

Healing Power: Traditional Herb Remedies of the Orang Asli Temiar in RPS Kuala Betis

Atikah Lokman, Hafis Simin, Sahar Sa'di Hashim, Tengku Mariam, Hajar Munirah, Ain Nurisha Mamat, Iman Sahadom
Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, University Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Terengganu, Malaysia

Email: atikahlokman20@gmail.com, sahasadi@unisza.edu.my, tg.mariam262@gmail.com, hajarmunirah22@gmail.com, nianurisha98@gmail.com, iman.sahadom@gmail.com

Corresponding Author Email: mohamadhafis@unisza.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i3/21061>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i3/21061

Published Date: 18 March 2024

Abstract

Orang Asli are indigenous peoples who have inhabited the country for thousands of years. Orang Asli are very protective of the customs, traditions, and practices they inherited from their forefathers. The Orang Asli Temiar community still uses herbs in health care. Herbs are not only able to help them cure diseases, but it has also become one of the local products that are in demand by the outside community. Local products such as Orang Asli Temiar herbs can help increase people's income. This research answers the objective of identifying herbal plants that are in demand by the outside community. This research focuses on the Orang Asli Temiar community in RPS Kuala Betis, as one of the Orang Asli settlements there is involved in selling herbs to the outside community. This qualitative study uses ethnographic methods, which are interviews and participation observations with key informants related to the cultural traditions of this Orang Asli Temiar community. The researcher participates observations with who are sellers and experts in identifying herbal plants. The research findings show that local products with a focus on herbal medicine have the potential to become one of the ecotourism products for the Orang Asli Temiar community. The conclusion of this research is important because it leads to a new, broader perspective on traditional medicine theory. Furthermore, this research provides direction for future researchers to conduct more in-depth studies on herbal plants. Overall, the results of this research point to a great opportunity for the development of the economy of Orang Asli communities while at the same time preserving their traditional medicinal heritage. It also encourages further research in this field, which could benefit both the Orang Asli community and the ecotourism industry as a whole.

Keyword: Local Product, Herbs, Orang Asli, Temiar, Ecotourism

Introduction

Orang Asli are a part of the Malaysian population that has inhabited the country for thousands of years. There are three tribes of Orang Asli, namely the Senoi, Proto and Negrito. The Temiar community is one of the tribal groups in the Senoi family. Orang Asli communities are generally found in inland areas, forest edges, and some suburbs of Malay settlements (Jabatan Muzium Malaysia, 2010). Orang Asli communities have typically and practice their unique beliefs and values. They value living in harmony with their fellow humans and the natural environment. Their relationship with fellow humans and the natural environment has dramatically influenced their way of life and economic resources. Because wild plants surround their environment, they naturally use it for daily needs such as food and medicine. The herbs they use reveal traditional knowledge and explain the background and history of the Orang Asli. The Orang Asli community is one of the people who have been using plant sources in the forest as herbal medicine for hundreds of years. This is because they are very close to nature and are said to be able to communicate with it (Aniza et al., 2014).

In the past, the Orang Asli community lived a nomadic life, moving from place to place. This significantly impacted their economic structure, where they only planted temporary crops (Haliza, 2018). Their main economic activities are fishing, hunting, and collecting forest products such as agarwood and honey. Some of them also use a barter system to obtain daily necessities. According to Haliza (2018), the community of the Orang Asli Temiar is more focused on agricultural activities. Although the economic activity is self-sufficient, all the customs and traditions remain. Gomes (2004) states that the Temiar community still practices a subsistence economy. They grow vegetables and *padi huma* (rice grown on the slopes of hillsides). A handful of them are beginning to grow fruit and saplings. Hunting, fishing, and the collection of forest products are side activities.

The Orang Asli Temiar's way of life is based on the resources of the environment around them. Their livelihood depends on natural resources, especially forests. Economically, most engage in various activities such as farming, hunting, and collecting forest products. They practice a subsistence economy where the results they get are only to meet the needs of their families (Tajuddin et al., 2016). From their point of view, they believe that the plants growing in the forest are life created by supernatural forces after the creation of man. The natural environment has become synonymous with the life of the Orang Asli community, especially the aspect of life's dependence on the environment (Ramle et al., 2014). Thus, their reliance on the natural environment forms the background of most of their settlements.

