



TRADITIONAL HEALERS AND BAPTIST CHRISTIANS AMONG ZELIANGRONG OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT



Traditional healing among the Zeliangrong is an age-old practice using herbs, rituals and even spells for physical healing. But with the coming of Christianity among the Zeliangrong people, there arose a tension between Christianity and traditional healing and divine healing (which Christians espoused). The paper is an attempt to find out the impact of traditional healing on the Baptist Christians among the Zeliangrong community of Manipur.

Keywords: *Koubiraj, Zeliangrong, Folk Medicine, Evil Spirits, Divine Healing.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The origin of traditional healing among the Zeliangrong cannot be exactly traced to a certain date. No doubt the survival of the people demands that ailments need to be combated. These combat often are done with the use of herbs, rituals to appease gods, as well as the spell by incantations. Zeliangrong traditional healers, like other Indians, used Ayurveda treatment where physical ailments of people were often attributed to divine factors, and magico-religious means were utilized to cure.¹ Chakraborty rightly pointed out that,

"North-Eastern ethnic communities based their traditional knowledge of medicine on their needs, instinct, observation, trial, and error, and long experience in the healing methods."²

Some of the methods used by traditional healers are questionable as far as Bible is concerned and yet Zeliangrong Christians continued to rely upon them blindly. The paper is an attempt to study the impact of traditional healers among the Zeliangrong community of Manipur.

1.1 Definition of Traditional Healers

WHO defines traditional medicine as,

"The sum total of all knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosing, preventing or eliminating a physical, mental or social disequilibrium and which rely exclusively on past experience and observation handed down from generation to generation, verbally or in writing."³

In the Zeliangrong context, traditional healers are local physicians who treat a person suffering from various sicknesses by the use of roots, leaves, fruits and even parts of animals. Some prefer to call them

as medicine men or folk healers⁴ in contrast to physicians who practice medicine with official accreditation. Typically, a traditional healer is one who has acquired from his/her father or a *Guru* the methods of treating diseases common to their region or of a particular specialization.⁵

1.2 Brief Background Sketch of Zeliangrong

Zeliangrong is the second largest tribes among the Nagas⁶ with approximately some 3lakhs except for the fact that they are scattered in three states of India: Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam. Zeliangrong is an acronym of the first syllable of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei,⁷ first coined on 15th February 1947 at Keishamthong⁸ which are names of dialects as well as a community.⁹ In Nagaland, Zeme and Liangmai are called as Zeliang while Rongmei is treated as different. It is the British who distinguishes these tribes as Kabui¹⁰ for Rongmei and Inpui and Kacha

⁴ Eric Eve, *The Healer from Nazareth: Jesus' Miracles in Historical Context* (London: SPCK, 2009), P. 55.

⁵"Healing Tree Network – Our Brand New Initiative," *Mythri speaks* (blog), July 27, 2016, <https://mythrispeaks.wordpress.com/2016/07/27/healing-tree-network-our-brand-new-initiative/>.

⁶ The origin and meaning of 'Naga' are disputed. There are over 65 different tribes under Nagas living in India as well as Myanmar.

⁷ According to oral accounts the name Liangmai, Rongmei and Zeme had its first occurrence while they were in Makuilongdi. There are different versions as to its origin. Namthiubuiyang Pamei, *The Trail from Makuilongdi: The Continuing Saga of the Zeliangrong People* (Tamenglong: Gironta Charitable Foundation, 2001), P.33-34.

⁸"Bill 108 of 2011 and Need to Understand the Words Naga Zeliangrong and Balkanization," accessed March 13, 2018, http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinions.Opinion_on_Manipur_Integrity_Issue.Bill_108_of_2011_and_need_to_understand_the_words_Naga_Zeliangrong_and_balkanization.

⁹ Elungkiebe Zeliang, *Charismatic Movements in the Baptist Churches in North East India: A Zeliangrong Perspective* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2014), P.2. Inpui (Puimei) was excluded in the nomenclature though were part of Zeliangrong for many decades which led to the Inpui departure from Zeliangrong in 1997. Recently the other three tribes also had amicably decided to be known not as Zeliangrong but as three different tribes.

