

Ethno medicinal practices and traditional healing system of Kattunayakan in Tamilnadu: An anthropological study

*V. Amuthavalluvan

Department of Anthropology, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

This study aimed to document the traditional ethno-medicinal practices of kattunayakan of south & north arcot district, Tamilnadu focusing on their utilization of medicinal plants and associated traditional healing system. Five villages were selected out of 65 villages, the participant observation method used for collecting data. Different parts of different Plant are used to treat different ailments ranging from diseases. In an average, 60 medicinal plants and parts are as used; the diverse patterns of use of different medicinal plant parts show the considerable indigenous knowledge of kattunayakans.

Keywords: Ethno-Medicinal plants; ailments; traditional healing system; using pattern; Kattunayakan; Tamilnadu

INTRODUCTION

From the early to recent Human beings and all tribes are being depend upon nature for their primary needs as they are born and brought up in forest. They are living as a long and trans generational interaction with nature was summarized with indigenous knowledge system which serves their mundane needs as well as crises situations of life including health. In India majority of tribes still rely upon their own way of traditional healing system and indigenous health seeking practices in the event of disease and this indigenous knowledge commonly referred to as the strength or value of their society.

Our ancestors were the simple hunters and gatherers and depended upon nature for food, shelter and medicine. This situation gave a chance to study about the local plants and their effects in different seasonal environments. In India majority of tribal population still depend on the indigenous treatment or traditional healing system. In every tribal group a particular family or individual is identified with the knowledge of ethno botanical recipes and as well function as magico-religious practitioner. These medicinal practices acquired and accumulated from generation to generation. This is commonly referred as the strength or value of the society (Samira Dasgupta: 2006) (S. Rajan: 2007). But in the recent past, the ideology of this strength and value are gradually degraded due to so many different social contacts from outside, the kattunayakan are still observing those traditional practices to some extent. The present paper deals with understanding the ethno-medicinal practice and traditional healing system of kattunayakan related to their local environmental. Their health care practices have been merged with their daily life. The aim of this paper is to document the health seeking behavior of kattunayakan because they are fast vanishing.

Three South and North Arcot districts, namely Vellore,

Thiruvannamalai, Villupuram have been covered for this study. Totally 65 settlements were visited, and five of them namely Panapakkam, Seshadrinagar, Kalasapakkam, Mugaiyur, Sitheripattu have been selected for the study.

The tribe is highly reserved and so the collection of information is a very difficult task. Hence the halt at the long time duration gave a pavement to score more data about their health seeking behavior. Systematic anthropological field explorations have been carried out with the help of elderly kattunayakan, medicine men (*Vaiitheir*) who have knowledge of plants and remedies. Discussions with women have been held in various settlements to collect maximum information of health seeking behavior.

ETHNO MEDICINAL PRACTICES

Ethno-medicine refers to the study of traditional medical practice which is concerned with the cultural interpretation of health, diseases and illness and also addresses the healthcare seeking process and healing practices of people (Krippner, 2003). The practice of ethno-medicine is a complex multi-disciplinary system constituting the use of plants, spirituality and the natural environment and has been the source of healing for people for millennia (Lowe H, Payne-Jackson A, Beckstrom-Sternberg SM, Duke JA, 2000), here the plants are playing a vital role in every ethnic community. Plants have been used in traditional medicine for several thousand years (Abu-Rabia, 2005), In India it is reported that traditional healers use 2500 plant species and medicine (Pei, 2001). The documentation of indigenous knowledge on the utilization of local plant resources by different ethnic groups or communities is one of the main objectives of ethno-botanical research (Shrestha, 1998)

The following plants are used for various problems.

- ❖ Naval seed (*Syzygium cttmni*): the seed of the plant of Naval- (*Syzygium cumnii*), it is powdered and used for diabetics.
- ❖ *Sithapuli (pavonia zeylonica)*: it is also used to cure diabetics
- ❖ Neem tree (*Vembu- Azadirachta indica*): it is used cure bile related problems
- ❖ *Vallarai (Centallaasiatica)*: it is used to cure cold related problems and memory power.
- ❖ *Pasalai keerai (Bassala rubra)*: it is used to reduce

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*Corresponding Author

Amuthavalluvan, Department of Anthropology, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, Tamilnadu, India