Orang Asli and Traditional Medicine

Orang Asli is an indigenous ethnic community in Malaysia with a rich cultural heritage, including in traditional medicine (Hairulnizam et al., 2022). Since time immemorial, the Orang Asli have been practicing traditional medicine as a treatment method to cure a wide range of illnesses. It uses herbs, roots, and other plants from the forest. Traditional medicine plays an essential role in the Orang Asli Temiar community. This heritage of conventional medicine is passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth and is a cultural heritage symbol of Temiar identity.

The traditional medicine of the Orang Asli people encompasses various treatment methods based on conventional knowledge, herbs and sequencing techniques, and spiritual beliefs. Orang Asli traditional medicine involves using different herbs usually found in the forest. Knowledge of the healing properties of these plants has been acquired through extensive observation and experience and is used as the primary basis for the treatment of

illnesses. For example, some plants such as *akar belang*, *akar tengkuk biawak* and *akar kuning* are used to treat yellow fever.

In addition, there is a spiritual dimension to Orang Asli's health care, which demonstrates a continuity between traditional beliefs, natural environment, and spirituality (Ramle et al., 2004). Disease is not only seen as a physical disorder but is also closely related to the spiritual and emotional aspects of the individual in their traditional beliefs and practices. The Orang Asli have a deep and abiding faith in the power and elements of nature. They believe that illness can occur when the balance of nature is disturbed, so they seek help from nature through traditional ceremonies and prayers for healing.

A total of 677 plant species belonging to 158 families were identified in the documentation of medicinal plants based on traditional knowledge used in traditional medicine by 18 indigenous tribes in 22 indigenous settlements. A total of 3,917 uses were recorded and grouped into ten categories of use, namely specific/particular diseases, external uses, women's health, men's health, children's health, beauty/self-care, tonics, defecation, venomous animal/insect stings and other (side dish, cuisine or spiritual). Most (57%) of the plants recorded are used to treat specialized or specific diseases (Tan et al., 2019).

The values of these spiritual beliefs and practices continue to be preserved and passed on from generation to generation as a valuable cultural heritage. However, modern influences have brought changes to the Orang Asli community. Traditional medicine, such as herbal medicine, is still widely practiced in their communities. Indeed, they believe herbal medicine treats illnesses better than modern medicine. This is a testament to the cultural resilience and strength of the identity of Orang Asli communities in maintaining their connection with tradition, nature, and the spirits of their ancestors (Hafis et al., 2020).

Methodology

The researcher used an ethnographic approach to study the herb medicine used by the Orang Asli Temiar at RPS Kuala Betis. Ethnography is a practical study that examines collections such as beliefs, behaviors, education, and language. An ethnographic study is a form of qualitative research used to explain, analyze, and interpret the form of "culture-sharing" of a group, including behavior, beliefs, language, economy, political structure, interaction, life, and style in relationships. To understand culture-sharing, a researcher must spend time in the field meeting, observing, and documenting. The time required then allows the data to be recorded in detail. The method of data collection is interview and participant observation. The selected informants are also Orang Asli Temiar, who are knowledgeable in herbal medicine and marketing to outsiders. The researcher has selected one informant to answer the study's objective, which is to explain the traditional knowledge of the Orang Asli Temiar community on herb medicine as one of the local products of the eco-tourism community. Among the selected informants is Mariam, a resident who cultivates local herbaceous products. The research area was chosen in RPS Kuala Betis because it is the settlement of the Orang Asli Temiar tribe and one of the areas where herb medicine is marketed to the outside community.

Traditional Herb Orang Asli Temiar

Based on observations at RPS Kuala Betis, Temiar men have 'tan' skin, while women have white or 'yellow langsat' skin. In terms of the economy, most of them are looking for sources of livelihood by working in the oil palm fields, gardening, and collecting forest products such as rattan, honey, and herbs. Herbs are not only used to cure illnesses but are also marketed

externally. The RPS in Kuala Betis is one of the placements actively selling herbs to communities outside the village. The demand for Orang Asli Temiar herbs is so high that the Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA) is training entrepreneurs. The aim is to make Temiar's local products part of eco-tourism.

