

# The Knowledge of Traditional Medical Treatment (*Namalo*) in Batak Toba Community (at Tambunan Lumban Gaol Village, Balige District, Toba Samosir Regency)

G.Z. Sarah Magdalena Sinambela and Agustrisno

Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,

Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

magdalenasarah202@gmail.com

**Key Words:** Traditional Medical treatment, *Namalo*, Batak Toba Community.

**Abstract:** This study examines the knowledge of Traditional Medical treatment (*Namalo*) in Toba Batak community at Tambunan Lumban Gaol Village. The purpose of this study was to determine the process of traditional medical treatment by *Namalo* and to know the perception of the community regarding traditional medical treatment performed by *Namalo*. In this research, the method used is ethnographic method and uses a qualitative approach to see the phenomenon of traditional medical treatment, especially *Namalo*, with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews and observations, where the authors go directly to the field to obtain accurate information from the community. The results of the study show that the traditional treatment carried out by *Namalo* is still visited by many people today because it does not conflict with religious teachings and traditional medical treatment is more affordable than medical treatment. Traditional medical treatment is a health effort in a different way from medical science, rooted in traditions derived from habits by previous ancestors. We need to preserve traditional medical treatment and continue to develop it because it is beneficial for society.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Traditional medical treatment is one of the alternative treatments that are trending in society (Prasanti, 2018). Usually done by using herbal plant ingredients, which are in accordance with the dosage and dosage for the type of disease suffered, so that it does not cause side effects. Traditional medical treatment is known by the public not only in the country but also in foreign countries. According to research from the United States National Institutes of Health, a third of Americans take alternative medical treatment in addition to going to the doctor. Meanwhile, the US National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) states that 18% of Americans consume herbal medicine (Wayne, 2016).

One of the regions that was once famous for its traditional medical treatment and the use of herbal plants is Indonesia, including Toba Batak ethnic community. Before the entry of European culture (Christianity) in Toba Batak region. Treatment is

carried out using traditional medicine. Batak Toba community has a book of Batak Toba medical treatment. This book is said to have originated from *Debata Mula Jadi Na Bolon*, or the Creator/God before the entry of Christianity (Gultom, 2010). The book contains knowledge about how to live a healthy life and cure disease. This Toba Batak Medical treatment Book contains how humans are always healthy, and for sick people to be healed, how to be close to God and how to carry out ritual culture so that humans are healthy. In the life of Batak, everything, including treatment, is always in line with ritual culture and heirlooms from ancient ancestors to find out how to get closer to the creator so that humans stay healthy and away from harm.

The Toba Batak people who control the contents of this medical treatment book are called Datu. Datu (Shaman) is someone who has abilities beyond the normal power of ordinary humans (supernatural / paranormal abilities). Some of the healing processes carried out by Datu have several



conditions, one of which is that the patient must bring some of the offerings needed during the treatment process. This offering is used starting from the process of determining the patient's illness to the patient's healing process. Some of the offerings that Datu usually needs in his treatment include chicken, chicken eggs, incense, and so on. This treatment is also inseparable from the existence of a spirit summoning ceremony and spirit worship to ask for health from the spirits of their ancestors.

The entry of European culture through the spread of Christianity to Toba Batak, traditional medical treatment carried out by Datu is starting to be abandoned and not accepted in the community. Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen is one of the famous German missionaries in spreading Protestant Christianity in the Batak area. Since Nommensen's death in 1918, the then church leader was succeeded by Dr. Warneck. In addition to bringing Christianity, modern medical treatment and school education were also introduced to Batak Toba community (Siahaan, 1982). This is what causes the traditional treatment of the Toba Batak to be abandoned. The presence of modern medical treatment and activities to summon spirits that are not in accordance with the teachings of Christianity have made the Toba people refuse to practice traditional medical treatment.

In general, traditional medical treatment or what is called BATRA by the Ministry of Health has several different names according to the area/regions where the traditional medical treatment is located, the BATRA of Batak Toba community is called *Namalo*, in Balinese community it is called Balian, in Madurese community it is called Dukun Cut, in Javanese community it is called Sangkal Putung, the people of South Sulawesi, Sandro Pauru and so on. The names of each of the above are collectively called BATRA or traditional medical treatment with the criteria that the healer uses traditional medicine in his treatment method, based on Government Regulation No. 103 of 2014 stating that traditional medicine is an ingredient or ingredient in the form of plants, animals or mineral materials that have been used. from generation to generation for treatment in accordance with the norms prevailing in society.