Tel: +91-9443659762

Email: anthrovalluvan@gmail.com

the heat of body

- ❖ *Sim tuthi (abutilon indicum)*: it is used for the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.
- ❖ *Neela avarai (Canavatia virosa)*: it is used as a laxative
- ❖ *Thavasi murungai (Justicia tranquebariensis)*: it is used for the treatment of dog bite.
- ❖ *Yelakkai (Elittaria cardomonum)*: it is used for gas related problems
- ❖ *Pirandai (dssus quadrangularis)*: it is used for gas related problems
- ❖ *Thandrikkai (Terminalia belerica)*: it is used to control the bile related problems.
- ❖ *Poovarasu (Thespesia populnea)*: it is used in the treatment of leprosy.
- ❖ *Kuppaimeani (Acalypha indica)*: it is used to cure cold disorder; leaf juice extract is also used to remove the worms in the intestine.
- ❖ *Aadu xhinapalai (Adathoda vasica)*: it is used for abortion.
- ❖ *Anai nerunji (Pedilium murex)*: for lack of minerals.

Preparation of mixture from herbal parts for treating different diseases

- ❖ **Avaram plant (*Cassia ariculata*)**: The floral parts of the plant are drunk with boiled water or milk, and also cooked as curry. It is consumed in these ways for problems related to *magavatai*, body heat, body odor, excessive sweating, thirst and tiredness. It also adds glow to the skin. The barks of the plant is boiled with the ratio of twenty grams to one liter, the decoction is taken from the stove after it gets reduced to three hundred mille liters. It is then consumed fifty mille liter daily for *madhu mogham*, *parumbadu*, excessive thirst and urine with blood.
- ❖ **Addu Thena Palai (*Aristolochia*)**: Two spoons of the leaf paste is taken with boiled water for poison bites; *karum kuttom*, *yanai thambal*, worms in stomach and *sori cherangu*. The root is grounded to a powdered state and five grams given to a snake bite victim for three days, he is not allowed to sleep with food restrictions. This cures all sorts of snake poisons.
- ❖ **Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)**: The juices of ginger and pomegranate of equal proportion is prepared and consumed fifteen mille liters daily for cough and wheezing. Ginger juice and ginger sweet is consumed for digestive problems, cold and body pain. Dried ginger, *kassu kati*, *kadukai (Kadukkai-Terminaliachebula)* sheath, *indhuuppu* are powdered to use a tooth powder, it is good for caries.
- ❖ **Elanthai (*Ziziphus Jujuba*)**: A handful of leaves, nutmeg six numbers, little garlic are made into paste and consumed for problem regarding female infertility. The leaf twigs and barks of the tree is powdered and consumed with buttermilk for bloody diarrhea
- ❖ **Datura**: The leaves are heated with gingili oil and applied to the respective areas to ease pain like arthritis, gastric related pains. It also eases the pain caused in breasts due to lactation. A solution is prepared by mixing with the leaf extract with coconut oil and added some zinc. This solution is used externally for wounds and *katte*. The leaves, flowers and seeds are taken in steam with milk. The preparation is then dried and smoked as cigar for asthma and wheezing trouble.
- ❖ **Erukku (*Calotropis gigantea*)**: The leaves are made into paste and given for snake bites. The leaf paste is given for scorpion bites and externally applied to the wound site.
- ❖ **Lemon (*Citrus Limon*)**: The leaf is added to buttermilk for some hours and consumed to remove body heat due to bile and *vaitai*. Up to four drops of lemon juice is poured to ear to remove the pain
- ❖ **Orillaithamarai (*Lonidium sattruticosum*)**: The leaf is consumed early in the morning preceded by milk. It is good for reproductive health and urinary health. The leaves of *orithal thamari*, *Keezhanelli- (Phyllanthusamarus)*, *yanai narunge (Nerunji-Tribulus terrestris)* is made into paste. About fifty grams of paste is added to curd which is consumed for ten days it is good for problems like *nertharai*, *vallai ozhghu*.
- ❖ **Omavalli (*coleus amboinicus*)** - The leaf juice extract is gives to infants with sugar for cough. The leaves extract with gingili oil and applied to forehead to remove heat from the body.
- ❖ **Kandankathhari (*Solum surentense*)**: The roots *ofkandankathre*, dried ginger, *Seragam* and *Ellakkai- Elettaria cardomomum* are boiled to prepare a decoction and drink daily for four to six times. It cures lung related problems, fevers caused by cough and cold. The roots of *kandang kathre*, *aristahchia* with rice *Thippili (Piper longum)* is added in ratio 9:1 and prepare a decoction which cures asthma, cough and *phenesam*. The fruit is heated dried and smoked for dental problems.
- ❖ **Karumchemai**: The leaf is fried castor oil and applied externally to severe wounds for fast cure. Consumption of leaf juice in the morning regulates the menstrual cycle obstructed due to gastric problems. The leaves of the plant is mixed with leaves of *acalypha indica* and ground with salt, it is applied externally for dermatological problems.
- ❖ **Kalyana murungai (*Erythrina variegata*)**: The leaf juice is consumed for ten days to ease the menstrual pain.
- ❖ **Kanchankorai (*Ocimum canum*)**: The leaf juice is mixed with milk and given to infants for cough and related problems. The leaf paste is applied over the body before bathing for deraiatological problems.
- ❖ **Karisilankanni (*Eclipta prostrate*)**: Large number of *karisalan kani* leaves with *Thulasi-(Ocimum sanctum)* and *Keezhanelli-(Phyllanthus amarus)* is eaten in morning and evening in empty stomach which cures liver and pancreatic disorders. Large amount of *karisalan kani*. Leaves with *Thumbi-(Lucus aspera)*, *Keezhaneli-(Phyllanthus amarus leaves)* is made into a paste and in taken with buttermilk for hepatitis infection.
- ❖ **Karivambu (*Murraya Koenigii*)**: Leaves of coriander are mixed with tamarind, and salt to fry with ghee. This preparation is mixed with food and consumed. This cures digestive problems like indigestion etc. The leaves of coriander with fried and made into paste along with dried ginger, nutmeg, *jeeragam*, *inthupu* and *asafoetida*. This preparation is taken along with food with ghee which cures diarrhea and constipation. Large amount of leaves are mixed with *Seeragam*, turmeric and made into a paste, this way of consumption cures the extreme fever caused by excessive presence of bile in the body.
- ❖ **Kattukodi (*Pachygone ovata*)**: The leaves of *kattukodi* is made into paste and consumed daily in the morning,

