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## The Usage of Mantras in Malay Society Midwifery Practice

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### Abstract

Midwifery is one of the traditional medical practice that stand still until this day. In this treatment, traditional midwives (tok bidan) plays its role as the most vital medical practitioner in Malay society as they are not only giving treatment, but also giving the advise to women on the how to take care of their health before and after the childbirth. The midwife also consistently being the person to be taken as a guide involving the health problems related to women pregnancy. During the treatment, the midwives are said to consume the mantra elements, which means all kinds of word in the form of poetry or prose that contain the intention and magical connotation, treatment and witchcraft that had being practice for the good intention or vice versa This study is focusing on the usage of mantra in midwifery practitioner demonstrated by midwives in their practice to treat pregnant mother. The study had been conducted on midwives who still active in Kampung Tualang Manir and Kampung Banggol Tok Mudin. The researchers use three main techniques in collecting data which are interviewing, participant observation and documents analysis. The results of the study indicates there are several mantras that had been applied in midwifery treatment started as early as three month old of fetus during pregnancy to the preparation of childbirth and it continues until the afterbirth phase. The function of the mantras is intentionally to make sure the safety of the mother and their unborn baby in good condition as well as in hoping the childbirth process goes smoothly and the baby is born safely.

**Keywords:** Traditional treatment, Midwifery, Mantra, Culture, Malay Society.

### Introduction

Traditional medicine is a pre-scientific treatment that had been practiced by a community in the past. This treatment is a heritage for generations and still being practiced today such as

prediction to the type of disease, treating bone fractures and the usage of various Malay herbs (Kasimin, 1998; Kadir, 2005). Traditional medication has the same goal as modern medication, which is to avoid pain and suffering with its own concepts and ways. Malay community have long believed in traditional medicine because it is said to be the safest method, and no side effects on human body. Furthermore, traditional treatments have its own place in the society since it is cheaper compared to other medical treatments, in addition to the use of ingredients derived from flora that can be obtained from the environments easily (Ahmad, 1998).

Inside the Malay community medication, the shaman plays a very important role in the process of curing the disease. The shaman or healer is said to have its own magical powers capabilities of treating the sick and the dying people (Osman, 1989). There are various categories of shaman in this traditional medical fields and these include the shaman of the root or herb, the shaman of exorcism, the shaman of circumcision, the shaman of midwifery, the shaman of massage, and lots more (Gimlette, 1971; Werner, 1986). By referring to the categories of shaman that have been mentioned, the specific category of shaman that will be emphasized parallel to the context of this study are midwives or better known as midwife in midwifery. In midwifery treatment, midwives play a very important role in the process of healing and restoring the women energy after childbirth. Traditional midwifery medication is a type of treatment that is still active in the states of the East Coast. This treatment is in demand among members of the society as it differs from modern treatments, while still maintaining the magical element of the treatment. This paper work will discuss the elements of magical which is the usage of mantra in the treatment of the Malay community midwifery that still actively practiced around the state.

### **The concept and Mantras Usage in Malay Community**

The word mantra is rarely used by the Malays as they are more synonym with the words spells (jampi) and curses (serapah). According to Harun Mat Piah (1989) the term of mantras includes spells, curses, cure (tawar), spraying or spit out (sembur), idolise or worship (puja), *seru* and charms (tangkai). Dollah (2007) argues that mantras, spells, curses have the same meaning which is a set of words believed to have supernatural powers. Mantras, spells and curses exist in a time frame of animism that had been created for ceremonies, rituals, treating patients and others (Amran Kasimin, 2007). From all point of views above, mantras can be concluded as all kinds of pronunciation in the form of rhythmic poetry or prose containing magical elements, medication and prose for a particular purpose whether with good intentions or otherwise.

