



# **A Comparative Analysis Of Traditional And Islamic Medical Practices In The Antiquity And Contemporary Period; Changes, Modernization And Modifications (A Case Study In Relation To The Practice In *Kasar Bunza* 1750-2019)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Kasar Bunza is a district comprising five villages of Bunza, Gwade, Damana, Bachaka, and Owa. The district is blessed with such natural endowments like mountains, hills, and many other trees of medicinal value. The availability of herbs and accessibility to such endowments of medicinal potentials provide herbalists and other traditional healers with herbs that aided the development of traditional medical practice in the area. Bunza people like any other Hausa society, have developed a tradition of medical system that sustained their health and wellbeing over the years. The development might not be unconnected with the history of the people that established the area, who were hunters and believed to be traditional medical practitioners. The health care needs of the people in the district had been taken care of by the practitioners of the tradition up to the period when conventional health system was introduced in the area in 1920s. The practice experienced some changes, modernizations and modifications competitively with the new system of health care services, though faced with a number of challenges; ranging from suspicion, mistrust, rejection and inadequacy of facilities. This was due to a number of reasons. The existence of traditional medical system was deeply rooted in Bunza culture. Consequently, the indigenous medical practice in *Kasar Bunza* continued to be patronized by quite a number of people in the area up till the contemporary period

**Keywords:** Traditional, Islamic medicine and contemporary period.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Bunza District comprises five village areas of Gwade, Damana, Bachaka, Owa and Bunza itself. The District is blessed with such natural endowments like mountains, hills, and many other trees of medicinal

value.<sup>1</sup> The availability and accessibility to such herbs provided herbalists and other traditional medical practitioners in the area with herbs that aided the development of traditional medical practice in the area. Bunza people like any other Hausa society, have developed a tradition of medical system that sustained their health and wellbeing over the years. This development might not be unconnected with the history of the people that established the area; who were hunters and of course traditional medical practitioners. The health care needs of the people in the district had been taken care of by not only the practitioners of the tradition, but also the practice of Islamic medicine up to the period when conventional healthcare services were introduced in the area in 1930s.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of the new system of healthcare services (Modern medicine) was received by suspicion, mistrust, and finally rejection. This was due to a number of reasons of which the most important, was the existence of traditional-cum-Islamic medical systems which became deeply rooted in the Bunza community. Consequently, the indigenous and Islamic medical practices in *Kasar* Bunza continued to be patronized and ever preferred by quite a number of people in the area. However, with increasing awareness and enlightenment campaigns, modern healthcare system gained ground when the people in the area realized its efficacy in the prevention and cure of certain diseases and illnesses.<sup>3</sup>

The practice of traditional and Islamic medicine has a long history. Traditional medicine is defined to mean the sum total of the knowledge, skill and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.<sup>4</sup> While Islamic medicine on the other hand refers to the most up-to-date medical science and technology combined and conforming to the divine teachings of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Although, modern health care system was accepted largely by the elites and individuals that have faith in it, the expensive nature of the system, the unavailability of and inaccessibility to the services (of the system) by the people of Bunza, made the use of traditional and Islamic healthcare systems as the best alternatives especially in remotest areas of *Kasar* Bunza. The people also believe that the traditional and Islamic healthcare systems were very effective and can best take care of their health needs as they did to their forefathers. This made quite a number of people to continue patronizing traditional and Islamic healthcare services.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, as time went on, especially in the period around 1980s, it was realized that there were quite a number of diseases indigenous to Bunza people that could not be prevented or cured by the modern healthcare system.<sup>7</sup> This further strengthened the patronage of traditional health care services as many people including the elites and the wealthy prefer to use traditional medicine as an alternative because of either the cost of the modern system or its limitations in preventing and or curing certain diseases and illnesses.<sup>8</sup> The trend continued till today and thus, presented a scenario of continuity, change and dual medical practice in healthcare delivery system in Bunza and elsewhere in Hausaland.

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<sup>1</sup> Abubakar Bello Bunza, 40 years old, A Teacher at Department of Geography, Government Secondary School, Bunza. Oral interview

<sup>2</sup> Malam Sani Sunny, 57 years old, Traditional Medical Practitioner, Oral interview, Detail discussions in relation to traditional and conventional healthcare services can be traced in, Abdullahi Labbo's work, "Some Reflections on Pre-Colonial Health Care Practices in Hausaland with Reference to Argungu Area of Old Kabi Kingdom", in A.I. Yandaki, *et'al*, (eds.), *Mahdi Adamu in the Practice of History: Hausaland and Beyond*, Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, 2018, p. 133

<sup>3</sup> A. Labbo, "A History of Colonial Medical and Healthcare..." p.16

<sup>4</sup> This definition is verified and authenticated by the World Health Organization in its "Global Report on Traditional and Complementary Medicine" of 2019

<sup>5</sup> For more on this see, Abbas Matt Elkadi was a certified Neurological Surgeon in the School of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>6</sup> Malam Zayyanu Dan Wuroyasi, Bunza, 48 years old, traditional medical practitioner, oral interview at Bunza

<sup>7</sup> Malam Zayyanu Dan Wuroyasi, oral interview, op. cit

<sup>8</sup> Malam Sani Sunny, 57 years old, Dual Medical Practitioner, Oral interview at Bunza.

