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Research Article

### Use of Quranic verses, amulets, numerology, and medicinal plants for treatment of diseases: a case study of a healer in Narsinghdi district, Bangladesh

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#### ABSTRACT

According to the World Health Organization, traditional medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, 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. Bangladesh has many types of traditional medicinal systems. Some like Ayurveda, Unani, or folk medicines mainly use medicinal plants for treatment. However, other treatment forms exist, which relies on use of Islamic and Hindu religious texts, wearing amulets containing plants or other miscellaneous items as well as portions from religious texts, incantations, and special religious rituals. The objective of this study was to document the healing methods of a 'fakir' (holy man as well as a medicinal practitioner), who practiced traditional medicine and treated diseases in Narsinghdi district of Bangladesh with the help of Quranic scripts, amulets, numerological charts, and medicinal plants. A total of 20 formulations were obtained from him using the above-mentioned diverse items. This study demonstrates another aspect of traditional medicine practice within the country, which has been scantily reported in the medical literature.

*Key words:* Quranic inscriptions, amulets, numerology, medicinal plants

#### INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization, traditional medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, 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 [51]. This is a broad definition, and can encompass any beliefs, traditions, rituals, approaches and uses of diverse materials, so long as all these things are believed by the concerned persons, i.e. the practitioner and the patient, that performing such acts or consumption of items, or the process of both will be able to cure the disease concerned.

Bangladesh traditional medicine is a combination of different methods, some with well

defined philosophies and pharmacopoeia, like Ayurveda, Unani, and homeopathy. These methods use medicinal plants and occasionally other animal ingredients and minerals in their treatment formularies. On the other hand, there is folk medicine, which uses a diverse variety of methods for treatment, and which methods have been borrowed from different systems and places, and sometimes claimed to be discovered by the practitioner himself or herself. In general though, folk medicinal practitioners rely on medicinal plants with occasional use of animal parts and minerals, but in a more simplified pattern than Ayurveda or Unani. But folk medicine can also consist of incantations, wearing amulets, use of religious texts, and performing special worship or rituals according to one's religious beliefs. Incantations can be both from religious texts or reciting certain 'mantras', which are believed to ward off the evil, which in turn is

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causing the patient to develop a particular disease. Religious texts can be Quran (if practitioner and patient are both Muslims), or the Vedas and Gita, if the practitioner and the patient happens to be Hindus. Other forms of rituals meant for treatment of diseases can be wearing amulets containing plant or animal parts and/or religious inscriptions and scripts. In fact, special lines from the Quran or the Vedas/Gita are thought by Muslims and Hindus, respectively, to have the ability to cure a specific disease. Hindus also perform worships ('pujas'), and both Muslims and Hindus often offer animal or bird sacrifices towards cure of ailments, more so, if the ailment is severe. The practitioner, besides incantations from religious or non-religious texts, can also recite the special lines and blow his/her breaths on the patient, or write such textual parts in water-soluble color (usually saffron) on paper, and advise the patient to drink the water after dissolving the written lines in water. The practitioner, who performs these are often called 'fakir' meaning holy or medicinal man (the term is also used to denote a beggar), instead of the usual term of Kaviraj or Vaidya or Hekim (Hakim), which generally means practitioners of Ayurvedic, Unani, or folk medicinal systems. Tribal practitioners are often referred to as Ojhas.

We have previously conducted ethnomedicinal studies mainly among the folk medicinal practitioners and tribal medicinal practitioners, who in general, used medicinal plants in particular, but also used occasionally animal parts and minerals in their formulations [26,28,29,30,6,12,13,23,24,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,1,3,4,5,11,16,17,28,29,46,47,8,13,12,18,31,32,33,34,46]. In our surveys, the Kavirajes sometimes were observed to prescribe amulets and incantations. From our surveys, it became evident to us, that there exists a good body of practitioners (inclusive of Muslim Imams of mosques and Hindu priests of temples), who practiced other forms of medicinal treatment, including regular use of amulets, numerological charts and graphic designs, worships, and incantations, and which consisted of wearing, reciting, and even drinking religious texts written in water-soluble color which were soaked in water to dissolve the letters followed by drinking the water. The objective of the present survey was to document the traditional medicinal practices of such a Muslim fakir of Narsinghdi district, Bangladesh, who used a combination of Quranic inscriptions, amulets, numerology, and medicinal plants in his treatment methods.

٧٢٨ ٦٢

٨٢	٣٢	٧٢
٩	٧٢	٥
٤	٧٢	٦٢

**Materials and Methods**

Information was collected from Zakir Hossain (Fakir) practicing in the village of Torowa in Narsinghdi district, Bangladesh. Informed consent was initially obtained from the healer to disseminate any provided information both nationally and internationally. The healer was requested to provide complete information on his practicing methods, although he kept to himself some of the details, like how he converted Quranic 'surahs' to numerological charts. Any plants mentioned by the healer were collected from guided field-walks conducted by the healer to show the interviewers the plants. Plant specimens were photographed and collected from the spot. Plant specimens were pressed, dried, and brought back to Dhaka to be identified at the Bangladesh National Herbarium.

**Results and Discussion**

The various formulations given by the healer will be presented in numerical order, for a number of formulations consisted of Quranic inscriptions converted to numerological formats. Usually such formats consisted of nine or sixteen numbers, converted, respectively, in columns and rows of three or four numbers each.