Mantras in the Malay community is said to have already existed in tandem with animism practiced since pre-Islamic era. It begins with the believe of animism and followed by folk tales detailing magical events such as weapons that can shape shifting human looks, about humans who have supernatural powers and can defeat their enemies, and the nature of the elusive (Taslim, 2007). Based on the story, the magic is presented in the form of a special spells which is mantras, along with some action and use of objects. The magic is usually practiced by a magical practitioner who is said to be in contact with the mythical world such as a shaman or a healer. Shaman uses supernatural powers to seek help through mantras, prayers, and sacrifice rituals.

Within the Malay community, the mantra is very famous and used for the purpose of treatment and witchcraft. Mantra is a form of prose or traditional poetry that is passed down through generations from their forefathers. Members of the community at that time were

said to rely heavily on supernatural elements in their lives. The supernatural elements embodied in the practice of spells can act to dispel evil forces that infect a person (Mohamad et.al, 2014). Shamans who practice this spells are usually given the same level of respect as the medical doctors who treat their patients today. For example, a person who is possessed by a supernatural being is usually saved through a spell reading by a magician who is believed to be able to connect with the supernatural world. The mantra is said to be a genre of traditional poetry of the earliest in the Malay community and is believed to be practiced in almost all aspects of life (Daud, 2007). However, the discussion in this paper focuses on the use of mantra in the community midwifery care in several villages in Kuala Terengganu district.

### Malay Midwifery

As mentioned earlier, a skilled shaman in the field of midwifery is known as a *tok bidan* (traditional midwives). According to the belief of the Malays, a midwives plays a vital role in the birth process of a baby and usually they are the woman who are quite old and experienced in matters relating to childbirth. Midwives is very concerned about the situation of the mother who is pregnant and giving birth (Ngadeni, 2018). Various ceremonies are performed during the period of a woman's pregnancy. When the fetus reaches the age of seven months, they will hold a "*melenggang perut*" ritual to correct the fetus position in the womb. According to Zain (2014) at the age of nine months, the midwives will once again correct the position of the baby in the womb followed by a specific mantra reading to facilitate the delivery process.

Normally, the services of the midwives are needed during critical times before being taken to a hospital or clinic for delivery. There are also midwives who serve in hospitals or clinics in the city who are qualified in the field of obstetrics and specialize in modern medicine. However, for some people especially those living in the village, midwives are highly respected. The village community believe the there are some influence of the midwives on the baby during the birth process, and there is a belief that the baby's life or death depends on the midwives themselves (Akmal, 2006).

Although it is said that the duties of traditional midwives are almost identical to modern midwives, the role of the traditional midwives is not neglected and considered easy. Midwives are capable in childbirth process, advising and caring for pregnant women before and after birth, tracking pregnancies, anticipating birth dates, managing mothers before and after birth, especially in matters of personal care and food. All food preparations are done by midwives using traditional ingredients and native plants (Naim et.al, 2018). Midwives not only treat, but also advise women on before and post-natal care as well as on health issues affecting the delivery system (Nasir, 2014; Barakbah, 2017).

During the birth process, there are some nerves that had disconnected and it cause a lot of energy loss. Massage is a treatment aimed at restoring the disturbed nervous system and promoting blood circulation (Jimah, 2014). Usually the post-natal massage will be done for three consecutive days by the midwives. This condition prevents the nerves from swelling and some unwanted gases entered the blood system which will have a detrimental effect on both the mother and the infant. The skills and knowledge of traditional midwives are also recognized in several developing countries, especially in rural areas, such as Pineapple, Jamaica, Parteras and Mexico (Awang, 1994). The community utilizes the services of the village midwife for the process of giving birth to their baby.

Eventhough midwives focuses their service on the mother's condition before and after the childbirth, they also use mantras while massaging the mother during afterbirth period and

infants who are exposed to the unwanted illness that will caused them to cry most of the time. Midwives normally use various mantras for mothers who just give birth to their babies to make sure they are not bothered by supernatural beings. If this process are not completed, the mothers are exposed to some psychological illness (Awang, 2007).