### Conceptual Clarification

Traditional medicine, also known as either folk or indigenous medicine refers to healthcare practice with strong historical and cultural roots all over the world. It involves aspects of traditional knowledge that developed over generations within various societies before the emergence of its orthodox counterpart. World Health Organization (WHO), defined traditional medicine as the sum total of knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement and or treatment of physical and mental illnesses.<sup>9</sup>

With later developments and changes, traditional medicine came to be defined as alternative, complementary or non-conventional modes of treatment often involving the use of herbs in a non-scientific manner. It involved the process of consulting herbalists, priests, witch doctors, and various local deities when seeking a solution to diverse illnesses and worries.<sup>10</sup> The traditional healing commonly done by the use of herbal medicine, bone setting process, spiritual therapies, circumcision, maternity care, psychiatric care, massage therapy, aromatherapy, homeopathy, and lots of other methods of traditional healing. Practitioners of traditional medicine are those competent men and women who provide healthcare services by the use of herbs, parts of animals and mineral substances using a number of approaches for the societal physical, mental and social well-being.<sup>11</sup>

Because of their sharing balance in accessibility and affordability, Islamic medicine like its traditional counterpart, has also been recognized as a system of healthcare delivery in almost all Muslim communities in Nigeria including *Kasar* Bunza. It is a medical knowledge and practice that began in the early Islamic period (570 AD), and practiced by Muslim physicians in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Dr. Elkadi<sup>12</sup> defined Islamic medicine as “the most up-to-date medical science and technology combined and conforming to the divine teachings of Islam.” Islamic medicine incorporates modern and traditional medical techniques in the service of healing. It heralds a litany of therapeutic techniques, based on which Muslim physicians and patients always acknowledge that the “ultimate cure is from Allah.”<sup>13</sup>

Traditional and Islamic medical practitioners include herbalists, born-setters, psychiatrists, spiritual therapists, local surgeons, traditional birth attendants (TBAs), occult practitioners, among others.<sup>14</sup> In Bunza, the practitioners also include fishermen, traditional barbers, hunters, butchers and blacksmiths among others.<sup>15</sup>

### Significance of the Study

This study of the history of traditional medical practice in *Kasar* Bunza was in stages and periods, from the pre-colonial, colonial to the post-colonial times. Throughout these periods, and especially during colonial and post-colonial eras, there were records of significant changes and continuity in the practice and utilization of the medicine that have not been analysed and interpreted. This study unveils the roles being played by the traditional medical practitioners through the three periods in the process of curing

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<sup>9</sup> WHO, “Traditional Medicine: A Modern Approach for Affordable Global Health”, *A Draft Report on Traditional Medicine* by its Commission on Intellectual Property, Innovation and Public Health (CIPIH), 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2005 (revised 2017), p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> I. O. Lawal, B.O. Temotope, “Traditional Medicine in Africa: An Appraisal of Ten Potent African Medicinal Plants”, *Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 6(14), p. 14. Retrieved via [www.hindawi.com](http://www.hindawi.com), on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2018

<sup>11</sup> I. O. Lawal, B.O. Temotope, “Traditional Medicine in Africa”, 2018

<sup>12</sup> Abbas Matt Elkadi was a certified Neurological Surgeon...

<sup>13</sup> On different scholarly definitions given to Islamic medicine, one can refer M.U. Bunza’s, ‘The Contribution of Amirul Muminina, Muhammadu Bello (1781-1837) to the Development of Medicine in Nineteen Century Hausaland, M.A. Dissertation, History Department, UDU, Sokoto, 1995, P. 56. or P.J. Lavers’ “Islamic Medicine and Its Influence on Traditional Medical Practitioners in Northern Nigeria” Arewa House Archive, Kaduna, 1/13/139,

<sup>14</sup> See M.U. Bunza, ‘The Contribution of Amirul Muminina...’, p. 57

<sup>15</sup> Malam Kakale S/Aski, 65 years old, Oral Interview at Bajifa area, Bunza

diseases especially diseases that are mysteriously beyond the efficacy of modern medicine. By doing so, the study has significantly contributed in bridging an obvious gap in the existing literature on medical history in Hausaland and Bunza in particular, and it stands as gateway to many researches to be carried on the field of traditional medicine. The study is also significant in the area of policy making, the policy makers are expected to benefit from history and design how traditional medicine can be fully integrated into the modern healthcare system.