¹⁰Namthiubuiyang Pamei, *The Trail from Makuilongdi: The Continuing Saga of the Zeliangrong People* (Tamenglong: Gironta Charitable Foundation, 2001), P. 56. Refer Zeliang, *Charismatic Movements in the Baptist Churches on North East India: A Zeliangrong Perspective*, P.3. for further explanation, P.3. *A brief account of the*

¹ Anu Saini, "Physicians of Ancient India," *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 5, no. 2 (2016): 255, <https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.192322>.

²Cheithou Charles Yuhlung, "Practice of Ethno Medicine among the Chothe Tribe of Manipur North-East India," *International Journal of Pharmaceutical & Biological Archive* 5, no. 3 (2015): 138

³World Health Organization, "The Promotion and Development of Traditional Medicine," World Health Organization Technical Report Series 622 (Geneva, 1978), P.8.



Naga¹¹ for Liangmai and Zeme. Zeliangrong dialects belong to the Naga-Bodo sub-family within the Tibeto-Burman language family.¹² Oral folk tales or songs of Zeliangrong people suggest that once they speak one language, possibly Liangmai or something close to it before their departure from Makuilongdi.¹³ They are said to have migrated from Sinlung province of China,¹⁴ and belong to Mongoloid stock. The total population of Zeliangrong in Manipur constitutes roughly 2 lakh of the total state population, having a 60% literacy rate as of now.

The religion of Zeliangrong according to Gangmumei Kamei is a primordial religion,¹⁵ as the basic tenets of primordial religion like belief in the spiritual world of power, the concept of supreme god, dependence on dreams, visions, and myth, the use of rituals and great dependence on medicine men (traditional healers) and priests are there with the religion of Zeliangrong.¹⁶ It is known in local dialect as *Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak* (earlier called as

*Paupai Rachap, Paupe Tacheng or Paupai Renet*¹⁷) since 1994.¹⁸ *Heraka* is of recent origin which is a reformed religion of *Paupai Renet* whose origin can be traced back to Haipou Jadonang and later continued by Rani Gaidinliu. The uniqueness of *Heraka* is the involvement of unseen or spirit called *Haidwarangbe* who lived in the house of female mediator.¹⁹

1.3 Origin of Baptist Christians among Zeliangrong

Christianity reached Zeliangrong areas of Manipur with the conversion of Maipak, an Inpui man in 1914²⁰ while the couple was living in Keishamthong where Maipak served Maharaja of Manipur. Maipak also called Namrijinang was baptized by Rev. U.M. Fox at Imphal on 6th December 1915.²¹ Jinlappou of Kaikao became the second Zeliangrong convert (first among the Rongmei) in 1918. Maisibou Newmai was the first convert from Liangmai in 1923 while Lungliambo was Zeme's first convert in 1940.²² Through these converts, many villagers were converted through indigenization one after another.²³ The role played by the Kukis in the expansion and spread of the gospel among the

Zeliangrong Nagas published by All Zeliangrong Student's Union, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland which was published in 2009 pointed out that the word *Kabui* referring to Rongmei had been in existence since 1st-century Christian era much before the British usage of them. P.4.

¹¹Kacha probably come from Angami dialect for the thick forest, referring to the place where Liangmai and Zeme live in ancient times. It is also possible that kacha which means raw can have a certain bearing on the name too.

"KACHA NAGA," accessed March 6, 2018, http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=manipur.Ethnic_Race_s_Manipur.Ethnic_Races_Sanathong.KACHA-NAGA.

¹² All Zeliangrong Students' Union, *A Brief Account of Zeliangrong Nagas* (Dimapur: All Zeliangrong Student's Union, 2009), P.6.

¹³ Zeliang, *Charismatic Movements in the Baptist Churches on North East India: A Zeliangrong Perspective*, P.2. Makuilongdi is the final resting place of the Zeliangrong before the departure to different regions as Rongmei, Liangmai, and Zeme where they are today. Pamei in his book, *The trail from Makuilongdi*, exclusively deals one chapter about the exodus of the Zeliangrong from China along with different versions of the same.