### Research Methodology

Areas of study were concentrated in the Kampung Tualang Manir and Kampung Banggol Tok Mudin in Kuala Terengganu. The villages was chosen because both of the midwives that still using the element of mantra during their midwifery treatment were found in those villages.

The selection of informants in this study is chosen from a midwife lived in Kampung Tualang and known as *Mok Long*. Another midwife is *Mok Su* who lives in Kampung Tok Mudin. Both midwives have worked together to provide the information needed during this research. The focus of this study is the usage of mantras in the midwifery treatment that cover several phases including before birth, during the process of birth and after birth (healing period). This study was conducted to find out about the use of mantras that still exist in the treatment today.

This study uses the field study approach which is the most important method in the process of obtaining the required information. This method requires the researcher to be present with the targeted individuals involved in this study, *Mok Long* and *Mok Su*. Wong & Shaladin (2004) stated that field study methods can be defined as qualitative studies aimed at obtaining descriptive information from informants through research, evaluation, and conclusion of a phenomena. Researchers use two techniques for obtaining data through field studies which are participant observation and interviews.

Observation technique have its own advantages in terms of the ability to obtain accurate information. Through observation, the information obtained from the direct experience of the researcher and it is able to obtain information even from unexpected events. Observations through participating the events have meet the information needed by researchers since the focus of this study intents to collect some mantras contained in the Malay community midwifery treatment. In the early stages of observation, researchers make their own assessment of what they see. In order to complete the information acquisition, interview techniques were conducted to obtain an accurate assessment of what was being studied.

Interviews were conducted to get as much information from the main informant as the midwives. Interviewing is an important technique for collecting qualitative data (Yusuff, 2004). This method can generate more accurate information than information obtained from other data collection methods (Yusuf, 2003). This interview enables the researcher to obtain information from both informants by asking questions related to the focus of the study. Through the interview process, research information is obtained directly by the researcher from the informant. The interview process will be conducted based on the focus of the study, where each of these questions will be broke down into smaller question themes to streamline the interview process and facilitate the process of data collection by the researcher.

The last technique used by the researcher is document review. Document analysis is a technique that can explain the phenomenon in more detail and become the fundamental or basis for the results of the study to be performed. In this regard, the researcher will explain aspects related to the use of mantras in the midwifery treatment. Some types of documents that will be used as reference are books, articles, theses, research reports and websites that have info on midwifery treatment.

### The Usage of Mantras in Malay Society Midwifery Treatment

In Malay society, traditional midwifery care is undoubtedly still has its demands from members of the public which makes it as one of the alternative treatments nowadays. Traditional medicine is different from modern medicine since it is associated with the ancient Malay belief of animism involving the use of a mantra in the process of treatment. The use of mantras was very widespread even before people knew religion. The advent of Hinduism in the Malay world adapted so well in the life of the Malay society, the elements are not easily erased even after they embraced Islam. Disagreements between animism, Hinduism and Islam are so significant, particularly in the concept of God that causes a lot of things mixed up in the lives of the Malay society, including the reading of mantras. The use of Quranic verses and words inside the reading of the mantra proves the influence of Islam in the midwifery treatment had mixed with the influence of animism and Hindu-Buddha has shown the existence of syncretism in the Malay society (Kasimin, 2007)

The practice of midwives job usually starts with *melenggang perut* ceremony. The Malay community used to practice the ritual specifically for the first child. The ceremony was conducted when the pregnancy had reached the age of seven months old to find out the gender of the baby in the womb. The ceremony will begin with the following reading of the mantra;

*Assalamulaikum,  
Hei segala anak cucu bidan ketujuh,  
Yang di bumi dan di langit, turunlah sekalian kamu,  
Mengadap aku tok bidan yang keramat,  
Mengadaplah kamu di hadapanku,  
Tujuh bulan, tujuh hari tujuh malam,  
Si anu mengidam buah kelapa,  
Bunga tujuh jenis air setempayan,  
Aku nak mandi nak bersihkan diri si anu,  
Selamatkan si anu dari bala,  
Anak si anu kandung biar bercahaya,  
Dengan berkat Lailahaillallah*