### **Herbs and their Medicinal Values in Kasar Bunza.**

Herbal medicine involves the use of medicinal plants for the prevention and treatment of diseases. It has been very central in African traditional medicine, and it was the oldest of the most widely used aspects of traditional medicine in the world.<sup>16</sup> It was used in all societies and was common to all cultures. Herbal medicine, had different derivative names; such as; botanical medicine, vegetable medicine, and or phytol medicine. Herbal medication implies the use of herbs in the preparations, of finished herbal products containing whole plants, parts of plants, or plant materials, like leaves, bark, berries, flowers, and roots, and/or their extracts as active ingredients intended for human therapeutic use or for other benefits in humans and sometimes animals.<sup>17</sup>

Herbal medicine was a special and prominent form of traditional medicine, in which the traditional healer was specialized in the use of herbs to treat various ailments. Healers' role in this regards was so remarkable since it arise from a thorough knowledge of the medicinal properties of indigenous plants and the pharmaceutical steps necessary in turning such plants into drugs such as the selection, compounding, dosage, efficacy, and toxicity.<sup>18</sup> The use of herbal medicine appeared to be universal in different cultures. However, the plants used for the same ailments and the modes of treatment may vary from place to place. The plants used for medicinal purposes are generally referred to as medicinal plants that was to say, any plant in which one or more of its organs contain substances that can be used for therapeutic purposes or prevention, the constituents can be used as precursors for the synthesis of drugs<sup>19</sup>. The following are some of the medicinal plants in *Kasar Bunza*:

### **The Relevance of Traditional Medical Practices today in relation to the practice in the Antiquity in Kasar Bunza**

The growing relevance/popularity of traditional medicine today in health care systems of many developing countries like Nigeria prompted the interest of the World Health Organization (WHO), to acknowledged the central role traditional medicine plays in the 21st century healthcare delivery in the areas of prevention and management of diseases such as in Traditional Bone Setting, Cancer, Psychiatric issues, Tuberculosis, Malaria, HIV/AIDS, etc. Thus in 2002, the WHO launched its first-ever comprehensive traditional medicine strategy designed to assist countries to overcome diseases using traditional medicine. Thus, greater percentage of the people in Bunza including rural and urban dwellers have reservations in the efficacy of traditional and complementary medicine. Some of the people in the area<sup>20</sup> attributed their loss of confidence in orthodox medicine to factors such as drug counterfeiting and drug reactions. On the other hand, they become attracted by the affordability and accessibility of the traditional healthcare system as it was in the antiquity. Some of them however observed that traditional medicine has been used to cure various life-threatening ailments in many instances at lower costs. Inaccessibility to modern medical care system matters most to the people of the area.

<sup>16</sup> Ezekwesili, J.O., *et'al*, *Herbal Medicine in Traditional African Medicine...*, P. 31

<sup>17</sup> The above explanation could be traced via this links: <https://www.intechopen.com/books/herbal-medicine-in-africa>

<sup>18</sup> Malam Zayyanu Danwuroyasi, Oral Interview...

<sup>19</sup> Ezekwesili J.O., *et'al*, "Herbal Medicine in African Traditional Medicine...", *op. cit.* P.34

<sup>20</sup> I had lots of interviews with stakeholders in *Kasar Bunza*, including traditional rulers; specifically my interview with *Amirun Gwade* (Village Head of Gwade).

## CONCLUSION

There is every possibility that indigenous medical practice will in the near future bounce back to take greater patronage of people especially in rural and semi-rural areas, where there are no provisions of healthcare facilities by the government. Accessibility to herbal medicines and its efficacy as discussed in earlier in this paper, are the factors that can help traditional and Islamic medical practices to thrive against conventional counterpart. Government should therefore do the needful to fund and/ or integrate the two medical practices into conventional healthcare delivery.

The acceptance and use of herbal medicines and related products continue to assume an exponential increase. Issues relating to increasing prevalence in traditional medical practice are no longer debatable. Islamic and Herbal products are regarded “safe” as they are derived from “natural” source. Therefore, government and other regulatory agencies should formulate policies on herbal medicines to standardized it and strengthen it to suit the global scale. It is now laid in the shoulders of the regulatory bodies to monitor and control the quality flow of herbal products and to facilitate their development to clinical trial stages.

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Alhaji A. Alade, *Sarkin Yarbawan* Bunza, 60 years, His Mechanic Station, along Zogirma Road, Bunza  
Kakale *Sarkin Askin* Bunza, 73 years, Bajifa, Bunza,  
Malam Abun Na'indu, Islamic Chemist, 39 years, interviewed at his Business Center, Old Market, Bunza  
*Malam* Haruna Jada Raha, a Spiritualist, Tudunwada, Bunza  
*Malam* Muhammad Sani (Sunny), Traditional and Islamic Medicine Practitioner, 55 years, Bunza  
*Malam* Muhammad Zaiyanu (Dan Wuroyasi), Herbal and Islamic medicine practitioner, 47 Years, Bunza  
Muhammad Abdullahi Mungadi, *Sarkin Aski* Mungadi, 50 years, Computer Department, KSUST, Aleiro  
Muhammadu Sani Bunza, *Sarkin Ruwan* Bunza, 60 years, *Gadar Karfe*, Bunza

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