¹⁴ Pamei, *The Trail from Makuilongdi: The Continuing Saga of the Zeliangrong People*, P.21.

¹⁵ Jenpui Kamei, *Gaan Ngai: A Festival of the Zeliangrong Nagas of North East India* (Dimapur: North Eastern Zone Cultural Centre, 2012), P. 49.

¹⁶ Pamei, *The Trail from Makuilongdi: The Continuing Saga of the Zeliangrong People*, P.47-48

¹⁷Zeliang, *Charismatic Movements in the Baptist Churches in North East India: A Zeliangrong Perspective*, P.27-29.

¹⁸Kamei, *Gaan Ngai*, P.54.

¹⁹ Zeliang, *Charismatic Movements in the Baptist Churches in North East India: A Zeliangrong Perspective*, P. 35.

²⁰Heizieluing Meru of Benreu village was the first Zeliangrong convert with his conversion in 1897 from among the entire Zeliangrong Nagas living in three North East state of India. Zeliang, *Charismatic Movements in the Baptist Churches in North East India: A Zeliangrong Perspective*, P.40.

²¹Elungkiebe Zeliang, *A History of the Manipur Baptist Convention* (Imphal: Manipur Baptist Convention, 2005), P. 31. Kamei in her book *Gaan Ngai* put the date wrongly as 5th Dec 1915. Kabui Naga Baptist Association in their report at MBC Golden Jubilee celebration verified the date of Maipak's baptism as 6th Dec in Zeliang's *A History of the Manipur Baptist Convention*, P.160.

²² Zeliang, *A History of the Manipur Baptist Convention*, P.187, 169,204. M. Maisuangdibou records the date of Maisi's conversion as 16th Sept. 1923, in his book, *Liangmai, and Christianity: Faith in search of understanding and transformation in indigenous/tribal context* (Tamei: Witinglung publication 2015), P.43.

²³Namthiubuiyang Pamei, *Tingben Patbou Racham: A Narrative on the Advent of Christianity Among the Zeliangrong* (Tamenglong: Gironta Charitable Foundation, 2016), P.51-54.



Zeliangrong villages were significant.²⁴ Interestingly it is the Baptist who brought Christianity first among Zeliangrong and no doubt over 95% of the people are Baptist today. Apart from Baptist, there are Roman Catholics, Charismatics (This includes Pentecostal, Assemblies of God, Revival Church), Adventist and others. Some of these groups are very few in number. It may be noted that Liangmai in Manipur had celebrated Passover celebration on 15th-16th Feb 2003 to commemorate complete redemption of the Liangmai.²⁵ The other tribes that comprise Zeliangrong are yet to see total redemption as a community.

1.4 Traditional Healers among Zeliangrong

Traditional healers among the Zeliangrong are called by various names. The Liangmai called them as *Phaimu*, *Phaimiu* or *Kamu*; for the Rongmei it is *Maipa*; Zeme called them as *Rekame*, and the Inpui as *Kathiam*. The Manipuri called them as *Maiba* or *Maibi*.²⁶ Today among the Zeliangrong, these healers are often known as *Koubiraj* which was wrongly pronounced as time passed from *Kabiraj* or *Kobiraj*²⁷ a title was given to physicians in Sanskrit (*Vaidya*) who treats kings and the royal family by the use of Ayurveda in ancient India. Their works were akin to the works of a magician (*Jadowala*) who are able to heal, treat diseases, removes magic (*Jado*) spells and foretell future. Traditional healers are believed to drive away malevolent or malicious spirits and deities, determine the cause of a disease, and administer remedies based on their knowledge in verse.²⁸ Many healers believed that the efficacy of

the medicine get lost when the name of the plants or animals used for medicine are revealed,²⁹ and hence it is a closely guarded secret.³⁰

Some of the healers claimed to get a revelation as to how a sick person ought to be treated while the majority evolved their practice from trial and error methods and accident. Some seem to be gifted too.³¹ Traditional healers among the Zeliangrong can be best divided into three categories: first, those who are helped by the spirits, second, those who considered themselves gifted by God and third, those who cultivate and later practice as a hobby. Healers' concern is the wellbeing of the individual as well as the society. But there are who used black magic who's concern are not on the welfare of the society nor individual. These bogus healers often cast a spell or pronounced certain magic so as to destroy the well being of certain individual or family,³² many times on behalf of some others. Thus, they can be classified as witchcraft or black magician or witch doctor. Healers neither always perform all the same functions, nor do they all fall into the same category. Each of them has their own field of expertise. Even the techniques employed differ considerably.