Research conducted in Thailand by Dusanee Suwankhong on traditional healers (*mor baan*) regarding the existence of traditional healers (*mor baan*) in southern Thailand. Based on data obtained from the Department of Development of Traditional and Alternative Medical treatment of Thailand, in 2005, in 35 provinces in Thailand, there were 3,705 traditional healers (*mor baan*) in Thailand. The Thai government and the Thai people have accepted and recognized the ability of *mor baan* to heal the sick. Mor baans have been classified based on their

abilities such as spiritual healers (*mor sai ya sart*), herbal healers (*mor sa moon prai*), massage (*mor nuat*), and midwives. *Morbaans* determine the patient's illness by giving time for them to listen to the patient's pain complaints, record their disease history, share health information with each other and observe the patient's physical situation. This traditional medicine also uses healing ceremonies for patients. *Mor sai sa yart* will enter his special room and start wearing a white robe with some candles around it. In this ceremony the body of the healer will be entered by the spirit so that the healer has the ability to heal the patient (Suwankhong & Liamputtong, 2011).

From the results of research conducted by Ria Manurung (2016) conducted in Toba Samosir Regency, it is known that currently traditional medical treatment carried out by *Namalo* has undergone changes. The treatment process carried out by *Namalo* is carried out using herbal ingredients. *Namalo* knows this medicinal herb from knowledge passed down from generation to generation from their ancestors, through this knowledge *Namalo* begins to learn to understand herbal plants starting from their benefits, the process of concocting them, the parts of plants used to how to grow these plants. *Namalo's* success in curing patients' ailments ranging from simple illnesses to chronic illnesses has given the public confidence to choose this treatment. *Namalo's* success has become the talk of the community and is becoming more widespread. The results of this study indicate that the traditional treatment performed by *Namalo* is still recognized by the local community. The usual way of treatment is used by *Namalo* to find out the type of disease experienced by his patients by massaging the body and by touching the patient's body parts (Manurung, Ismail, & Daulay, 2016).

From several studies that have been done previously, show that the existence of traditional medical treatment is again accepted by the community, especially in other countries such as Thailand which has traditional healers (*mor baan*) which is not much different from *Namalo*. In Balige *Namalo* has not been able to become a *mor baan* which is starting to be recognized by the State and the general public. This is due to the mystical history of traditional medical treatment in this area that makes *Namalo* not yet trusted by the public.

## 2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses the ethnographic method to see the phenomenon of traditional medical treatment, especially *Namalo*, by finding out aspects related to the topic of traditional medical treatment (*Namalo*)



in Toba Batak community. The main subject of this research is the traditional medical treatment (*Namalo*). This research was conducted on Toba Batak community in Tambunan Lumban Gaol village, Balige district, Toba Samosir Regency.

The data collection used in this study were in-depth interviews and observations. Before conducting interviews or observations first, researchers develop rapport, by introducing and adapting to informants, creating a comfortable atmosphere for informants and researchers, so that informants want to provide data that really matches the actual facts.

The informants in this study consisted of key informants, namely traditional healers or *Namalo*, as well as ordinary informants, namely people who had gone to *Namalo* for treatment. Informant profiles consist of 1 healer/*Namalo*, 4 ordinary people, 3 church administrators.

### 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Traditional medical treatment is a health effort in a different way from medical science, rooted in traditions originating from the tribe itself or outside the tribe (Sarajar et al, 1994: 2). Traditional medical treatment that is currently known by Batak Toba community is *Namalo* which uses a treatment method using herbal plants which is starting to be known and recognized by the surrounding community. However, the treatment does not use advanced technology such as medical equipment.

The location of this research, namely Balige, precisely in Lumban Gaol Village, shows that the people still have high enthusiasm for obtaining traditional medical treatment. The factors are economic factors as well as social and cultural factors. People who live in rural areas generally work as farmers and their economic situation is simple, so they choose traditional treatment over medical treatment where the patient only pays for the herbal medicine ingredients formulated by *Namalo*. There are several *Namalo* who do not provide a price benchmark for the cost of their medical services and accept the cost sincerely from the patient.

