

HINDU INDIGENOUS HEALING: BAHARAGU CEREMONY AND ITS EFFECT ON DIARRHEA TREATMENT

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Abstract :

Diarrhoea is a prevalent condition that may result in dehydration and severe complications if not managed. The Dayak Meratus community in Kamawakan Village, following Hindu Kaharingan customs, possesses a distinctive traditional healing technique called the Baharagu ceremony. This traditional rite combines herbal medication and spiritual purification as a comprehensive method for addressing diarrhoea and other ailments. This study seeks to delineate the execution of the Baharagu ritual, ascertain the taboos that patients are required to observe, and evaluate its effects on patient health.

This study utilises a qualitative descriptive methodology through ethnographic techniques. Data collection was conducted via comprehensive interviews with balian (traditional healers), community leaders, and patients, alongside participatory observation and documentation. Data analysis was performed employing reduction, classification, and interpretation methodologies.

The results demonstrate that the Baharagu ceremony comprises multiple phases, including preparation, ritual performance, and conclusion. The preparation phase entails the compilation of offerings, including ringgitan, traditional cakes, flowers, and musical instruments. Patients additionally adhere to particular dietary and behavioural limitations prior to the ritual. The essence of the ceremony transpires at night, during which the balian recites mantras, administers pelungsur (herbal medicine), and conducts a purification rite. Post-ceremony limitations, like remaining indoors and refraining from interaction with strangers, are essential for facilitating recuperation. The Baharagu ceremony has demonstrated efficacy in addressing diarrhoea among the community. This ceremony promotes social unity and strengthens traditional cultural values.

This study concludes that the Baharagu ceremony is a significant cultural heritage that amalgamates conventional medicine with holistic therapy. The results provide a basis for the possible establishment of community-oriented healthcare initiatives.

Key Words : Traditional medicine, Baharagu ritual, Hindu Kaharingan, Dayak Meratus, diarrhoea therapy

INTRODUCTION

Diarrhea is a prevalent condition that significantly affects individuals' health and daily activities, particularly in rural and indigenous communities with limited access to modern healthcare facilities. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health, diarrhea remains one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality, especially among children in remote areas (At Thobari et al., 2022). The impact of this condition is exacerbated in regions with scarce medical resources, making alternative healing systems an essential aspect of healthcare. For the Dayak Meratus community in Kalimantan, Indonesia, traditional healing remains a crucial component of their healthcare practices. One of the most culturally significant traditional healing methods is the Baharagu ceremony, a ritual deeply embedded in the Hindu Kaharingan belief system (Anshari & Yani, 2020).

The Baharagu ceremony is not merely a medical intervention but a holistic healing approach that encompasses spiritual, communal, and cultural dimensions. It involves multiple stages, including ceremonial preparations by a traditional healer (balian), symbolic offerings, and the chanting of mantras. The balian plays a central role in invoking spiritual entities to cleanse the afflicted individual and restore bodily balance. The ritual is conducted within a structured environment where the patient is required to adhere to strict prohibitions, such as avoiding social interactions and refraining from outdoor activities during the healing process. These elements highlight the strong interconnection between spirituality, communal harmony, and well-being within the Dayak Meratus culture (Az-Zahra et al., 2021).

Despite its cultural and practical significance, the Baharagu ceremony has not been extensively documented or analyzed in academic literature. Existing research on traditional healing methods often fails to explore the intricate relationship between ritual practices and tangible health outcomes. Studies on indigenous healing frequently focus on the pharmacological properties of herbal medicine while overlooking the spiritual and psychosocial aspects of treatment (Anshari, 2024). This gap underscores the necessity of comprehending how rituals such as Baharagu contribute to health improvements and cultural preservation within indigenous communities.

This study aims to systematically document and analyze the stages of the Baharagu ceremony, assess its effectiveness in managing diarrhea, and explore its role in reinforcing communal solidarity. By examining the ceremonial process, healing mechanisms, and perspectives of community members, this research contributes to the broader discourse on traditional healing systems and their relevance within contemporary healthcare frameworks. Understanding such cultural practices is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and integrative healthcare approach that respects indigenous knowledge and promotes sustainable medical solutions.

1. Windy Tri Yuana, W. T., Andiarsa, D., Suryatinah, Y., & Juhairiyah, J. (2016). *Traditional Medicine in the Dayak Community for Diarrhea*.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach to explore the Baharagu ceremony as a traditional treatment for diarrhea among the Dayak Meratus community. Ethnography was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of cultural and spiritual practices. The study was conducted in Kamawakan Village, Loksado District, South Hulu Sungai Regency, South Kalimantan Province, an area known for its unique traditional healing methods.

Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews with key informants, including traditional healers (balian), community leaders, and patients who underwent the Baharagu ceremony. Secondary data were collected from documents such as demographic records, village profiles, and related literature on traditional medicine. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on those with knowledge and direct experience of the Baharagu ceremony.

Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Structured interview guidelines were used to ensure consistency during interviews. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to directly observe the preparation, implementation, and conclusion of the Baharagu ceremony. Documentation of rituals, including photographs and field notes, provided supplementary data for analysis.

Data analysis involved several stages: data reduction, classification, and interpretation. Analysis was performed using manual coding. The analysis process included domain analysis to identify local terminology related to the ceremony, taxonomic analysis to examine the structure of cultural practices, and thematic analysis to explore the broader cultural significance of the Baharagu ceremony.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Overview of the Research Location

The research was conducted in Kamawakan Village, Loksado District, South Hulu Sungai Regency, South Kalimantan Province. Geographically, Kamawakan Village is located in the southern part of Loksado District, approximately 45 km from the capital of South Hulu Sungai Regency (Kandangan) and around 180 km from the capital of South Kalimantan Province (Banjarmasin). The village covers an area of 4,118 hectares and consists of eleven hamlets (Figure 1). The geographical location of Kamawakan Village, surrounded by the Meratus Mountains, significantly influences the cultural and health practices of the Dayak Meratus people, including their approach to traditional healing methods such as the Baharagu Ceremony. The environmental conditions, including humidity, temperature, and vegetation, play a vital role in shaping the medicinal plant resources available for traditional healing.

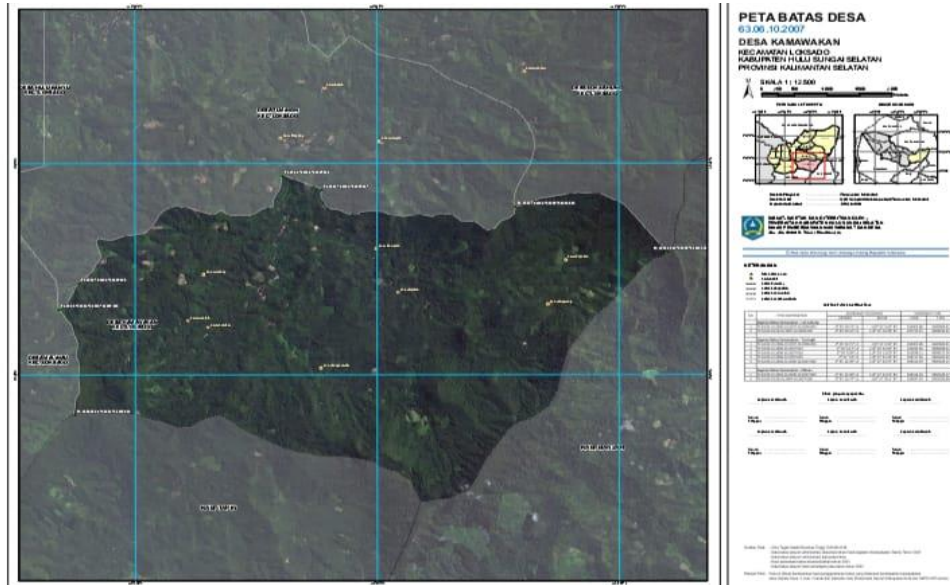


Figure 1. Geography of Kamawakan Village
(Source: Kamawakan Village profile book)

Traditional healing practices in Kamawakan Village align with theories of religious healing, as described by Joshi et al. (2008) (Joshi et al., 2008), where communal rituals reinforce social solidarity and provide psychological reassurance. Similar traditions have been documented among other indigenous groups, such as the healing practices of the Barikan Tradition. The Barikan Tradition integrates religion, healing, and solidarity by blending local beliefs with Islam in a spiritual ritual. It fosters social cohesion and collective identity while helping communities adapt to modernization (Yoga et al., 2024).

The Process of Conducting the Baharagu Ceremony

The Baharagu ceremony involves several stages, from preparation to closure. The preparation phase includes arranging ceremonial tools such as ringgitan (palm leaf decorations), offerings consisting of traditional cakes, flowers, and musical instruments, as well as preparing herbal remedies used for healing (Figure.2). These offerings follow specific cultural and spiritual guidelines to ensure they appease the spirits and deities involved in the healing process. The patient also undergoes preparation, which includes specific dietary and behavioral restrictions.