Many Zeliangrong traditional healers' method is somewhat identical with the method of renowned

²⁴Ibid., P. 54-59.

²⁵Maisuangdibou, *Liangmai, and Christianity: Faith in Search of Understanding and Transformation in Indigenous/Tribal Context*, P.55.

²⁶ These varied title given to them have different meaning too. They include prophet, medicine man, one who knows how to predict how to be treated by touching, one who knows how to massage etc.

²⁷Sashikaba Kechutzar, "Naga Traditional Religion Versus Naga Christianity," *Journal of Tribal Studies* XXI, no. 1 & 2 (December 2016): 153. The term *Kobirajis* a term borrowed from Assamese for the person who can set right the dislocation of joints and sprains, and they can even prepare medicine from herbs.

²⁸"Reproductive Health Beliefs and Their Consequences: A Case Study on Rural Indigenous Women in Bangladesh. - Free Online Library," accessed February 21, 2018,

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Reproductive+health+beliefs+and+their+consequences%3A+a+case+study+on+...-a0383981215>.

²⁹G Ngaomei and E J Singh, "Traditional Knowledge of the Therapeutic Use of Animals by Rongmei Tribe, Manipur, India," *International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research* 7, no. 8 (August 2016): 1982.

³⁰T Thirunarayanan, A. Srividya, and R Sangeetha, *Formulary of Native Healers* (Chennai: Centre for traditional Medicine & Research, 2016), P.17.

³¹Wilanlung Moita, interview by author, telephonic interview, 20th Feb 2018. Wilanlung was one such practitioner practicing it as a hobby. He learned the art from the reading and observing his grandfather. He also noted that he was gifted as he never forgets whatever his grandfather told him or whatever he had seen related to this traditional way of treating the sick people.

³²Mathiudin Abonmai, interview by author, telephonic interview, 26th Jan, 2018. Mathiudin said his grandfather, who is a traditional healer prior to embracing Christianity, used to narrate how *Doisimai* (those who know magic) would cast spell on their enemies and hence used to have so many problems everywhere.



Mexican folk healer, Don Pedrito Jaramillo,³³ in that they used various parts of the plant like leaves, barks, seeds, roots, etc. and also herbs, creepers, climbers, shrubs, grasses, etc. as a single item but mainly by mixing with other ingredients in the treatments. They are used in diverse forms- fresh or raw, dry or powder, or as culinary or concoction, or as a tonic. The following³⁴ are common types of sicknesses and things used by traditional healers in the treatment:

