

# The Role of The Herbalist in Building The Identity of Madurese Traditional Herbal Medicine (*Jamu*)

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**Abstract** Herbalists play an important role in building the identity of Madurese traditional herbal medicine, or *jamu*. They are aware that their product needs a cultural identity so that it will be easier to remember, imagine, and describe to their children and grandchildren in generations to come, as well as to the consumer. It is the duty of future generations to remember, reconstitute, and recreate the meaning of the past for the present day. Members of the young generation today face social, political, and cultural changes on both a global and a local level. They must make choices, none of which are easy. Potential threats from outside in the form of science and technology may cloud their local identity. They must continue to preserve oral traditions in order to make tradition an ideological weapon. The method used in this research, which aims to understand how people interact and work together through daily life phenomena, based on a structured cultural concept, combines techniques of observation, interviewing, and documentary analysis to record people's communication and behaviour in a particular social background. The role of the herbalist is still important today because not everyone possesses the skills needed to make *jamu*. Becoming a herbalist entails more than simply mixing together a number of plants or herbs to make *jamu*. Herbalists must also give directions to their assistants. They need to understand the illnesses that their customers frequently suffer from and have the ability to communicate well with their customers. It is these skills that have enabled the tradition of drinking *jamu* to continue up to the present day.

**Keyword:** herbalist, *jamu*, ethnomedicine, Madurese

## 1. Introduction

In Indonesia, drinking *jamu* is quite a popular habit. Our ancestors' habit of drinking *jamu* is supported by [1] which recognizes that 40% of the Indonesian population have at one time or another consumed this traditional herbal medicine. This means that drinking *jamu* is a legal act, acknowledged by the world of modern health. According to data on Basic Health Research (Riskedas) in 2010, 55.3% of Indonesians consume *jamu*, and 95% say that *jamu* is beneficial for people's health. Furthermore, [2] states that 68% of the Indonesian population feels that drinking *jamu* suits them. From this data, it is evident that the majority of Indonesian people like *jamu*. In the Madurese community, drinking *jamu* has been a habit for generations, with parents encouraging it as part of a healthy lifestyle (Jordan, 2008: 35). Some people make their

own *jamu*, but others prefer to trust herbalists. Herbalists are elderly people (usually women) who have a wealth of important knowledge about concocting *jamu*. This knowledge is transmitted verbally and the person listening must remember all the various explanations given [3]. In this modern age, the practice of oral traditions, marked by the domination of verbal transmission, still continues to take place. Verbal transmission is a cognition system made up of the knowledge, trust, and values inside a person's head. This knowledge is transmitted to children and grandchildren in the form of language expressions, advice, or folklore. If examined more closely, these forms contain concepts, principles, or scientific knowledge that is not yet formalized [4]. This is what occurred when knowledge was first developed in preliterate societies, and continues to be referenced today [5].

One interesting phenomenon that is occurring today is that modern-day housewives rarely make their own *jamu*, even the simplest kind. They prefer to buy *jamu* sold in local shops, to wait for the woman who sells from door to door, or to order from a herbalist working at home. The reasons for this are quite complex, and include the fact that women today are busy with jobs outside the home, thus having no time to make their own *jamu*. Additionally, the younger generation's interest in learning to make *jamu* is on the decline, meaning there will be a shortage of herbalists in the future, which in turn will have a direct impact on the potential disappearance of knowledge about *jamu* formulas that is stored in their minds. Therefore, the goal of this research is to reveal the important role of the herbalist in preserving the continuation of the *jamu*-drinking tradition in the traditional community of Madura.

## 2. Research Method

This research uses Spradley's Method of Ethnography [6] from the discipline of cognitive anthropology, which assumes that every society has its own unique system of knowledge that can be learned by understanding people's perception and way of thought related to the material phenomena that occur around them. This method of ethnography is used to understand how people interact and work together through daily life phenomena, based on a structured cultural concept, and combines techniques of observation, interviewing, and documentary analysis to record people's communication and behaviour in a particular social background. By using this method of ethnography, the herbalist is not only treated as a material object but also as a subject who is able to express and relate experiences and knowledge. Positioning the consumer as the research subject enables an elaboration of the consumers' actions, the reasons for consuming *jamu* being the primary focus of the research. With the use of ethnography, the consumers' behaviour can be understood, specifically through the ethnography of communication, in which language is the medium of communication. According [7] language is an integral part of a community, and therefore, in order to interact with Madurese herbalists and consumers to obtain information about the deeper significance of drinking *jamu*, it is necessary to have a good command of the Madurese language. The goal is to discover the conceptual tool used by the consumer to classify, arrange, interpret, and experience the social universe[8] In order to understand what the subjects are doing, the first step required is an understanding of the Madurese language. This is supplemented which describes language as the first and most important step in being able to describe a culture. A field researcher must have an understanding of the local language, in this case Madurese, because Madurese is the language of daily communication for the people of Madura.

## 3. Results And Discussion

### 3.1 Role of the Herbalist

The herbalist or healer [4] is a person who is an expert in combining materials such as roots and woody plants. He or she plays an important role as a person who has comprehensive knowledge of the different formulas for making *jamu*. The herbalist does not randomly combine various medicinal plants to make *jamu* or continue formulas from the past, transmitted by elders. A true herbalist is a person who develops the knowledge of previous herbalists in a creative way. He or she holds the highest position in terms of the artistic aspect and responsibility for making *jamu* “as it should appear” to the buyer. The herbalist does not work alone but is accompanied by a number of assistants who help to select and sort the materials, then to wash and combine them to create a *jamu* product with a local identity. [9]

The word identity is defined as the special qualities or characteristics that distinguish a person or group. Thus, identity is a situation in which a person can self-reflect to look for the special or unique signs he or she has acquired through his or her internal composition fused together with the external social environment. Therefore, identity may refer to social, political, cultural, and psychological elements.