it is a cure for diabetes, excessive thirst and tiredness. The leaf extract with lemon juice is mixed with curd and consumed which cures perumbadu,

❖ **Katta Amanakku** (*Ricinis communis*): Tying the leaves in breast increases lactation. The leaves are boiled mildly in water and slight massaged in the breast and tried which increases lactation. Kattamanuku oil and coconut oil is applied over the wounds for cure. The latex secretion from plants is gurgled in mouth which cures the oral ulcers. Applying the latex secretion also aids in blood coagulation in wounds.

❖ **Kanavazhi** (*commelina bengalensis*): The leaf extract is used in treatment of bed sore and applied over breasts to cure lactation wounds.

❖ **Kuppai meani** (*Acalypha indica*): The leaves are heated with castor oil and tied in the body as a cure for bedsores. The leaf extract is applied in the forehead which cures headache. The leaf extract with turmeric and salt is applied in the body and bath is taken that cure all sorts of dermatological problems.

❖ **Guava** (*Psidium guajava*): A handful of guava leaves with a chilly is boiled in one liter of water it is drunk for every half an hour to immediately control vomiting, indigestion, gastric related problems, cough, tiredness, thirst and cholera. The leaf twigs are chewed and later easily digestible food is taken which gives relief from indigestion and acidity.

❖ **Sirukurinjan** (*Gymnema sylvestre*): The leaves of *strukurunjan* and *kala* leaves are ground to paste and consumed in the morning this provide relief from reproductive problem like irregular periods and excessive bleeding. A part of *sirukurunja* and two parts of coconut palm flowers are grounded to paste it is dried and made into pellets the consumption of pellets control blood sugar laves.

❖ **Sundai** (*Solatum Torvum*): Generally consumption of *sundai* is good for problem related to cold, cough, Tuberculosis and constipation.

❖ **Hibiscus**: The flower is dried, powdered and added with equal amounts of Marutham bark powder which is good for cardiac health. The flower is added with hair oil and used for better hair growth.

