

Mechanisms Adopted by The Nandi Religious Practitioners to Create, Prepare, Preserve and Transfer the Knowledge of Traditional Medicine Among the Nandi of Uasin-Gishu- Kenya

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Abstract- The Nandi community of Uasin-Gishu, Kenya, has a rich tradition of traditional medicine that encompasses not only the intricate practices of healing but also the mechanisms employed to create, prepare, preserve, and transfer this invaluable knowledge. The intersection of spirituality, cultural heritage, and ecological awareness shapes the methods through which Nandi religious practitioners ensure the continuity of traditional medicine wisdom. This research paper delves into the profound mechanisms adopted by Nandi religious practitioners to safeguard their traditional medicine heritage. From ancestral teachings and spiritual revelations to apprenticeships, oral transmission, and sustainable harvesting practices, these mechanisms illuminate the intricate tapestry of traditional medicine knowledge preservation within the Nandi community. This exploration not only sheds light on the resilience of indigenous practices in the face of modern challenges but also underscores the significance of cultural identity and holistic well-being in the continued propagation of traditional medicine wisdom. The transfer of traditional medicine knowledge among the Nandi community embodies the interplay of familial bonds, cultural heritage, and spiritual connections. The passing down of herbal healing wisdom through apprenticeships ensures the continuity of curative techniques, with the forest serving as the classroom. While the influence of modernization and Christianization has introduced changes, the resilience of traditional medicine persists. The intertwining of ancestral revelations, observations, and practical experiences nurtures a holistic understanding of curative herbs. As colonial and contemporary forces intersect with indigenous practices, the unwavering belief in traditional

medicine serves as a foundation for the Nandi community's enduring connection to their cultural heritage and holistic healing practices.

Indexed Terms- Nandi Religious Practitioners, Traditional Medicine, Knowledge Transfer

I. INTRODUCTION

The practices of creation, preparation, and preservation of traditional medicine among the Nandi community reveal a rich interplay of ancestral knowledge, spirituality, and ecological awareness. Traditional medicine holds a vital place in Nandi culture, with herbalists learning their craft through apprenticeships, ancestral wisdom, and even observations from the natural world. This indigenous knowledge is deeply ingrained in the community's cultural fabric and plays a significant role in healthcare practices. Additionally, the sustainable methods employed in gathering and harvesting medicinal plants showcase the community's commitment to preserving these valuable resources for present and future generations.

The transfer of traditional medicine knowledge within the Nandi community is a dynamic process deeply rooted in familial lineage, cultural practices, and spiritual connections. This vital practice involves the transmission of herbal healing techniques from one generation to the next, creating a continuum of wisdom and expertise. Traditional medicine apprenticeships, guided by parents, grandparents, and relatives, nurture the observation, experience, and memorization necessary to understand the intricate details of curative herbs found in the forest. This knowledge transfer is characterized by adaptability,

with those outside of traditional medicine families having the opportunity to learn for a fee. Moreover, spiritual dimensions, such as ancestral revelations through dreams, add a mystical layer to the acquisition of healing knowledge. The impact of colonialism and modernization, marked by Christian influence and formal education, has introduced shifts in the transmission of this knowledge, but the enduring belief in traditional medicine continues to shape the preservation of these practices.

II. CREATION, PREPARATION AND PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

The study found out that some Nandi herbalists learned their trade by doing an apprenticeship. It was also gained through ancestors, spirits, and the Supernatural being through visions, dreams, and revelations. Additionally, it might be discovered by trial and error while combining different plants to treat an illness. The herbalist tried their remedies on a variety of illnesses, and if they were successful, that particular condition would be cured. Additionally, some herbalists among the Nandi learned new remedies by studying how animals healed themselves, then they could test those remedies on people for example according to (Elders,25/11/2022),

a remedy for stomach-ache was discovered through observing a dog that had a stomach complication where it ate a certain shrub which was later discovered that it worked for human being also.

This idea is supported (Harrison et.al, 2002) who argued that an estimate of 80% of Africans visit traditional medicine practitioners who have no formal training, their practices are self-taught and acquainted by observation and Folklore (knowledge) is orally transmitted are more diverse, ecosystem and ethnic community specific with household level health practices (home remedies for primary health care, food recipes, rituals, customs), specialized healing traditions like bone setting, poison healers, birth attendants, veterinary healers, general healers.

In addition, DellaPosta, Shi & Macy (2015) supported the above arguments when he indicated that practises of traditional and complementary systems of medicine are deeply rooted in the cultural environment

community beliefs, emotions, life experiences, spiritual considerations, and even religion. Therefore, culturally bound rituals, taboos, beliefs, and unofficial social norms that are passed down orally over generations make up the governance practices of traditional medicine. It is believed that breaking cultural taboos and customs will result in punishment from the gods and the spiritual realm. These are generated over centuries by communities and use components of ecosystems (plants, animal and mineral/metal derivatives) that are primarily locally available, easily accessible and often cost effective. It varies hugely owing to social, ecological and historical circumstances. Hence, countries with similar ecosystems are often found to nurture similar health practices indicating the strong linkages between environment and health. These are also known as indigenous medicine, ethnos medicine, bush medicine, little traditions etc.