Based on the narrative of Mrs. Tampubolon, the mother of *Namalo* Daniel Sinambela, that the treatment process was carried out by giving herbal ingredients to the disease according to the complaints felt by the patient. Herbal concoctions are given to patients in the form of liquid packaged in jerry cans with a size of 5 liters at a price of 1 jerry can Rp. 60,000, -. But if there are patients who can not afford to pay, the healer actually wants to

give the medicine for free. The cost of the herbal ingredients is based on the type of medicinal plants needed to make the potion. Then, according to *Namalo's* informant Daniel Sinambela (26), that traditional medicine does not have a negative impact on patients because the herbal medicinal ingredients are processed by *Namalo* himself with his ability to know herbal plants, processing methods and the right dosage (Prastanti : 2018).

Then from social factors, data in the field show that the reason the people in this study area use traditional medicine is because of the experiences of others. As stated by Mr. Morris Tambunan, he initially went to *Namalo* for treatment because he heard stories from friends who had been treated there, what was wrong with getting better. For cultural factors, because traditional medical treatment has become a culture for the Toba Batak people, every family has introduced traditional medical treatment to their children. According to the informant, Mrs Batubara (52), she went to Bakkara for treatment because it was started by her family, and her mother-in-law went there for treatment and was able to recover.

In general, Batak Toba people have knowledge about how to treat the diseases they experience, which is obtained from the teachings of their previous parents, but only for minor ailments. If the disease is "critical", they will go to *Namalo* for treatment. From the results of research in the field, the diseases that can be cured by *Namalo* are liver disease/*sahit ate-ate*, ulcer disease/*sahit needa*, stomach acid disease/*sahit needa*, dysentery /hereditary disease, kidney disease, angina pectoris/*sigunja*, gallstone disease / *batu i pogu*, hemorrhoid disease. The medicinal plants used by him are *lempuyang*, *ciplukan*, *brotowali*, Chinese *Petai*, *raru* wood, guava leaf shoots, *sambiloto*, turmeric, jadam, and brown sugar. Then, the medicinal ingredients that have been collected are cleaned and then processed, some of the ingredients are chopped first, then ready to be chopped, then pureed again using a blender, then cooked. There are medicinal ingredients that are roasted, some are boiled like making herbal medicine, then the other ingredients are mixed again into the medicinal stew. When the medicinal ingredients are cooked, they are put into a 5-liter jerry can, which is to be given to patients who order drugs that match their illness. The medicinal ingredients made by *Namalo* are for patients who have internal ailments, especially stomach ailments, he has never treated serious illnesses.

In carrying out the treatment process carried out by *Namalo*, referring to the stages carried out in an effort to help patients to obtain healing. The



treatment process is carried out only knowing the patient's disease and giving the necessary medicinal ingredients. *Namalo's* way of determining the disease from his patient is by consulting about the complaints felt by the patient. There are also some patients who come and receive this traditional treatment after receiving treatment at the hospital. For patients with this experience, *Namalo* will request and see the results of the examinations that have been obtained from the hospital and then adjust them through the results of the examinations he has done (Effendi : 2013).

Based on the results of the examination conducted by *Namalo* in determining the patient's illness, *Namalo* will mix the medicinal ingredients needed by the patient based on the type of illness he is suffering from. If the medicine that matches the patient's complaint is still available, then the medicine can be directly given and taken home by the patient and take it according to *Namalo's* recommendation, but if the medicine stock is running out, the patient must come back the next day to take the medical treatment as ordered (Effendi : 2013).

All patients who have come for treatment at *Namalo's* house have always recovered by consuming traditional medicine made by *Namalo*, but all treatments in order to obtain satisfactory results must be diligent and routine to take these drugs and do not violate the taboos that have been made by *Namalo*, namely not consuming foods that are unhealthy contains flavoring. There are patients who come for treatment only once and there are many times according to the type of disease suffered by the patient.

