attacked by wild animals of the forest. The body are mostly recovered only after frantic searches are made when the body began to enter the process decomposed. To avert the transmission of illness that might potentially emanate out from the decomposed corpse, the dead body was never brought inside the village parameters and buried off in an undisclosed location away from the settlement. This was followed by a symbolic observance of condolence knowns '*Sahnit*' with the believed that doing so would prevent similar death from occurring. They would remain indoors and refrain themselves from touching sharp tools and implements. Additionally, they would abstain from doing their daily work and avoid travelling in and out of the village (Doungel, 2023).

5. Classification and Treatment of illness

Tribal population in generally follows animism and believed that diseases and death was caused by supernatural power and spirits (Pal & Jain, 1998). The response to diseases contingent upon the interpretation of specific ailments which includes symptoms experience; the assumption of sick role; medical care contact; the dependent -patient role; recovery and rehabilitation Suchman as cited in Leena Sumaraj, 2001). The thadou-Kuki broadly classified sickness into two primary types: personalistic and naturalistic. Sacrificial rituals or '*kithoi*'

dominate the treatment process in personalistic ailments whereas medicinal herbs, plants and animals-based medicine are extensively employed for naturalistic ailments.

5.1 Ritualistic Treatment of illness

The Thadou-Kukis ascribes the presence and their flawed interactions with spirits and supernatural being in the natural environment as the cause of personalistic sickness. The traditional priest '*thempu*' play a very significant role in the diagnostic and treatment of personalistic ailments. Twumasi (1972), while studying novice culture observed that for one to become a medicinal practitioner one has to be divinely chosen through revelation or one have come under the influence of some spirits. Another qualified practitioner has to analyse the episodes and confirm that the spirits or God wished the possessed individual to enter into healing profession. Each Thadou-Kuki village has its own priest '*thempu*' cum traditional healer, who administer sacrificial rituals and are well versed in chants and incantation. He holds a respectable position in the villages and the priesthood trait is mainly passed down within family from father son although it is not inherently hereditary.

The roots of personalistic ailments and sacrificial rituals '*kithoi*' goes back to oral tradition of the people, which gave a strong reference to a subterranean place referred to as '*Khul*'. In this regard. Colonial administrator William Shaw that writes "while *Chongthu Party* (Progeniture of the said people) departed from the cave, they heard the curse of *Pi Nemneh* whom they have left behind, proclaiming they would suffered from all kinds of sickness, death, troubles, evil spirits and back luck". They associate illness and suffering as a consequence of the curse and make sacrifices in an attempt to avert the affliction of the curse during serious illness (Shaw,1929).

Ritualistic treatment of sickness involved sacrificial of animals along with priest chants and incantation, where certain plants and animals' products along with natural objects are used in the therapeutic process. These includes domesticated animals such as mithun, pig, dog, fowl, python skull and certain plants products and natural objects like amulet, *Sungko Jung* (roots of Indian coral tree), bark of *Makei* tree, *Lhakhai, keh* (fulgurite) *Ngalvang thao*. The preparation and composition of the medicine depends upon the symptom, severity and complexity of the ailing individual. Given below are some commonly known sickness and ritualistic practices of the people believed to be associated with malevolent spirits and supernatural entities.

5.1.1. *In-Lamvei*

It is an ailment believed to be induced by supernatural entities as due to flawed living conditions. The visible indicators of the illness consist of pale skin and loss of energy. Treatment involves the priest performing a sacrificial ritual of a sow before the household magical box known as '*Indoi*' (Lhouvum, 2014).

5.1.2. *Tulam vei* or *Twilang Kithoi*

The illness is linked to unsanitary and improper utilisation of water source including rivulets, swamps, ponds and others. They believed that malevolent spirits inhabit these places and polluting it provoke and ire the spirits leading to such sickness. Prolonged swelling of the body was the observable symptom of the sickness. Treatment of the ailments was done by the priest with a sacrificial ceremony known as '*Twisan*', signifying 'the test of water'. The priest would offer a metal pot '*langbel*' and sacrifice a goat or fowl in the water source from where the individual has come into contact. The implication of such offering was to use it as a bargain in exchange for the person soul, which was said to be possess by the water spirits. In the aforementioned rite, certain meaning was attributed to the different parts of the sacrifice animal. The leg of the fowl was assumed to be wooden mortar '*sum*', while the wings were likened to a traditional mat '*Dop*'. The dowl head was presumed to be traditional winnowing mat '*Godal*'. The ritual treatment process also necessitates dietary restriction and prohibition from entering and exiting the residence for the during treatment period (Haokip, 2017).