JAKOA has provided courses in preparation, packaging, marketing, etc. Based on interviews with key informants, they have been supported and taught how to promote local products on the Internet. This will help them to be recognized by the public. Local herb products have been on the market throughout Malaysia with online sales. The internet awareness of the Temiar community is not only contributing to the increase in income, but it is also contributing to the promotion of local products as eco-tourism products.

According to key informants, the herbs sold have various functions, including sweetness, high blood pressure, uric acid, jaundice, and cough, for women in labor and others. Each herb is priced differently depending on the function, ranging from RM15 to RM30. According to the informant interviews, herbs also have taboos that need to be observed to be effective. Among the taboos to be followed by the patient is: "It is not recommended to take gas, lime, and coconut drinks at the same time; please separate them within 1 hour and take the drinks as follows".

The following is a list of the herbs in demand from the community outside the country. Also included are the properties of the herbs and how to use them as a guide for the buyer.

1. Akar Salum (Chaklog)

Benefits: Suitable for postnatal woman. Improves blood circulation. Heals swelling and wounds or fractures.

Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 2 cups of water, boil for 15 minutes, and drink twice daily (morning and evening).



2. Akar Kuning (Rempening)

Benefits: For baby affected by jaundice

Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water. Then boil for 15 minutes on medium heat. After boiling, pour the herbal water into a cup and filter. Mother drinks. Pour a small amount into the baby's mouth and use it to bathe the baby.



3. *Kacip Patimah*

Benefits: For postnatal women. Suitable for women.

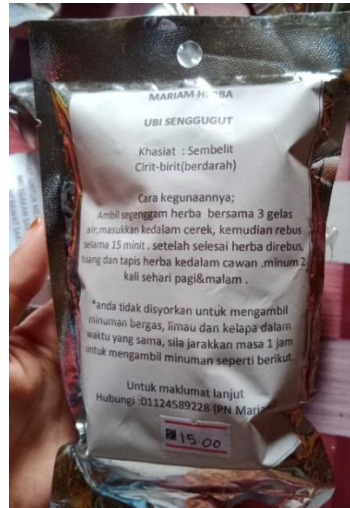
Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water, put them in a kettle, and boil for 15 minutes. Fire on medium. When the herbs are cooked, pour into a half cup and filter. Drink twice a day (morning and evening).



4. *Ubi Sengugut*

Benefits: Constipation and Diarrhea

Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water. Then boil for 15 minutes on medium heat. After boiling, pour the herbal water into a cup and filter. Drink two times a day, morning and evening.



5. *Tongkat Ali Putih (Tengrul)*

Benefits: Increases energy. Relieves cough. Relieves muscle aches and back pain.

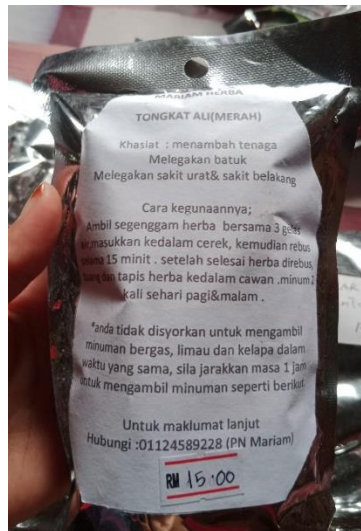
Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water, place in a kettle, and boil for 15 minutes. After boiling, pour the herbs into a cup and filter. Drink two times a day. (Morning and evening)



6. *Tongkat Ali Merah (Cog Lembu)*

Benefits: Increases energy. Relieves cough. Relieves backache and vein pain.

Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water, place in a kettle, and boil for 15 minutes. After the herbs are boiled, pour the herbs into a cup and filter. Drink two times a day. (morning and evening)



7. *Tongkat Ali Hitam (Sat)*

Benefits: Gout, swollen legs

Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water, then boil for 15 minutes. After the herb is boiled, pour and filter the herb into a cup and drink two times a day. (Morning and evening)



8. *Akar Belang (Kesut)*

Benefits: High blood pressure. A pine vein. Headache. Backache. Painful joints.

Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water. Then boil for 15 minutes on medium heat. After boiling, pour and filter the herbal water into a cup and drink twice daily morning and evening.



9. Akar Pasong (Pasong)

Benefits: Suitable high blood pressure

Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water. Then boil for 15 minutes on medium heat. After boiling, pour the herbal water into a cup and filter. Drink two times a day, morning and evening.



10. Akar Telusoh (Jarang Kuis)

Benefits: avoid pregnancy

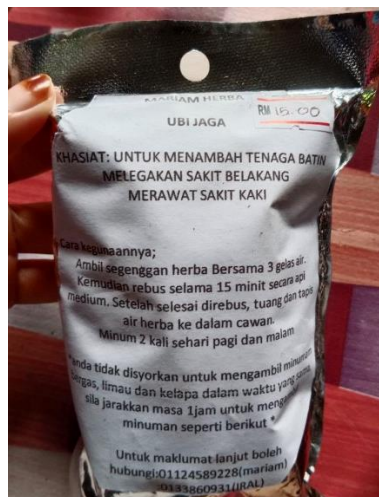
Usage: Take a handful of the herb and 3 cups of water. Boil for 15 minutes on medium heat. After boiling, pour the herbal water into a cup and filter. Drink two times a day, morning and evening.



11. Ubi Jaga (Dagok)

Benefits: Increases internal energy and relieves back pain. Treat foot pain

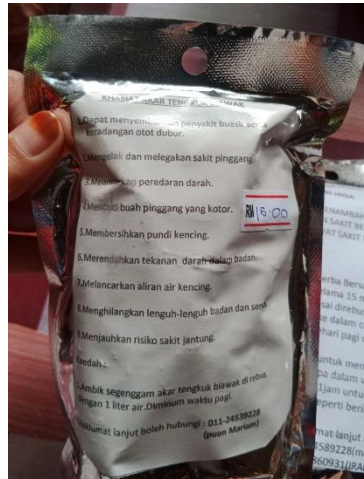
Usage: Take a handful of herbs with 3 cups of water. Then boil for 15 minutes on medium heat. After boiling, pour the herbal water into a cup and filter it. Drink two times a day, morning and evening.



12. Akar Tengkok Biawak (Tangen Bagek)

Benefits: Treats hemorrhoids and anal inflammation. Prevents and relieves lumbago. Improves blood circulation. Suitable to kidney disease. Cleanses the urinary bladder. Lowers the blood pressure in the body. Improves urine flow. Relieves body and joint pains. Prevents the risk of heart disease.

Usage: Take a handful of *akar tengkok biawak* and boil it with 1 liter of water. Drink in the morning.



13. Ubi Seduwang

Benefits: Suitable for reducing acne

Usage: Take a handful of the herb with 3 cups of water. Then boil on medium heat for 15 minutes. After boiling, pour the herbal water into a cup and filter. Drink two times a day, morning and evening.



14. Akar Geremdom

Benefits: diabetes, kidney stones, urinary tract infection

Usage: Take a handful of the herb with 3 cups of water, put it in a kettle, and boil it for 15 minutes. After boiling, pour the herb into a cup and drink it twice daily, in the morning and evening.



Conclusion

The traditional medicine of the Temiar group was passed down through the ages. Traditional medicine is a culture of the Orang Asli that will not be abandoned. The culture, customs, taboos, and beliefs of the Orang Asli are inseparable because they symbolize a culture's identity. Likewise, many of them still practice herbal medicine because they do not want to abandon the culture of their ancestors, even though their lives have progressed and modern medicine has been introduced. Traditional medicine in the Orang Asli community is also reflected in its spiritual aspect. They believe that illness is not only physical. It also has spiritual and emotional aspects. Therefore, in addition to biological therapies, religious rites, and traditional ceremonials were used to cure disease and restore spiritual and physical balance. Although modern challenges and external influences have led to a decline in traditional medicine among younger, efforts to preserve and revive traditional knowledge and practices continue. The holistic approach of Orang Asli traditional medicine, which includes physical, mental, and spiritual aspects, continues to be a source of pride and strength in this community.