The study also uncovered that there were several methods used in preparing the medicine depending on the type of ailment to be treated. However, decoction was the most widely used method of preparation of the medicine mainly because of the ease of using water to prepare them. Nankaya et.al (2019) confirmed the above findings when he pointed out that there is more than one method used in preparing many of the medicinal plants in traditional African communities. However, he adds that the type of plant species, condition of ailment being treated, and plant parts used determined the method of preparation. The study found out that traditional ways of gathering medicinal plants were guided by the need to protect the plant from drying up or being destroyed. There were various measures adopted and used to ensure that medicinal plants did not die due to harvesting of medicine. These harvesting methods included uprooting herbs or removing a few roots, or bark or some leaves from a shrub or tree required for use in the family or by a patient.

In addition, the study indicated that different herbs treated different diseases and traditional practices brought about the well-being of society. Harvesting roots: The study noted that the local community relied a great deal on medicinal plant roots for treatment of ailments. The roots were removed using a stick or simple tools. This would be chewed on the spot to

relieve some discomfort or carried home for boiling with other herbs provided by the household head or herbalist.

Uprooting of herbs: According to the respondents' plants that were small and had few roots or one tuber could be uprooted. Once the roots or the tuber was removed the plant was then replanted, with the hope that it would grow. In addition, the harvester spat on the plant as a sign of blessing and uttered words whose intention was not to destroy or kill the plant but to use it to treat a disease. According to the respondents,

our culture dictates that harvesting roots of medicinal plants should be mainly from trees and shrubs that have several strong roots. In order to gather the roots of trees or shrubs, one is supposed to remove one or two roots and at most four. We literally say that you scratch out a few roots 'kingwari tikitik eang akoi angwen eng ketit ageng, that is to remove only two to four roots from a plant only. This means that you only gather what is required without destroying the plant. The person harvesting should identify identify one or two roots of a medicinal plant and remove the whole root at a time. If one needs more roots, then should he/she identify another and remove from it.

Shinkafi et.al (2015) agree with the respondent when he pointed out the cultures and traditions of various communities and societies shape the utilization of this medicinal plant materials.

The young were restricted from harvesting the tap root as pointed out by one of the respondents;

due to the restrictions of removing a maximum of four roots from a plant, herbalists taught the young people never to remove the tap root- which they referred to as the 'heart' of the plant locally referred to as 'muguleldab ketit'. The common words used were 'kingwori sakitia ma kibolu' literally translated as "you only scratch a medicinal plant not digging out.

Therefore, the use of the term scratching means avoiding digging with a hoe or "jembe" which may remove many roots at once. This traditional method ensured that the plant was not affected as only few

roots were removed which ensured the continuous survival of the medicinal plant.

According to the Nandi elders, all the members of the community were taught medicinal plants used for general ailments such as cuts, colds, cough and abdominal pains. The knowledge on use of plants guided the people in their day to day activities to protect medicinal plants. For instance, in Nandi, young browsed medicinal plants were covered with a thorny branch to protect it from browsing animals as it grows. During land cultivation, the farmers avoided uprooting any plants especially known medicinal plants. Instead they only cut the branches and left the tree stump which would re-grow after some time. Therefore, medicinal plants used in the community were well conserved. The traditional methods of gathering had guidelines that were intended to protect the plants and the user.

Towns' et.al (2014) agree with the findings when he stated that when gathering plants for medicinal purposes special measure must be taken. The medicinal plants should be gathered without destroying by uprooting.



Figure 1: Traditional medicine stored in different ways.

Source: Research 2022

III. TRANSFER OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE KNOWLEDGE

The revealed that most of the herbalists learned the art of herbal practice from their parents, grandparents or other relatives as pointed out by one of the herbalists;

The young male children who had interest learned the practice of treating patients from their parents and a son who had no natural bent for his father's inclination to herbal knowledge, may take up hunting or bee keeping as a full-time or learn another trade from a member of his father's or his mother's family or even from nonrelative. More precisely, through several years of learning by accompanying their parent to collect herbs in the forest, practising and experience, the young were able to memorize the exact location or position of each and every important curative herb in the forest. With the stream of time, they were able to learn such knowledge and skill. Unlike other skill this one required one to be more observant in order to learn well and become competent. Those who were interested in the knowledge but their parents lacked had to pay a fee for them to learn fee to learn and be shown the plants that are used to treat specific diseases.

Makore (2022) agree with the idea of the respondent that knowledge can be transferred to another generation when he pointed out that traditional knowledge includes people's observable traditions that are passed down from generation to generation and form their "scriptures," or source of knowledge.