Sl. No.	TYPES OF SICKNESS OR DISEASES	INGREDIENTS COMMONLY USED IN THE TREATMENT
1.	A toothache, Eye pain.	Toothache plant flower is hand crushed and kept in the cavity to get relief. A drop of milk (human) is used for any eye pain or foreign body in the eye.
2.	Wounds, Sprain or Dislocation, Muscular pains, Fracture of bones, Blood clotting or healing of the wound.	<i>Dioscorea Pentephylla</i> is crushed and apply in the area before bandaging. Frog fresh or dry is good for healing wound (soup first later its meat is eaten)
3.	Stomach-ache, Burning sensation of the stomach, Dysentery, Diarrhoea, Acidity, Gastric, Chronic-ulcer.	Tender leaves of <i>Adhatoda Vasica</i> , or <i>Centella Asiatica</i> or bark of mango plant is boiled and given to the patient. Tender leave of guava is chewed for dysentery and diarrhea. Bedbugs caught alive and soaked in salted water for some 20 minutes and the water is given to heal diarrhea.☐
4.	Jaundice	All yellow fruits like papaya are eaten. Boiling the bark of mango plant is also consumed.
5.	Scabies, Allergy, Anti-insecticides.	Red marigold leaves are warmed in the fire and then crushed and applied over the affected area. The fruit or powder of <i>Rhus Semialata</i> is simply eating or applied. Eating tortoise cooked meat in its shell.☐
6.	Urinary problem, Stone case, Kidney problem, Uterine problem.	Boiling or cooking <i>Centella Asiaticais</i> good for kidney issue. Urine of flying squirrel is used for treating the stone case.
7.	Dispeller of magic spells.	<i>Curcuma Caesia</i> is crushed and its liquid is taken. Sometimes they are told to carry along with them. Ginger is also used for this purpose too.
8.	Fever	Garlic crushed and make a paste with pure mustard oil after heating it up is applied on the forehead, chest, back, and joints. Tender leaves of <i>Adhatoda Vasica</i> is also used for fever, rheumatism,
9.	Piles, Constipation, Paralysis, Epilepsy.	Indian trumpet flower is used to treat a person suffering from pile who are to sit on the warm boiled water of the plant bark kept in a tub. The plant bark should be peeled upwards with one breath. This process is continued until one gets relief. The tender leaves are eaten as a chutney with a belief that it reduces high BP, and also by those who suffer from Epilepsy.

³³ Eve, *The Healer from Nazareth: Jesus' Miracles in Historical Context*, P. 58-59.

³⁴ These are collections from individuals who were interviewed as well as reading from Ngaomei and Singh, "Traditional Knowledge of the Therapeutic Use of Animals by Rongmei Tribe, Manipur, India."



Beside these, Zeliangrong traditional healers frequently used black turmeric, culantro, yam leave, king chilli, *jengdui* (traditionally prepared paste from mustard leave which is black in color), bile of a Bear and Python, Tragopan, dung of mice, honey, *Guimangkho* and piece of black dust formed as a result of prolonged use of fire in the traditional home mainly kitchen (Liangmai called it *kangngui*). The fruit of *Rhussemialata* is considered very good medicine hence the dry fruit is preserved and kept throughout the year in every home. There is a specific way of preparing medicine and it must be followed strictly. While taking bark for medicine, one must cut the bark from downside not upside (cut and peel upside). When a leave is used for preparation it must be always in an odd number. For healing of bone cancer, a tuber of a certain plant called as *Nruibuilong* (in Rongmei) mixed with honey after a thorough cleaning of the part by petrol will suck up all the cancerous shell and cured in around three weeks' time.³⁵ The swollen part must be bandaged and clean daily. Traditionally prepared rice wine, poison extracted from centipede are also said to be used for preparing medicine for liver cancer.

1.5 INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL HEALERS AMONG CHRISTIANS

1.5.1 Many Christian blindly believe them

Mr. Wilanlung Moita,³⁶ a practitioner of traditional healers testified to the fact that a Christian lady brought to him a child who had been suffering from a fever over and over again for some two-three years. The lady had consulted many doctors and yet the fever was not completely cured as it would re-emerge again once the medicine stops. Moita following his forefather's belief prayed for a divine miracle and simply prescribed paracetamol liquid be purchased and given to the child. The mother did and the child was completely healed. This is, in fact, the beliefs of many Christians among the Zeliangrong. Many blindly believed and at times, as the above also show, got the desired result too. For

³⁵ The shared state, "The Lost Medical Knowledge of Tamenglong". Filmed (Jan 2015). YouTube video, 08:07. Posted (Jan 2015).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OB--fssediU0>.

³⁶ Wilanlung Moita, interview by author, telephonic interview, 20th Feb 2018.

such as this, perhaps we can conclude 'with faith all things are possible'.