5.1.3. *Gamlah-vei* or *Gamlah-len*

Possession by malevolent spirits of the forest was believed to be causes of sickness in '*Gamlah-vei*' or '*Gamlah-len*'. The ailing individual exhibits the case of psychological disorder and behaves in abnormal manners. Treatment commences with the priest assessing the reality of the illness determining its curability. If curable, then a figurine of a man and a woman carrying a basket made of mud would be left behind in the jungle in a spot where the afflicted was assumed to have come into contact with malevolent spirits of the forest along with a priestly incantation '*thimthu*'. A pig or dog would be sacrificed by the priest; the entrails would then be removed and the body affixed to a pole in front of the house with a vine known as '*Kanggul*'. This was left untouched until the carcass got decomposed naturally by itself. Another illness resembling the same symptom and treatment process is '*Thile hin khenna Kithoina*'.

The afflicted individual frequently witnesses death people in dreams, sickness for unknown reason, conditions of madness that results in wandering in desolate areas. Here, the blood of a dog upon was spilt upon the body of the afflicted individual and its carcass hung at the entrance of the patient house as a part of the treatment. The condition is also referred to as '*Uihap*', derived from the local term for dog '*ul*', which was utilised in the therapy method.

5.1.4. *Kaose*

Studies on health care practices of the people would be incomplete without mentioning a malevolent spirit known as '*Kaose*', which they maintain with outmost confidentiality within the community. They belief that these spirits referred to as '*Kao*' resides within the physical body of an individual with the ability to possesses and cause harms to others. The sprits appear like a Firey amber when detached from the corporeal body and exhibits lust for food and worthy material things. Symptom such as intense chest pain, rolling eyes, difficulty in breathing, pain in the vascular system, severe headache, uninterrupted cries of babies, loss of

self-control and those similar to epilepsy and others were presumed to indicate possession by '*Kaose*' (Haokip, 2011). Treatment procedure includes offering of delicious meal and valuable material possession, if the reason for possession is lust for such. If not various plants and animals' products or combination of such were used in the treatment either through sacrificial rituals or either by formulating a medicine through concoction, amulets, syrup, lotion and other (Vumlam Sithlhou, personal communications, 12 January, 2022).

5.2 Animals' Base Treatment of Illness

The therapeutic application of animals and wildlife products are deeply ingrained in many Asian cultures, where wide varieties of medicinal species and their parts are harvested for thousands of years (Colfer, et.al, 2006). Treatment of human diseases using animals and animals-derived treatments is known as Zootherapy (Hussain & Tynson, 2021). Lev (1985), writes that phenomenon in Zootherapy is marked both by abroad geographical distribution and very deep historical origins. In addition to its ritualistic applications, among the Thadou-Kukis animals and their body parts are also widely used in treatment of ailments associated to the physical conditions. Fulgurite also known as '*Kechang*' and bear liver was employed to diagnosis all kinds of ailments. The water extracted from bear liver steeped overnight was used as remedy for stomach ache and the liver itself was taken against intestinal and kidney disorder.

The tongue of Burmese deer '*Sasan*' and the oil extract of a wild cat '*Ngalvang*' combined with honey and ginger was utilised in treatment of crack and fracture bones. The fresh blood of a fowl is applied against swollen veins and leg. Faeces of porcupine, liver of wildcat, pig fats and unborn piglets are taken against dysentery (Haokip, 2014). Ashes remains of human and the parietal skull of monkey and human are used in treatment of migraine and epilepsy. Treatment for stone cases includes usage of birds such as *va-ah* 'crows', *valup*, *vashonglhuh* and those of snails namely *tuilung* and *tuikoh*. The blood of a dog and a kind of lizard known as '*To-ke*' is used as medicine against asthma and cancer. Given below figures in the next page are a few article used in treatment of personalistic ailments (Vumlam Sithlhou, personal communications, 12 January, 2022).