Payyappallimana, (2010), also supports the findings when he pointed out that in most countries where traditional medicine is not formalized, it largely remains in the noncodified folk knowledge form. Diversity, collective ownership guided by customary laws, adaptability to changing contexts and oral transmission are some of the prominent characteristics of this knowledge.

Fundamentally, the trainees were taught on how to discern the leaves, berries, and roots of a greater number of local plants. In order to adequately acquire such knowledge, the youths and relieved patients were sent to gather specific herbs and ultimately taught the recipes for preparing a variety of medicines. As already discussed in the earlier analysis, it would be imperative to note that acquisition of such skills and techniques were generally passed on from father to son especially from those clans that took herbal medicine as their profession. However, the same arrangement was far from rigid.

In addition, the study found out that in some cases some of the specialists like herbalist learned the art of their work through spiritual revelation from the ancestors who could impart knowledge on them through dreams. At times they could be shown a certain plant that treat certain complication through dreams while they were asleep.

Payyappallimana, (2010) concur with the findings when he argued that traditional knowledge can also be transmitted from supernatural being down to the spirits, ancestors and the living persons. Also; the knowledge can be transmitted directly from the hierarchy of beings to living human beings. These hierarchies of being transfer knowledge through revelation.

At present, the study unearthed that some few household heads in the Nandi community were ignorant of traditional medicinal plants especially those who grew up in Christian homes and were on salaried employment. This showed the impact of missionaries who encouraged Christian converts to go to school and use modern medicine provided by modern health facilities.

Bwalya, W. (2019) supports the findings of the study when he pointed out that western culture has had an impact on the traditional socialization on use of medicinal plants to treat ailments. This was enhanced by marginalization of traditional medicine by colonial government and promoted by the missionaries in mission and government schools.

However, the effect is still limited as the impact of western culture and Christianity has not completely influenced the Nandi community due to the strong belief in traditional medicines.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the practices surrounding the creation, preparation, and preservation of traditional medicine among the Nandi community reflect a profound harmony between ancestral wisdom, ecological awareness, and cultural beliefs. The acquisition of herbal knowledge through apprenticeships, spiritual revelations, and observations of nature underscores the holistic foundation of traditional medicine. As the

Nandi community's practitioners combine ancestral teachings with trial and error, guided by visions and observations of animals, they create a comprehensive repository of curative techniques. This cultural wealth, rooted in folklore and orally transmitted wisdom, is echoed by the sentiment that over 80% of Africans seek guidance from self-taught traditional medicine practitioners. The cultural context, rituals, and taboos intricately woven into these practices underscore the significance of indigenous knowledge in healthcare. The meticulous gathering methods, such as selective root removal and mindful harvesting, demonstrate the community's deep respect for the environment and sustainable resource management. The Nandi's interconnectedness with nature is mirrored in their practices, with protective measures for growing medicinal plants and their careful use for ailments. This knowledge's passing down, often through generations, ensures that the interplay of cultural heritage, spiritual bonds, and practical experience continues to enrich the Nandi community's holistic well-being and connection to their ancestral traditions. The transfer of traditional medicine knowledge among the Nandi community embodies the interplay of familial bonds, cultural heritage, and spiritual connections. The passing down of herbal healing wisdom through apprenticeships ensures the continuity of curative techniques, with the forest serving as the classroom. While the influence of modernization and Christianization has introduced changes, the resilience of traditional medicine persists. The intertwining of ancestral revelations, observations, and practical experiences nurtures a holistic understanding of curative herbs. As colonial and contemporary forces intersect with indigenous practices, the unwavering belief in traditional medicine serves as a foundation for the Nandi community's enduring connection to their cultural heritage and holistic healing practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To further strengthen the preservation and transmission of traditional medicine knowledge within the Nandi community:

1. Efforts should be made to enhance the awareness and appreciation of traditional medicine practices among the younger generation. Integrating traditional medicine knowledge into formal and

informal education systems can help maintain cultural identity and ensure the continuity of these valuable practices.

2. Collaborative efforts between traditional healers, researchers, and institutions should be encouraged to document and study traditional medicine practices. This would not only help preserve the knowledge but also provide opportunities for innovation and scientific validation.
3. To address the challenges posed by habitat destruction and unsustainable harvesting practices, community-led initiatives for the conservation of medicinal plants should be established. This could involve creating local regulations for plant harvesting and encouraging the cultivation of medicinal plants within households and community spaces.
4. Engaging experts from diverse fields such as botany, ethno botany, anthropology, and ecology can provide a holistic approach to the preservation of traditional medicine. These collaborations can facilitate sustainable practices that respect both cultural heritage and ecological balance.
5. Striking a balance between modern healthcare and traditional medicine is crucial. Encouraging open dialogue between practitioners of both systems can lead to integrated healthcare approaches that utilize the strengths of both traditions while respecting cultural values.
6. Governments, NGOs, and international organizations should recognize and support traditional medicine practices as an essential aspect of cultural heritage and healthcare. This can include providing funding for research, conservation efforts, and training programs for traditional healers.

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