1.5.2 Attribute many sicknesses to evil spirits

Many sicknesses will be automatically attributed to evil spirits attack³⁷ when the doctors are not able to properly or clearly diagnose. In spite of the fact that many Zeliangrong people had embraced Christianity, many continued to claim like other Naga tribes that certain sicknesses are caused by evil spirits and only traditional healers alone can cure them.³⁸ Hence such a sick person will consult traditional healers only. Mr. Wilanlung Moita³⁹ believed that there are *mairiangsamai* (a kind of evil spirits that would eat up intestinal organs of the people usually the child) still exist among the Zeliangrong community even after the coming of Christianity.

1.5.3 Methods adopted by contemporary Christian healers

Contemporary Christian healers employed the term 'divine healers.' When observed, it is clear these healers are very akin to traditional healers because they use all the methods and techniques traditional healers used. The only difference is they are not called as *Kobiraj* but as healers. These healers are said to be capable of getting revelation or visions from God with which they will prescribe medicines or prepare medicine and give to the patient for treatment.⁴⁰ There are many such healers adopting the methods and techniques of traditional healers by opening centers for treatment. They give a different name like prayer center, prayer cell, healing center, divine healing center etc. where the emphasis is given to fasting and prayer for the sick patient. ☐

³⁷ Zeliang, *Charismatic Movements in the Baptist Churches in North East India: A Zeliangrong Perspective*, P. 144. Zeliang also recorded many stories narrated to him by a different individual in his book. Refer P.145-150.

³⁸ Sashikaba Kechutzar, "Naga Traditional Religion Versus Naga Christianity," *Journal of Tribal Studies* XXI, no. 1 & 2 (December 2016): 152.

³⁹ Wilanlung Moita, interview by author, telephonic interview, 20th Feb 2018.

⁴⁰ The author's aunty is undergoing a treatment for arthritis on her knee at present. She consulted first bone specialist but as no relieve seems to be in sight, shifted to *Kobiraj* but even after finishing the course of the *Kobiraj* as she is not getting relieved, she is now being treated by the so-called 'divine healers'. She said she is seeing a sign of improvement already as she can walk a few meters again.



1.6 REASONS FOR THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL HEALERS

Many Zeliangrong Christians believed that traditional healers have special skills, expertise, and knowledge to heal sickness. So whenever they have complication they would come upon traditional healers or they would come and meet them in their homes. Several reasons could be pointed out for their dominant influences on the contemporary Christians.

1.6.1 Traditional healers are known to the public

Zeliangrong people are very much a close community wherein almost everyone knows everyone. These healers, once someone knows of his/her gifts, will be known to the whole population of the village or town in very little time. Hence when someone gets sick for people living in a place where there is no proper physical health department or hospital, their first resort is traditional healers. This is echoed by all the people who were interviewed by the author.

1.6.2 They are fellow believers

Majority of Zeliangrong living in Tamenglong District of Manipur had embraced Christianity and hence any traditional healers living in Tamenglong are fellow believers. However, one cannot ignore that there is quite a handful of Zeliangrong from Rongmei, Zeme and Inpui who are yet to receive Christ even today. These people live predominantly in Imphal valley areas. When Christian practiced traditional healing method as stated earlier, either with the name *Kobiraj* or divine healers etc. no doubt people will prefer to consult them before consulting a medical practitioner.

1.6.3 They have a good rapport

Having good rapport in any field works wonder. The stories of these healers are known to almost everyone among the villagers or towns. People who had not consulted any healers till date said they would certainly approach and seek their help if a situation arises.⁴¹ There is also relatives, elders, and neighbors influencing others regarding their future consultation with the traditional healers as they talked about healing or cure, they got through them. Moreover, it is very rare that people would question the cultural practices and family

⁴¹ Wikhuanlungliu Zou, interview by the author, telephonic interview, 27th Feb 2018.

rules. Following their elders, neighbors or in-law's advice is also a sign of respect. ☐

1.6.4 They charged minimal fees

Traditional healers, unlike the professional doctors, charge a fee that is affordable by a family, which they generally offer him with a sense of gratitude. They don't have a fixed amount. At times they are paid even with vegetables or fruits instead of cash. Kaisuangbo Marenmai, *Kobiraj* practicing in the author's village never demand any price for any service rendered. However, people give what they could.⁴² Many traditional healers practiced and lived by free will offering of the people.