Peace be upon you,  
Call upon every descendants of the seventh midwife,  
That live on the earth and on the sky, come down all of you,  
Facing me the sacred midwife,  
Facing me right on front of me,  
Seven Month, seven days and nights,  
Some person crave for the coconut,  
Variety of seven flower with a pool of water,  
I want to take a bath and clean the person,  
Save the person from any harms,  
Let the person's child enlighten,  
With the blessing of no other god than Allah

(Daud, 2009)

After the spell was recited, a coconut will be placed on the mother's belly and rolled up to the foot three times before being released at the extremities. When the coconut is in a three nozzle shaped in the top position, it is believed that the baby to be born is male and if the coconut nozzle is in the lower or reverse position, it indicates that the baby is female. However, the result of an interview with an informant among researchers found that the Malay community nowadays are not practicing the *melenggang perut* ceremonial anymore because it is regarded as an act of superstition. According to *Mok Su*;

*...lenggang perut ni kite dok wak doh, orang dulu-dulu je wak...Mok su wak rase perut je nok tahu laki puan bayi tuu..kalu bayi duk beloh kiri tu puang aah.. kalu duk beloh kanan tu bese laki aah...*

...we don't practice *lenggang perut* anymore, only the previous generation practiced the ceremony...Mok su only feel the belly to determine the gender of the baby...If the position is on the left, it is a baby girl...if it is on the right side, usually it is a boy...

(R2, T1)

In addition, there are also mantras that had been used in the process of correcting the inverse baby position. When some of the certain month has come the baby in the womb should be in the normal position, the head is situated at lower parts and the legs are upper part of the body. According to Daud (2007), if the baby is in an inverted or horizontal position, the midwife will read a mantra on the water, oil or egg for the mother to drink, rub or eat. In this ceremony, the mantra read is as follows;

*Bismillah hirrahma nirrahim  
Hei benih, aku tahu asalmu benih,  
Duduk dalam kandungan bapa empat puluh hari,  
Tutun keibu sembilan bulan,  
Nakhatah namau benih,  
Hei mek awang , mu balik ke tempat jalan yang asal,  
mu tak boleh duduk melintang kalang,  
mu tak boleh derhaka pada bidan,  
mu duduk betul ke jalan yang asal,  
jangan duduk melintang kalang,  
jangan duduk derhaka pada bidan,  
kembalilah ke jalan yang asal,  
bukan kuasa aku, dengan kuasa Allah,  
bukan kudrat aku, dengan kudrat Allah,  
dengan berkat kata Lailahailallah Muhammadar Rasulallah*

With the name of Allah the most loving and merciful  
I called upon the seed, I know your origin seed,  
Live in your father's body for forty days,  
Move into your mother for nine months,  
*Nakhatah namau benih,*  
Ooo mek awang , you come back to your right path,  
You are not allowed to sit horizontally,

You cannot defy this midwife,  
 You move to the right path,  
 Don't move horizontally,  
 Don't defy the midwife,  
 Come back to the right path,  
 Not with my power, it is Allah's power,  
 Not with my strength, it is Allah's strength,  
 With the blessing of words Lailahaillallah Muhammadar Rasulullah

In the process of correcting the fetus position, the midwives bravery must be at a high level because it risks the lives of the mother and baby in the womb. According to informants, each time she began the process of fixing the fetus position, she would be accompanied by her mother, who is also an experienced midwife. The experience and knowledge of the mother of this informant is essential especially in the process of correcting the fetus as this process must be undergoes very carefully. In the interview recorded on 4.2.2020 as follows;