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Fig.1. Dried Skull of Python



Fig.2. Parietal Skull of Human



Fig.3. Amulets

Fig.4. *Songkoh* (Indian Coral Tree)

5.3. Herbalist Treatment of Illness

Among the tribals, forest and resources of the natural environment acted as an important reservoir of medicinal plants and herbs. The people look forward to these resources as remedial measures to alleviate themselves against sickness and to facilitate healthy life systyle. This knowledge was believed to have been acquired through the hard experience of trial-and-error method and passed down from generations. In the process, they identified certain medicinal plants and herbs as per their medicinal values and physical characteristics. To elucidate the 'great plantain' is locally referred to as '*Sinus lou*' as it is used for treatment of Sinus. 'Goat weed' as '*Loubong*', as the leaves extract is used for blood clothing. The Cathedral bell would be called as '*Meikah-lou*', where '*meikah*' would denote skin burn and '*lou*' as simply medicine.

Herbalist of plants base treatment of illness is known as '*Thinglhang Lou chop*', where '*thinglhang*' would signify a forest or hilly areas and '*Lou chop*' would as mixed medicinal practices (Mangtinlen Lhouvum, personal communication, 10 janaury 2022). Most of the medicine are prepared from part of a single plants, herbs or in combinations with others. Forms of medicine preparation includes infusion, decoction, mixture, syrup, paste, paste, extract, Juice, oilmen's and others. Till date, the people preferred plant-based medicinal treatment over conventional medicines because of their fewer side effects, easy availability and the attachment they have to their natural surroundings. Table and picture given below in the next pages are few known medicinal plants along with their preparation techniques and usage.

Local Name	Common/Scientific Name	Medicinal Parts	Preparations Techniques & Usages
<i>Nohnom Jung</i>	Mimosa Pudica/ Shame plants	Roots	Boil roots used in treatment of stone case
<i>Anjang kha</i>	Egg Plant	Fruit	Consume raw or mixed with water is used against high blood pressure.
<i>Thanlou</i>	Croton Caudatus	Leaves	Paste is used as an anti-bacterial Agent in wounds infection
<i>Changkongche</i>	Centella asiatica	Whole plants	Consumed to regulated blood pressure, gastritis and in stomach ache
<i>Thing</i>	Ginger	Rhizome	Crushed juice is used against snake bite and blood pressure
<i>Begul</i>	Python Snake Beans	Latex	Latex used in treatment of snakebite.
<i>Louthul Jungnei</i>	Chinese chives	Leaves	Leaves paste in bone dislocations.
<i>Aidul</i>	East Himalaya cardamom	Leaves	Treatment of foot odour.
<i>Saikang</i>	Indian wormwood	Leaves	Treatment of dysentery.
<i>Nakie</i>	Beauty berry tree	Bark, young twigs	Paste of the bark is used in healing wounds. Young twig is eaten to against stomach ache
<i>Belnam</i>	Fischer Clerodendrum	Leaves	Leaf extract is applied in ear infections.
<i>Thanlou</i>	Miracle plant of Saikot	Leaves	Extracts of leaves uses as anti-dandruff and against dysetry and liver infections
<i>Thingthal</i>	Cinamon	Bark	Bark dried crushed into powder is smoke and inhaled in Sinus
<i>Neigeipat lou</i>	Asthma weed	Latex	Latex used in mouth

			inflammatory
<i>Daikham</i>	Goniothalamus Sesquipedalis	Leaves	The smoke of burnt leaf in inhaled in common cold.
<i>Sohlhu Tolkum</i>	Gooseberry /Gulf Leaf flower	Fruit	Fruit mixed with oil and salt is applied in toothache.
<i>Vohbilche</i>	Chinese plantain	Whole plant	Boiled and consumed in against gastric and stomach problem
<i>Ankam thao</i>	Mustard	Seed	Oil extract is used in ear pain.
<i>Belbukong/ Leisan</i>	Indian Rhododendron	Whole plant & fruit	Boiled to make decoction and ripen fruit is consume against diabetics and tongue ulcers.
<i>Bahlong</i>	Indian trumpet tree	Unripe fruit	The fruit is roasted and its outer layer is made into concoction and consumed orally in treatment of diabetic, liver and gastrointestinal problem.
<i>Louboung</i>	Goat weed	Leaves	Leaves extracts is used as antiseptic
<i>Aithanglou</i>	Fish mint	Leaves & roots	Decoction or paste of leaf and roots is taken orally against kidney stones and tonsilitis.
<i>Sihmi hangmai</i>	Creeping wood sorrel	Whole plant	The whole plant is boiled and steam is inhaled against sinus.
<i>Ansache</i>	Toothache plant	Leaf & flower	Decoction of the leaf and flower is consumed orally in hookworm and piles.
<i>Sapthe na</i>	Passion fruit	Leaves	Leaf decoction is taken orally or cooked as part of diet in hypertension
<i>Anphui</i>	East India glory bower	Leaves	Leaf decoction is taken orally or consumed as a diet in hypertension.
<i>Vohbilche</i>	Chinese plantain	Whole plant	Boiled and consumed against Gastro-intestinal disorder
<i>Puhlou</i>	Blumea flava D C	Leaves	Leaves paste is applied on forehead in head ache condition. It is also used as preventive agents against body ache