Identity is the result of a process of identification which helps a social group to establish cohesion and indicate its position when dealing with other people [10]. *Jamu* herbalists are aware that outside their own ethnic group there are other individuals and groups whose profession is the same as their own. For this reason, early generations of *jamu* herbalists attempted to formulate a local conception in the process of making their *jamu*. Building their identity meant building or establishing the understanding of the herbalist in creating the *jamu*. From this perspective, identity emphasizes the construction of ethnicity that adheres to the *jamu*. Madurese *jamu* strengthens the cultural identity of Madura which has long since been associated with its Strong Mighty *jamu*. This term is in fact a symbol of the spirit of the Madurese people’s healthy lifestyle.

### 3.2 Unique Madurese *Jamu* Products

Popular Madurese *jamu* products include special kinds of *jamu* for treating the female sexual organs called Sari Rapet, Paka’ Harum, and Empot-empot. For men, popular *jamu* products are Kuat Perkasa, Lelaki Perkasa, and Majun. These names illustrate that the *jamu* is for treating the sexual organs [11] This kind of Madurese *jamu* is not unlike Viagra in effect but is made from the young areca nut and *kayu rapet* (Latin: *Parameria laevigata*) which are processed in a simple manner to produce a ready-to-drink *jamu* in liquid form. The reaction from this *jamu* is gradual and without side effects.

The word ‘*sari*’ is often used for a girl’s name, and means refined and soft. Sari Rapet describes a woman who is still ‘tight’ (still a virgin). In other words, Sari Rapet *jamu* is for women who wish to make their vagina tight like that of an unmarried girl. The name Paka’ Harum comes from the words *paka’*, which describes the bitter, astringent taste of the young areca nut, and *harum*, which describes the fragrance of the magnolia or jasmine flowers used in this *jamu*. This symbolizes the expectation that drinking this *jamu* will make the vagina smell fragrant. U’un, who makes her own *jamu* from flowers, describes her experience as follows: It’s embarrassing being with your husband if your body smells bad, so don’t forget to drink *jamu*. Every week I make *jamu* from jasmine and magnolia flowers which make the whole body smell fragrant, even the inner organs. If you don’t believe it, ask my husband.

The phrase ‘*todus ka lake*’ means ashamed towards one’s husband and if he is constantly reminded of an unmarried girl, it will eventually stick in his memory. Whether consciously or otherwise, memories stay with us and are marked by symbols, values, and anything that forms

a collective memory, including in the form of the collective unconscious[10]. Collective unconscious comes from a latent memory that is passed down from generation to generation. However, it is not the knowledge that is inherited but rather the predisposition to memory (tendency to act) that makes people tend to think and act towards something in the same way. Collective unconscious is the foundation that passes on the entire structure of personality. Collective unconscious plays a strong role in helping a community to store knowledge about its *jamu* and other paraphernalia.

Experiences and knowledge are passed down from our grandparents and become a part of the past that continues to exist in the present day. The presence of this knowledge and experience is a form of cultural epistemology and cognitive unconscious in the shape of concepts, perceptions, and reasoning which determines the views of the Madura community in their affiliation with the culture of the past regarding the concept of healthy living. Evidence of this is that old proverbial sayings passed down from generation to generation continue to be referenced. Here, the tradition of drinking *jamu* as an intangible culture passed down over the generations will never become extinct as long as the Madurese language remains a part of cultural communication. Preserving the Madurese language is synonymous with preserving the traditional heritage of *jamu* drinking, which in turn is synonymous with preserving the knowledge of our Madurese ancestors from long ago. Therefore, a healthy lifestyle is not something new to the Madura community, but something they have continued to develop alongside other developments in their culture. Culture refers to everything that is learned and experienced together socially by the members of a community [12]. Drinking *jamu* is never thought of today as a sign of a child's obedience. Modern society tends to use the steps of a methodological or conceptual approach to understand the tradition of drinking *jamu*, preferring to use logical procedures and epistemological postulates of others who are educated in the fields of pharmacy and medicine.

Despite living in the modern age, the Madura community and the Indonesian people in general have not yet moved on from the oral culture. For this reason, oral traditions today are still important for linking the events of today with those of the past. In the past, during the preliterate era, people's activities were only recounted in verbal ways, such as singing, intoning in a kind of mantra, telling stories, giving advice, or through other elegant expressions. The tendency to think of the oral tradition as fictional stories is inaccurate because there are numerous examples of oral traditions where the element of knowledge is more dominant, one being the tradition of drinking *jamu* which existed long before the Indonesian nation became literate. Nowadays, these proverbial expressions are being investigated by experts, including researchers from both educational and industrial institutions, because they contain examples of ethnoscience that originated from the thoughts of the local (Madurese) people. This is why it is necessary to have a good command of the Madurese language in order to understand these conceptions that are all written in Madurese, including knowledge from the past that was inherited from the Madurese people's ancestors and is being gradually erased by modern knowledge. This knowledge will, however, never disappear as long as the Madurese language continues to function as the language used to explain about the activity of drinking *jamu*. This condition also happens in.

#### 4. Conclusion

To date, knowledge about making *jamu* has been passed down from one generation to another using the model of oral transmission. The structural nature of this inheritance system, from parents to children and so on, is an internal policy in the families of herbalists and can in fact be viewed as a ‘political’ policy, the goal of which is to preserve the cultural identity of the group that is rooted in its institution. In the future, it is important to integrate the role of herbalist in the government policy and education institution.

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