*..Mok Long nok pusing sorang dok berani sebab serung (takut)..bese nok wak Mok Long panggil aah mok..pernah wak dengan mok laa sekali..buat tu tau tapi Mok Long ade mari serung..*

*..Mok Long is afraid to turn the fetus alone as I feel scared ..usually I ask for my mother to come along..I had done this only once with my mother...I know how to do it but I still feel afraid ..*

(R1, T2)

Further on, according to *Mok Long*, during the process of correcting the baby's position she will be read al-Fatihah verse first and then some recite as follows:

*Bismillah hirrahma nirrahim  
 Allah tolong, Muhammad pusing,  
 Jibrail tetap.*

With the name of Allah the most loving and merciful  
 Allah help, Muhammad turns,  
 Gabriel stay.

Other than that, in the process of childbirth, the most important thing is the hygiene of the place of baby delivery. Pregnant places need to be cleared and cleaned from any disturbance of the supernatural creature. The cleaning ceremony will include a mantra reciting by the midwife, while sprinkling turmeric rice in each of the four corners of the world. Here is the mantra that the midwife recited:

*Bismillah hirrahma nirrahim  
 ...Hei jin tanah, jembalang tanah, Aku tahu asal usulmu,  
 Punai kuning aku tanam, aku seorang, menjadi lalat,  
 Hei aku tahu asal usulmu, Dengar arahan aku,  
 Kau kau tidak dengan, Aku bersumpah akan sumpahmu,  
 Berambus dari sini, Jadi angin, jadi debu,  
 Guruku ajar aku,  
 Tiada Tuhan melainkan Allah,*



*Muhammad Rasullah,  
Cakap dan kata Allah itu satu,  
Kepadanya kita sembah...*

In the name of Allah the most loving and merciful  
...oooo the land genie, the land spirit, I know your origin,  
I'll bury the bird, just me, becoming a fly,  
Oooo I know your origin, Listen to my command,  
You are not with me, I swear to curse you,  
Get lost from here, Become a wind, become a dust,  
My master taught me,  
There is no god but Allah,  
Muhammad is messenger of Allah,  
Speak and say Allah is the only one,  
To whom we worship...

(Awang, 2007)

Other than cleaning the place of the delivery, there are also mantras recited by midwives aimed to limit the number of children. The mantra reciting is as follows;

*Bismillah hirrahman nirrahim,  
Berlendir putih, berlendir batu, berlendir aku nak hancutkan,  
Singgah di bukit, bukit pecah,  
Singgah di padang, padang hangus,  
Singgah di rumput, rumput bubus,  
Hei cair aku hendak cair,  
Kalau mu tidak cair,  
Derhaka mu kepada Allah,  
Bukan kuasa aku,  
Berkat kata Lailahailallah.*

In the name of Allah the most loving and merciful  
The white mucous, the stony mucous, the mucous that will destroy by me,  
Touch the hill, the hill destroyed,  
Touch the field, the field burned,  
Touch the grass, the grass disappeared,  
Oooo I want you to be liquified ,  
If you are not melted,  
You are disobeying Allah,  
Not with my power,  
But with the bless of no other god than Allah.

(Awang, 2007)

Maternal complications are a major problem as there are some risk may occur that can result the death of the mother or child. This problem is solved by drinking *selusuh* oil or *selusuh* water, which is usually recited with some mantras by the midwife in order to facilitate the delivery process. The content of the mantra is described in an interview with *Mok Long* on 14.9.2015;

*Bismillah hirrahman nirrahim,  
Ayat kursi,Ayar seribu dinar,  
Kalimah syahadah...  
Hei urat, Aku tahu usulmu urat,  
Urat simpul mintak teruraikan,  
Lendir tongkol mitak dihancurkan,Tulang retak mitak dirapatkan,  
Sendi retak mitak dikacingkan,  
Mitak tulang pulih semula,  
Bukan kuasa aku,  
Berkat kat Lailahaillallah...*

In the name of Allah the most loving and the most merciful,  
The verse of kursi,The verse of a thousand dinar,  
Syahadah...  
Ooo nerves and vein, I know where you come from,  
Untied the tangled nerves,  
Crush the harden mucus, please merge the crack bones,  
Please put the crack joins into places,  
Please heal the bones,  
Not with my power,  
With the bless of no god other than Allah...