This research makes a significant theoretical and contextual contribution to the Orang Asli traditional medicine field, particularly in the area of herbal medicine. Theoretically, it fills the gap in the existing literature by providing a more significant contribution and knowledge to the traditional medical practices among Orang Asli. This research study makes it clear to the reader that local products based on herbal medicine can be one of the eco-tourism products for the Orang Asli. They provide a new perspective and help to develop a more comprehensive theory of traditional healing. This research provides guidance and illustration for future researchers to do more in-depth research on herbal plants. Further scientific studies need to be conducted to test the efficacy of the herbal medicine practiced by the Temiar.

Acknowledgement

This author acknowledges the financial and technical support for this Fundamental Research Grant Scheme project by Minister of Higher Education (MOHE) under Grant (FRGS/1/2022/WAB08/UNISZA /02/ 1 – RR472) I am very appreciative and indebted to the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) grant entitled "Pembentukan Model Pembangunan Produk Ekopelancongan Orang Asli Suku Kaum Temiar di Malaysia" under the grant reference code (FRGS/1/2022/WAB08/UNISZA /02/ 1) for funding all associated costs throughout the study period to completion.

Reference

- Tan, A. L., Madihah, M. N., Norbaiah, M. Y., Nurulhani, I. B., Amizan, N., Nik Musa'adah, M., Fadzureena, J., & Norini, H. (2019). *Status Kekayaan Penggunaan Tumbuhan Ubatan Oleh Masyarakat Orang Asli Di Semenanjung Malaysia*. Pp. 7–10 dalam Mazura MP & Firdaus K (eds.). *Prosiding Seminar Pemuliharaan & Pemerksaan Pengetahuan Tradisi 2019*. FRIM, Kepong.
- Nik Musa'adah, M., Norbaiah, M. Y., Firdaus, K., Siti Nur Aisyah, M. H., Mazura, M. P., Fadzureena, J., ... & Norini, H. *PERUBATAN TRADISIONAL: BUKAN SEKADAR JAMPI. Bridging Traditional Knowledge & Natural Products Innovations Towards Wellness and Shared Prosperity*, 35.
- Fauzi, N. W. (2012). Perubatan melayu tradisional: Kitab tibb pontianak (Malay traditional medicine: kitab tibb pontianak). *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 7(1), 149-162.

- Haliza, A. R. (2018) *World View Masyarakat Orang Asli Dan Pelestarian Alam Sekitar*. Jabatan Kesihatan Persekitaran dan Pekerjaan, Fakulti Perubatan dan Sains Kesihatan, Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Tajuddin, A., Muhammad, F. A., Candyrilla, V. B., Rohana, J., (Pnyt.). 2016. *Kelestarian Orang Asli Terengganu*. Kuala Terengganu: Penerbit Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.
- Ramle, A., Asmawi, I., Hafis, M. A. S., Nur Hafizah, R., Sukhairi, M. R. (2014). Pemuliharaan Hutan dalam Kalangan Semaq Beri di Negeri Terengganu, Malaysia. *Malaysia Journal of Society and Spaces*, 10: 113-124.
- Asmawi, I. (2013). *Pengetahuan Tradisional berkaitan Pemakanan Masyarakat Orang Asli Suku Kaum Batek, Kuala Koh Gua Musang Kelantan* (Doctoral dissertation, Master Thesis. Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Terengganu).
- Hafis, S., Ramle, A., Asmawi, I., Sahar, S. H., Abdullah, I. (2020). Temiar: *Warisan Kepimpinan dan Pembangunan*. Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (ASWARA).
- Hairulnizam, M. K., Hafis, A. S., Ibrahim, M. A., Abdullah, R., Som, A. P. M., & Ibrahim, A. (2022). Challenges in the Use of Natural Resources among Semaq Beri, Hulu Terengganu. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(12), 143 – 152
- Ramle, A., Asmawi I., Hafis S., Ramle, N. H., & Rasat, M. S. M. (2014). Pemuliharaan hutan dalam kalangan masyarakat Semaq Beri di Negeri Terengganu, Malaysia (Forest conservation and the Semaq Beri community of Terengganu, Malaysia). *Geografia*, 10(3).