❖ **Thulasi** (*Oaimum sanctum*): The leaves are baked in steam and the leaf juice is extracted five drops are taken twice a day which increase the appetite. It is good for the functioning of heart and liver. It also increases lactation. Tulsi and nutmeg are mixed in ratio of 5:2 and made into paste. It is dried and again made into pellets it is mixed in hot water and consumed twice a day. This is a remedy for all types of fever. Mixture of tulsi juice and kar is along kani juice is mixed and few drops are added to ears that provides relief to ear pain and pus in ear. Tulsi leaf juice, honey and hot water are mixed in the ratio of 1:5:5 and consumed twice a day for twenty to forty days which cures heart disease. Inflorescences of tulsi, thiple, vasambu are powdered in equal proportions with sugar. It is then taken with honey which cures whooping cough. Seeds are powdered and taken with betel that results in physical vigor.

❖ **Thumbai** (*Lucus aspera*): Leaf juice of thumbai is mixed with honey and consumed the leaf paste is also applied in the wound which detoxifier the scorpion bite. Applying the leaf paste on the body and bathing cures dermatological problems. The leaves of thumbai and youthamani is equal proportion is made into paste which relieves abnormal mestural periods and

excessive bleeding.

❖ **Thuthi** (*Abutilon indicum*): The leaves are cooked and eaten with food following diet restriction for forty to one hundred and twenty days. This gets rid of piles. The leaves are heated with castor oil and tied near the anus which cures intermediate and advanced stage of piles.

❖ **Thuthuvelai** (*Solatum trilobatum*): The leaves are heated with ghee and eaten with food this provides relief from cold affecting lungs, improves health and intelligence. *Thuthuvali*, *Kandankathari* (*Solanum xanthocarpum*), *Parpadagam* (*Mollugo cerviana*), *evolvilus okinoides* are taken in equal proportion and prepared a concentrated form of decoction which is consumed five to ten mille liters for every hour that reduces the fever caused by pneumonia and typhoid.

❖ **Coconut**: A fully matured coconut is taken and scraped to oil get flakes which is heated mildly in castor oil and tied over belly that provides relief from *verai vekam*. The coconut flakes is fried with oil and applied over breasts that stop lactation. Gurgling the mouth with coconut milk, cures oral mounds and ulcers. This milk is also good for stomach ulcer.

❖ **Nanari** (*Hemidesmus indicus*): The roots *ofnannari* are made into powder and five mille grams are added with 200 mille liter of milk this reduces the heat in the body and cure problems related to female reproductive health like *magavati*, *maga anal* and *neersulukku*, cough consumption for long time prevent whitening of the hair. Consuming the powder with butter cures leprosy at initial stages.

❖ **Nayuruvi** (*Acranthos aspera*): The leaf juice can be applied over *thambal*, *padi* for cure and also applied over the wound of scorpion bite. The seeds of *nayuruvi* can be mixed with *ththi keen* oil fry and consumed for piles.

❖ **Naval Maram** (*Syzygium cumini*): The leaf of naval tree, twigs; leaf twigs of mango tree are mixed in equal proportion and made into paste which cures watery diarrhea and bloody diarrhea. The powder prepared from the seeds of naval is mixed with water and consumed, which cures *madhu mogam*, more urination and diabetes.

❖ **Centella asiatica**: Two kilo gram of *Centella asiatica* is boiled in steam with milk dried and powdered, it is then added with twenty grams of *Adimaduram* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), *kadukaiflower*, *Val millagu* (*Piper cubeba*), *Jathikkai* (*Myristicafragrans*), *sadipathiri*, *elarasivelaku*, date seeds and grapes. It is then heated with jaggery mixture, tried to mix evenly. This preparation is taken four grams daily with milk which is good for nervous system, skin and general health.

❖ **Amla**: one kilo of dries amla is immersed in twelve liters of water for night and later heated to get one to five liter decoction and added with one kilo of melted sugar. It is then mixed and stored with forty grams each with *adhimaduram*, *coogai neeru* and *kodi mundri* and sixty grams of date seeds and *Thippili* (*longum*). The mixture is then spread with ghee. It is taken five grams twice a day for two months, this cures vomiting, *pithayandu*, body heat, *themer voiyou*, *sogai*, *neersuruki*, *kunmam*, increase heart beat.