Given below are images of few medicinal plants:



Fig.5. *Changkongche* (Centella asiatica)



Fig.6. *Louboun* (Goat weed)



Fig.7. *Anphui* (East Indian Glory Blower)



Figure.8. *Vohbilche* (Chinese plantain)



Figure.9. *Puhlou* (Bluma Flava DC)



Fig.10. *Nohnom* (Shame Plant)

6. Discussion

The study reveals that unlike the modern clinical understanding of health and illness. The Thadou-Kukis understanding of health and illness was fundamentally functional contingent upon the ability and inability to do the normal work as assign by the respective culture. The term '*damlou*' signifies sickness of all kinds and '*Mi damthei*' to an individual devoid of maladies. The identification and diagnostic for sickness were based on the symptom shown primary through inspections, auscultation, olfaction inquiry and palpitation. They categorised illness as of personalistic or naturalistic based on the symptom and how they perceived the symptom. In the former, supernatural being or malicious spirits were believed to be the causes of the sickness while those as result of a flaws in the physical human condition was considered as naturalistic with a tenuous distinction between the two causes. The traditional priest '*Thempu*' plays a very crucial role in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases relating to personalistic sickness. Practitioner such as herbalist, bonesetters, midwives mostly addressed the naturalistic ailments.

In both instances, medicinal plants, herbs, animals and their parts or combination thereof are used in the therapeutic process. They have several beliefs system and cultural practices concerning healthy community living and also as a precautionary measure against illness such as *Khojeh*, *Je-chan*, taboos, and certain do and don'ts. These practices adhere to either individually or followed collectively contingent upon the community comprehension and severity of the sickness or disease. Few of these beliefs and practices, consciously or unconsciously are clinically beneficial to facilitate personal health, prevent against transmission of disease as evidenced by the concept community quarantine, restriction on specific activities, choices on dietary intakes within treatment duration to restore ones' health. Sacrificial rituals or '*kithoi*' predominate the treatment process in personalistic ailments whereas usage of medicinal herbs, plants and animals' products dominate naturalistic treatment. The knowledge of using medicinal herbs and plants was believed to have acquired as result of their ecological interactions through trial-and-error experiences. Herbalist or plants-based treatment of illness is referred to as '*Thinglhang Louchop*' and medicinal plants and herbs are identified as per their medicinal usage and physical characteristics. As mentioned earlier the 'great plantain' is locally referred to as '*Sinus lou*' as it is used for treatment of Sinus. 'Goat weed' as '*Loubong*', as the leaves extract is used for blood clotting. Forms of their traditional medicine preparation includes infusion, decoction, mixture, syrup, paste, paste, extract, Juice, oilmen's and others.

To conclude traditional medicinal practices was once regard as erroneous as it was seldom studied. The reason pointing to have emerged out of unexamined habitual usage, cultural custom and its efficacy based on aggregate observation and experience. Currently, with the advancement in health care system and medicinal researches, traditional medicine is being incorporated or used as alternatives to modern allopathic medicine. Traditional medicine carries both benefits and challenges, as excessive over harvesting of therapeutic herbs, plants and animals derived remedies poses the risk of extinction and ecological imbalance. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge the significance of medicinal plants and animals and their management in the health care system.

It is equally essential to maintain ecological balance while practicing traditional medicine using plants and animals, necessitating a focus conserving rich biodiversity. A certificate system can be introduced for practitioner of traditional medicine and for the procurement of the raw materials. Beside at the same time a synthetic alternatives and demand reduction are all possible solution to avoid overharvesting and maintain ecological balances.

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Data Availability

All the data with regard to the manuscript is with the author concerned and will be made available on request.