Figure 2. Preparation of Barahagu Ceremony

The peak of the Baharagu ceremony occurs at night, as the spiritual world is believed to be more receptive at this time. The balian (traditional healer) initiates the ritual by reciting prayers and mantras, invoking spiritual entities to aid in healing the afflicted person (Figure 3). The healing process includes administering pelungsur, a special herbal remedy believed to neutralize toxins and restore the body's balance. This is followed by spiritual purification involving water infused with medicinal herbs and a symbolic act of transferring the illness into an object or animal. The ceremony lasts until dawn, ensuring that all necessary spiritual and physical interventions are completed.





Figure 3. The peak of the Baharagu ceremony

Similar ceremonial healing methods are found in other cultures, such as Balinese Usada healing, which incorporates herbal remedies with prayers and mantras to restore health (Fahyan & Farhah, 2024). The study highlights the role of Balian, traditional Balinese healers, in preserving cultural balance and mental health through the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana—harmony between God, nature, and humans. Balian treatments integrate spiritual and herbal healing, often complementing modern medical practices, particularly in addressing mental disorders. Despite modernization, the Balian remain vital in maintaining Bali's cultural identity, blending tradition with contemporary healthcare needs.

The Baharagu ceremony's emphasis on both spiritual and physical purification aligns with the holistic healing principles found in Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine, where the balance of body and spirit is essential for recovery (Lu et al., 2004; Nesari, 2023).

Taboos Related to the Client's Recovery Process

The Baharagu ceremony is not solely a physical treatment; it is a holistic healing process that integrates herbal medicine with spiritual purification. However, for the treatment to be effective, patients must strictly adhere to several taboos. These restrictions include:

1. Remaining indoors for at least 24 hours to prevent external disturbances that may disrupt the healing process.
2. Avoiding strenuous physical activities or any form of labor until given permission by the healer
3. Refraining from direct contact with outsiders, including visitors from other villages, to maintain the sanctity of the healing process.
4. Abstaining from consuming certain types of food and drinks that are believed to counteract the effects of the ritual treatment.

Failure to observe these taboos is thought to weaken the healing process and may lead to a relapse or prolonged illness. Similar practices are observed in other Indonesian indigenous

healing traditions, such as the Tam Uim Reu, Barai, and Sapulei Tradition (Assit et al., 2023; Astuti et al., n.d.; S et al., 2022).

The Impact of Dayak Meratus Healing Practices on Client Health

The Baharagu ceremony has shown significant effectiveness in treating illnesses like diarrhea within the Dayak Meratus community. Reports indicate that most patients experience improvement within 24 hours, with full recovery typically occurring within a week. This aligns with studies on traditional medicine that highlight the importance of integrating herbal and spiritual healing in managing health conditions.

A comparative research with contemporary therapies reveals that herbal remedies employed in the Baharagu ceremony, such as pelungsur, exhibit pharmacological similarities to common anti-diarrheal pharmaceuticals. Guava leaves (*Psidium guajava*), an essential component of pelungsur, possess tannins with antibacterial characteristics that suppress *Escherichia coli*, a prevalent cause of diarrhoea (Nurdianti et al., 2024; Patel et al., 2019; Zulfiana & Fatmawati, 2022). Clinical investigations demonstrate that guava extract markedly decreases the incidence of diarrhoea episodes, validating the effectiveness of traditional medicine (Birdi et al., 2020). The Dayak tribe in Deya also utilises guava leaves for the treatment of diarrhoea (Yuana et al., 2016). The utilisation of medicinal plants is intricately associated with the healing practices in several regions of Indonesia, including Bali (Sinarsih et al., 2024).

In addition to bodily healing, the Baharagu ceremony promotes communal cooperation and strengthens social connections. The joint involvement of family and community members fortifies the cultural identity of the Dayak Meratus people and ensures the continuation of their traditional healing techniques.

CONCLUSION

The Baharagu ceremony is a comprehensive healing method that combines spiritual and herbal medicine to address ailments like diarrhoea. It facilitates physical recuperation, fortifies communal connections, and safeguards cultural legacy. Identifying and recording these practices is crucial for preserving indigenous knowledge and incorporating traditional healing techniques into wider health programs.

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