The church has ever rejected traditional medical treatment in Batak land because this treatment uses mystical and illogical elements in treating its patients. However, nowadays *Namalo* traditional medical treatment has begun to be accepted by the community due to the practice of traditional medical treatment being carried out not related to mystical matters and in accordance with religious teachings. This acceptance can be seen with the community's choice to follow traditional medical treatment which has existed.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Traditional medical treatment is a health effort in a different way from medical science, rooted in traditions originating from the tribe itself or outside the tribe. One of the treatments owned by an ethnic group in Indonesia, namely the traditional Batak treatment carried out by a *Namalo* is not always inferior to the treatment applied by the doctor (medical team). It's just that this treatment system

does not involve sophisticated technological tools such as medical equipment. The drugs used by *Namalo* are certain types of plants that are still natural. For concocting, traditional tools are needed that are useful as a means of treatment that will be carried out by *Namalo* to his patients. The treatment process carried out by *Namalo* refers to the stages carried out by *Namalo* in an effort to help patients to obtain healing. The treatment process carried out by *Namalo* only knows the patient's illness and provides the necessary medicinal ingredients. *Namalo's* way of determining the disease from his patient is by consulting about the complaints felt by the patient. There are also some patients who come and receive this traditional treatment after receiving treatment at the hospital. For patients with this experience, *Namalo* will request and see the results of the examinations that have been obtained from the hospital and then adjust them through the results of the examinations that he did. Based on the results of the examination conducted by *Namalo* in determining the patient's illness, *Namalo* will mix the medicinal ingredients needed by the patient based on the type of illness he is suffering from. If the drug that matches the patient's complaint is still available, then the drug can be directly given and taken home by the patient and take it according to *Namalo's* recommendation, but if the drug stock is running out, the patient must come back the next day to take the medical treatment as ordered. Currently, *Namalo* traditional medicine has begun to be accepted by the community, this acceptance is due to the practice of traditional medical treatment being carried out not related to mystical matters and in accordance with religious teachings. This acceptance can be seen with the community's choice to follow traditional medical treatment, which has already existed.

#### REFERENCES

- Gultom, I. 2010. *Malim Religion in Batak Land*. Bumi Aksara. Jakarta.
- Manurung, R., Ismail, R., & Daulay, H. 2017. *Namalo- Traditional Healer In Batak Toba Society, Indonesia: Knowledge of Drug and Traditional Treatment Process*. *Man In India* , 369-384.
- Suwankhong, D., & Liamputtong, P. 2011. *Traditional Healers (mor pheun baan) in Southern Thailand: The Barriers For*



- Cooperation With Modern Health Care Delivery. J Community Health* , 36:431-437.
- Wayne, F. 2016, February 26. *Star2.com*. Retrieved March 16, 2016, from Star2.com:: <http://www.star2.com/health/wellness/2016/02/26/you-should-talk-to-your-doctor-about-alternative-treatments/>.
- Prasanti, D. (2018). The Role of Traditional Medicine in family Terapeutical Communication Keluarga in Digital Era. *Jurnal Komunikasi Universitas Garut: The result of Thinking and Research*, 3(1), 17-27.
- Siahaan, Nalom. (1982). *Dalihan Na Tolu Culture*. Jakarta: Tulus Jaya.
- Sarajar, H. M. (1994). *Traditional Treatment of North Sulawesi*. Department Of Education and Culture, Direktorat General of Culture, Direktorat of History and Traditional Values, The Project of Studies and Center Cultural Values Development.
- Effendi, M. (2013). The Usage of of Traditional Medical Treatment System (Batra) in Public Health Center/Puskesmas. *Surabaya: FISIP-UNAIR*.
- Silalahi, U. (2012). The Position and The Power of King In Traditional Kingdom of One Community in North Sumatra: Batak Toba Community. *Research Report-Humanities and Social Science*, 2.
- Sitio, R., Suza, D. E., & Nasution, S. S. (2016). The Quality of Life of Cervic Cancer Patient: The Experience of Batak Toba Tribe Patients. *Idea Nursing Journal*, 7(1), 34-41.
- Manurung, S. (2015). *Character Education in the Familiy: Case Study of Moslem Batak Toba Family in North Sumatra* (Doctoral dissertation, Pasca sarjana UIN-SU).