❖ **Lippia Nodiflora**: The leaves of lippia with ginger, mint-pudina, coriandrum, murraya koenigi is ground to paste and taken with food and ghee. This cures sputum in breast area and tuberculosis, Lippia with samula juice is boiled with gingili oil and hair bath is taken. This provides relief from dandruff.

❖ **Mullukerai** (*Amaranthus spinosa*): Roots of mulli forty grams with Omam- (*Trachyspermum ammi*), garlic two grams is made to paste and daily ten to fifteen grams are consumed thrice a day which cures stomach pain. The root ash of mulli is added with rice starch and applied over external tumors that break down and cures. The leaves are cooked consumed which increase the appetite and controls stomach problems.

❖ **Sirukeeri**: Cooking and consumed the greens increase urination and removes toxins. The leaf juice of sirukeeri with gingili oil fifty mille liters is added with hundred mille liter of water cleared with sodium carbonate prevents blood with urine. Sim keen root extract with fresh rice washed water is consumed with honey which cures excessive bile in blood.

❖ **Manale kerri** (*Gisekia Pharnaecoid*): the greens are cooked with dhal and eaten with cures cold, *paerthyam thodam*.

❖ **Puliyari** (*Oxalis corniculata*): Leaves or punyan is Doiled in steam with banana flower the juice formed with boiling is given to children with honey; this cures the diarrhea in children. The leaves are boiled and eaten with dhal that cures gastric problems, excessive piles, lack of taste and fainting.

❖ **Pakarkkai** (*Mimordica charantia*): The seeds are powdered and in taken with milk that kills the worms in intestine.

❖ **Kattu venkayam** (*wild onion*): The juice of bulb is applied in scalp over infected areas of *puchivett* for ten hours land taken bath which *skikakai*. This is done for two to three weeks this is believed to kill the fungi in the scalp. It is also believed to cure cough, irritation in urinary track during urination and anemia.

❖ **Sombu** (*foeniculum vulgare*): Consuming little amounts of *Sombu* increases urination and helps people who urinate less,

❖ **Ginger Legiuam**: The juice extracts of ginger, *Kandangkathi*, *Tribvlus*, Territories, Radish and Lemon are mixed in milk in the ratio of 1:2 and mixed with part of palm jaggery and filtered. It is when added with dried ginger, nutmeg, *JhippWi-iPiper longum*, *Thanisappapathi*, *Geeragam*, clove, *Ellakkai-iElettaria cardomomum* and *voivillakam* each of forty grams in powdered form then ghee added and preserved. It is taken five to ten grams twice a day which relives problems related to gastric troubles, bile disorders, *soolai*, *fits*, *kunmam*, *porumal*, vomiting, indigestions, lack of appetite and tastelessness.

❖ **Garlic Legiuam**: Four hundred grams of garlic is boiled with one titter and added with four hundred grams of palm jaggery and three hundred grams of butter. It is then taken five grams twice a day which cures digestives problems, cough and *Elumburukki*.

❖ **Murukkan seed tablet**: Ten grams each of *murukkan* seeds, *jeeragam*, *Kadugu rohini* -(*Piccorhiza kurroa*) dried ginger, Nutmeg, *tipilli* and sixty grams of *suthivanam* is boiled in water and made into pellets of five hundred Mgs in size. One or two tablets are taken before sleeping with sugar water. This cures infection of worms in stomach, indigestion, lack of appetite, cold, kondai.

❖ **Mantha Enai**: One liter castor butter and two liter juice of whole *indang kodi* plant is heated mildly. Twenty grams of black *seeragam* is added to the boiling extract. The highly concentrated extract is filtered two grams of *koroson* powder is added and stored in a glass bottle this oil is an infant medicine

for constipation and fever caused by cold food restrictions are followed i.e. no salt, tamarind and chilly.

❖ **Darin of vilam** (*Lymoma acidissima*): vilam is powdered and one gram is eaten with butter twice a day. A teaspoon of selanthinayakam with a teaspoon of milk twice a day cures tumors inside the body will cure the internal injuries.

List of diseases treated my kattunayakan

• **Kidney stones**: *Sirupoola*-(*Aerva lanata*), *siru nerigal* (*Nerunji-Tribulus terrestris*) is taken in equal ratio and made into a paste about ten grams of the paste is dissolved in five hundred millie liters of curd and drunk twice a day for two months this treatment dissolves the kidney stones.