1.6.5 They are easy to access

Easy access for people living in a remote place become the main reasons for going to traditional healers in times of need. Not only do the sick need to spend in a queue to get 5-10 minutes consultation with the doctors, they at times are not considerate too. They are not friendly at times. Traditional healers would often come to the sick house if it is in a village set up and do the necessary preparation for the treatment of the sick. ☐

1.6.6 Many Christians are pragmatic

Many Zeliangrong is pragmatic in nature: whatever works must be believed and accepted. Traditional healers in at least one occasion in their practice had healed someone in the past and this becomes a flame that continued to burn. For some, these healers' medicine makes people recover faster than anything else.⁴³ This is possible because a sickness when it is minor or non-existent (not real sickness) traditional healers can be more effective than the medical physicians.⁴⁴ In case of broken bones, there is apprehension among the people that going to a doctor for treatment means their legs would be amputated, hence would prefer traditional healers.

⁴² The author can remember very well when he had dislocated his leg while playing football, Marenmai was called. He massaged the leg followed by prescribing *banampuiriang*, a kind of climbers found plenty in the village, to be crushed and bandaged over the affected leg. The author's mother gave him a warm glass of red tea with sugar in it for the service rendered.

⁴³ Kaiwiyang Moita, interview by the author, telephonic interview, 14th Jan 2018.

⁴⁴ Eve, *The Healer from Nazareth: Jesus' Miracles in Historical Context*, P.56.



1.7 BIBLICAL VIEWS ON TRADITIONAL HEALERS

There is no evidence of an organized medical system in the Bible days. Most sicknesses were probably treated at home as several stories would illustrate. Physicians do exist but Jews believe the only true healer is God. No doubt herbs mentioned in the Bible has medicinal⁴⁵ value.

1.7.1 Old Testament (OT) teaching

The OT does not condemn the herbal usage while condemning the incorporation of it in occult practice. Many OT text clearly teach against the use of witchcraft, sorcery, medium, spiritist, magician or black magic (cf. Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26, 20:26-27, 31; Deut. 18:10-12, 14; 2 Chro. 33:6; Isai. 8:19, 47:12-14; Mic. 3:7, 5:11-12).

Ezekiel 47:12 tells us we can obtain medicine from the leaves, suggesting during Biblical times people were aware and used herbs for medicinal purpose. When Job was afflicted by boils he seemed to be aware of the principle that the draining sores needed to dry out so he sat in ashes (Job 2:7-8). The balm mentioned by Jeremiah could be of the nature of frankincense or some aromatic juice from a shrub, containing benzoin used as medicine (Jer. 8:22, 46:11, 51:8).⁴⁶ Figs that were used to heal Hezekiah's boil by Isaiah (2 Kings 20:7) could not be ascertained but nevertheless significant. So it is clear OT does not in any way condemn the use of herbal medicine, it is the incorporation with occult practices the Bible is against.

1.7.2 New Testament(NT) teaching

If the OT describes the symptoms of diseases, NT no longer describes it. We find patients themselves or through others went to the physicians, Jesus, and apostles for healing. We are told Luke was a physician but sadly we do not see his medical practices being recorded. However, we know that as a physician in the first century, the only 'medicine' available to Luke would have been herbal medicines. The Good Samaritan treated the wounds of the injured man with wine and oil (Luke 10:34). Wine is an antiseptic and will tend to coagulate blood,

⁴⁵The Top 14 Herbs of the Bible #BibleHerbs - DrAxe.Com," Dr. Axe, July 16, 2012, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://draxe.com/the-top-14-herbs-of-the-bible/>.

⁴⁶A. Rendle Short, *The Bible and Modern Medicine: A Survey of Health and Healing in the Old and New Testament* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1953). P. 71-72.

thereby assisting healing. Oil soothes and forms a coating. The medicinal use of wine is mentioned in Scripture several times (including 1 Timothy 5:23).