(R1, T1)



Picture 1 : Mok Long were reciting mantra during the making of selusuh oil .

The last task of midwives are on the 44th day after the mother deliver her baby which is the end of healing period. The midwives will perform a “kitchen reformation” ceremony also known as a releasing ceremony. The midwives will perform a releasing ceremony to ensure that the mother and baby are not disturbed by the supernatural creatures. In the same time strengthening the soul and preventing the mother from being psychologically ill. According to *Mok Su*, the time frame for the releasing ceremony can be 40 days after delivery and not more than 100 days after delivery. If it is made after a hundred day after the delivery such as one

hundred and one day, it is believed to have no effect as it is a taboo to be followed in order to perform the releasing ceremony. According to the informant;

*...hmm pelepah ni boleh wak sekali mok dengan anak. Ade masoaloh gangguan mok ke gangguan anak ke, masoaloh anak mase dalam kandungan macam lemas ke, songsang ke memang kena wak pelepah..kalu dok wak hok ni anak hok seterusnya akan jadi gitu jugok..kalu hok sulong songsang, dok wak pelepah ..hok nombor dua pun mudah untuk songsang..ye jadi mende berulang..tu penting pelepah.*

...hmm this liberation ceremony can be done for mother and her child at the same time. If there are any problems regarding disturbance toward the mother or the child, The problems regarding drowning in the womb, not in the position as the baby supposed to be during the pregnancy, then the liberation ceremony must be done, if not, the next child will face the same situation. If the first child is in inverse position, the second child also will easily faced the inverse situation... that is the importance of the liberation ceremony.

(R2, T2)

The tools and ingredients needed for the release ceremony are *kain pelikat* (a type of lower part cloth wore by men), a bowl of rice, *kain batik* (a type of lower part cloth wore by women) and old coconut that need to be provided by those who wish to have this service. During this process, *Mok Su* began with the five Bismillah readings five times, the greetings (selawat) on the Prophet three times and the verse of kursi reciting and was used for this purpose, whereby the practice of calling the mystical elements and previous recitation had not been practiced in this process.

#### The Five Bismillah

*Bismillah hirrahman nirrahim,  
Bismillahisy syafi,  
Bismillahil kaafi,  
Bismillahil mu'aafi,  
Bismillahil la-dzi laa ya-dhur-ru,  
ma'asmihisyai-un fil ardhi  
walaa fis-samaa'i wahuwas sami' ul alim.*

(R2, T3)



Picture 2 : The tools and ingredients used in the liberation ceremony



Picture 3: The position of the mother and her infants during the liberation ceremony

### Conclusion

Mantras are local heritage which has been the practice of the Malay society before Islam. The spread and acceptance of Islam in the life of the Malay community has led to the assimilation process in reading mantras. There is a mantra that begins with the reading of Bismillahir rahmannir rahim and ends with La ilahailah, Muhammadur Rasullullah especially in the treatment of midwifery. The reading of the mantra in this treatment has its own significance as it is believed to provide protection and safety to the mother and baby from early pregnancy to the birth process. Clearly, the mantras are said to be a protective agent to seek safety and prosperity in life from the disruption of the supernatural being. Mantra is also a great example of cultural synchronicity that has undergone various blending and mixing elements, especially in the recovery and healing of diseases. In terms of theoretical and contextual contributions of this research, this study shows the importance of local knowledge in the society especially the Malay community in the context of intellectual property to be inherited by the new

generation. The results of the study have proved the community's belief in the use of mantras and assimilated with the local culture has preserved this custom to remain until today.

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