• **Dysentery**: Treatment for the baby. The following herbs are taken to prepare decoction -Leaf of *Poduthalai*-(*Phyla nodiflora*), Two Neem twigs, Two *Nuna*-(*Morinda coreia*) twigs, *Uppalam kodi* -(*pentatropis microphylla*) twigs, *Mandha poundu*, *Kanchankorai*-(*Ocimum canurri*), Sunflower, *Chandra flower-fevohulus alsinoides*, *Seeragam*-(*Cuminum cimini*), and Turmeric powder. The above herbs are boiled in steam and the hot decoction is given to the child by through the paladai.

• **Karumchevaphu noi**: Donkey milk is given to the diseases child, no food is given for three days, only water and sugar water is given to two days. The extremities of the body became blue; the *chevapu* oil is bought from the washer-man women and given to the child. *Vasambu*-(*Acorus calamus*) is burned in the flame of castor oil lamp the soot is collected and mixed with mother's milk and then given to the child for stomach pain.

• **Oodhu kamalai**: The leaves of *Karisilankanni*-(*Eclipta prostrate*) can cook and eaten Ten grams of *karisilakanni* leaves, few leaves of *neem*, *tulasi*, *seru-keelanalli* is eaten a raw in empty stomach at morning and evening followed by food restriction.

• **Foot cracks**: The leaves of Neem are turmeric are mixed and made into paste, applying the paste over the cracks cures them. Eating the Marutham leaves early in the morning also cure the cracks.

• **Wounds**: The application of castor oil along with coconut oil over the wounds. Tying *karivelam* leaves over the wounds. Washing with *Othiyam*-(*Lannea coromandelica*) barks boiled water over rectum and genitals cures the wounds present here.

• **Dog bite**: Consumption of hundred milligram of powdered *Azhinjil*-(*A langium salvifolium*) root barks twice a day for a week cures the poison. The leaves of *Datura* are fried in gingili oil and applied over the bitten area. Daily consumption of half gram roasted asafetida with palm jaggery removes the toxic effects of dog bite.

• **Scorpion bite**: Consuming Thumbai juice one mille liter with honey daily removes the toxic and applying the leaf extract over the wound removes the toxics and scars. Application of leaf extract of *Erukku*-(*Calotropis gigantean*) over the wounds also cures the scorpion bite. Application of *birma thandu-fargemone mexicana*) extract over the wound also cures. *Arivalmooku poondu* - (*sida acuta*) - *acalypha indica* leaves with few garlic and nutmeg are made into paste and applied over the site of wound.

CONCLUSION

The Ethno-medicine practice and Traditional knowledge healing system of the kattunayakans reveal that the community maintains still

its pristine form. It is difficult to separate their daily from health seeking behavior (Bindu, 2007). Documentation of ethno-medicinal practices of kattunayakan provides us a brief look of their native understanding in protecting their healthy knowledge of Ethno-medicinal plants and by both precautionary and remedial measures, which are culturally nurtured and environmentally supported. They follow their own distinct ways of predicting and diagnosing the health conditions and trying to meet the demand in a very casual way that would not differentiate much from day to day activities. Much curiosity is exhibited in the matters of child birth and sexuality as pointed out by Levy and Fallers (1959: 647-51) that reproduction and sexuality were two primary or essential activities of any human beings life.

Kattunayakans folk and the medicinal man use a variety of plant products like leaves, barks, roots, fruits etc in different combination to cure various diseases. They use two or more remedies for the same disease indicating that one is superior to the other. As the local environment is subjected to degradation the non-availability of certain species also force them to find an alternative. It is also observed that almost every grownup individual try on their own for any kind of ailment in initial stages. However in the changing situation kattunayakan are gradually accepting modern health care systems subjected to their economic conditions.

SUGGESTION

As an Anthropological study, it covered all their practice of traditional healing system along with socio-cultural practices, from the field work I (Researcher) observed that the study population (Kattunayakans) undergone of fast transition based on modern technology, the situation has two sides but anthropologist always look upon the pathetic situation why because their attitude of health practice under the endangered situation, soon this practice will extinct from their life style, so government should create some policy to encourage them to promote their health practice. Apart that their ethno-medicinal practice and traditional healing system should be examined by concern

scientist so that both can be benefitted.

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