A clear case of traditional medicine during the NT period is the admonishing the Church at Laodicea was given to use their locally-produced eye salve because of their lack of spiritual vision (Rev. 3:18). So, as long as there is no incorporation of the use of herbs with occult practices, the scripture is absolutely fine. The healing performed by Jesus and his disciples is not the same as exorcist perform. In this light, the Zeliangrong healers are not condemned by the Bible unless it involves any black magic or occult practices.

1.8 RECOMMENDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS

1.8.1 Understand ultimate healer is Jesus Christ only

"Seeking (and receiving) a healing without seeking and finding the Healer is settling for much less than is offered and needed."⁴⁷This is true because, no matter what kind of healing one received from whoever and whatever sources it may be, healing comes from God alone. Perhaps Lucas is right to say that healing comes through a cooperation between God and His creature, through divine initiative and creaturely response.⁴⁸ We get healing, no matter what methods we used, by the gracious action of God through nature when we cooperate with Him. Interestingly many traditional healers among the Zeliangrong in Tamenglong District regularly prayed as they prepare medicine and encourage the patient to pray for the cure.

1.8.2 All true healings are divine

God is the creator and sustainer of everything seen and unseen is also ultimately the healer of any physical ailments. Physicians may know the healing power of nature and therefore make use of what is understood to facilitate healing, but they only dress the wound, God heals.⁴⁹ And such, all healing is of

⁴⁷Mark A. Pearson, *Christian Healing: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide* (Michigan: Chosen Books-A divisions of Baker book house, 1995), P.24.

⁴⁸Ernest Lucas, ed., *Christian Healing: What Can We Believe?* (London: Lynx Communications, 1997), P.16.

⁴⁹Ambroise Pare was quoted as saying, "I dress the wound, but God healed him." Quoted by Ernest Lucas, ed., *Christian Healing: What Can We Believe?* (London: Lynx Communications, 1997), P.6



God whether it occurs through traditional healers or medical doctors.⁵⁰ Without doubt doctors, nutritionist, healers, and counselors are intended by God to bless us and promote our well-being. In this contemporary medical and traditional healers as well as religious experiences we are but to affirmed with Calvin: "The Lord is undoubtedly present with his people to assist them in all ages; and, whenever it is necessary, he heals their diseases as much as he did in ancient times."⁵¹

1.8.3 Get the best available treatment

To get the best available treatment is to seek ways and means of improving how one can get treatment. Science knows in part and sees through the glass of illness darkly. It has limitation but this is not to demean the knowledge of medical science. Today medical science has advanced so much so that there is almost nothing that they cannot handle when diagnosed early. In such a time, to go back to traditional healing is being true ancient.

1.8.4 Know who they are consulting

Since there are healers who used Ayurveda for the treatment and there are healers who used black magic, Christians must identify if they at all have to consult them. No one can be forced to consult or not to consult traditional healers. Nevertheless, the public must be prudent enough to know beforehand who they are consulting or who they wanted to consult for the best result wanted.

1.8.5 The church should be taught well on the pros and cons of traditional healers

There is a great task for all the church as well as public leaders to take stock of the present scenario. Unless they take concrete steps to teach the people the pros and cons of these traditional healers, there is great danger of the public being sold to the hand of the healers. Public education and orientation on the same is the urgent need of the hour. This education can be carried out through seminars, conferences or community grievance forum. We live in the time of increasing religious disillusionment, much of this is because of the church retreat from what she was called to perform. Had the

⁵⁰ Quoted by The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, *The Relation of Christian Faith to Health* (New York: Board of National Missions, 1960), P.40.

⁵¹ The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

church being faithful in teaching to the new members of the church this disillusionment would not be as great as it is today. There is great danger of healing becoming an end in itself.

1.9 CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, traditional healers had a tremendous effect on the thought and lives of Zeliangrong people. But, nevertheless, in time where there have been widespread beliefs that green medicines are healthier and safer, we must be wise as to when to consult traditional healers and when we should not because of the abusive use of herbs by some traditional healers. If the herbs are not helping our body to restore back to what it is designed, but is detrimental to our body and do not bring glory to God, every born-again Christian should stop getting help from the traditional healers. The church can and must play a vital role in educating the people about traditional healers. There is a great need for the church to do its homework well.

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