*Formula 1 for treatment of pain in pregnant woman during delivery:*

Root of *Mimosa diplotricha* C. Wright (Fabaceae, local name: shada lojjaboti) is tied during pain to left knee of the pregnant woman. Delivery can be expected after tying within 10-15 minutes.

*Formula 2 for treatment of stuttering in children:*

A piece of lead is tied to the child and the child is told to suck the lead a few times.

*Formula 3 for treatment of epilepsy:*

The scalp of a dead person is crushed and the epileptic person asked to smell the powder.

*Formula 4 for treatment of epilepsy:*

The following chart (top) containing Arabic numerals were advised to be worn as an amulet around the neck. The bottom chart is conversion of Arabic numerals to English numerals.

786

8	3	10
9	7	5
4	11	6

The number 786 at the top of the chart is the numerological conversion of Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, which verse is at the beginning of the Holy Quran, and is recited by the Muslims before doing anything, and means “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful”. It is to be noted that the numbers 7, 8 and 6 when added leads to 21. The various numbers in the chart whether added horizontally or vertically or diagonally also leads to the number 21. The numbers are based on the lunar-based Arabic alphabets, and the numbers of the individual alphabets present in the phrase are given in parentheses: Bay (2), Seen (60), Meem (40), Alif (1), Laam (30), Laam (30), Choti hey (5), Alif (1), Laam (30), Re (200), Badi hey (8), Meem (40), Noon (50), Alif (1), Laam (30), Re (200), Badi hey (8), Ye (10), and Meem (40). The total value adds up to 786. This is one form of calculation used by the fakir in

the above chart, but all charts used by him do not necessarily use the same lunar-based calculations, as will be demonstrated below. However, all such charts given by the fakir starts with 786 (in Arabic numerals written above each individual chart). Also what is not known as to how and why the fakir was using the chart specifically for the treatment of epilepsy? If the number 786 = 21 (i.e. the numerological conversion of the beginning verse of the Quran) is the significant reason behind using this chart, then the chart could and should have been used for other diseases too. This is a point where the healer (fakir) did not disclose details.

*Formula 5 for treatment of headache:*

The following two charts containing Arabic numerals were advised by the fakir to written on a piece of paper and tied to the head.

٧٨٦

٢٣٣	٦٦٦	٣٣	١٦٦
٢٩٦	١٧٦	٢٣٣	٢٦٧
١٦٨	٣٣٢	٢٣٣	٢٦١
٢٠	٢٠	١٩	٣٦٦

٧٨٦

ط	ط	ط	ط
ط	ط	ط	ط
ط	ط	ط	ط
ط	ط	ط	ط

In the first chart of Formula 5, the corresponding English numbers are shown (below).

32	66	3	61
92	71	22	72
81	23	42	12
52	02	91	13

It is to be noted that horizontal addition of numbers in the rows are 152 (first row), 257 (second row), 158 (third row), and 178 (fourth row). Vertical addition of numbers in the columns are 257 (first column from the left), 162 (second column), 158 (third column), and 158 (fourth column). Diagonal addition of numbers either left or right leads to 158. Thus the number 158 can be obtained five times, and the number 257 obtained twice. The second chart in Formulation 5 does not have any numerical value.

*Formula 6 for treatment of pain in the forehead:*

The fakir advised the patient first to press two sides of the head with the thumb and middle finger of each hand. Then the patient has to recite Surah Al-Fatihah from the Quran once while slowly bringing the fingers to the forehead. If this does not alleviate the headache, then the patient has to recite Surah Al-Fatihah thrice.

*Formula 7 for treatment of toothache:*

٧٨٦

٨	١٦٦	١٤	٧٠٢
١٣٦	٢٦٦	٧	٦٢
٧٧	٦٦	٩	٦٦
١٦	٢٦	٧٨	١٠٢

The above chart containing Arabic numerals has to be written on a piece of paper and then the aching tooth is to be brushed with the paper. Following

brushing, the paper has to be dropped in front of a black dog. The English conversion of the Arabic numerals is shown below.

786

8	11	14	75
13	26	7	12
77	6	9	6
10	5	78	15

Horizontal addition of numbers in the rows (starting from top row) leads to the following numbers: 108, 58, 98, and 108. Vertical addition of numbers leading from the first column (left) gives the following numbers: 108, 48, 108, and 108. Diagonal addition of numbers from top right leads to 98, while diagonal addition of numbers from top left leads to 58. Thus the number 108 is obtained five

times, 98 twice, 58 twice, and 48 once. The meaning of the numbers as well as the arrangement of the numbers in the chart was not disclosed by the fakir.

*Formula 8 for treatment of severe cold with coughs:*

The following chart, containing Arabic numerals and an Arabic alphabet is written on a piece of paper, and is tied to the head of the patient.

٧٨٦٢

٢	١١٢	٨	١٢
٧	١٤	١	١٢
٩	ص	١٥	٦٢
١٦٢	٥٢	١٠	٣٢

The corresponding English numbers are shown in the Table below. Note that ص is the Arabic alphabet ‘sād’ and is not a number.

786

2	11	8	12
7	14	1	12
9	ص	15	6
16	5	10	3

The numbers in the top two rows when added horizontally adds up to 33 and 34, respectively. The numbers in the first, third and fourth column from the left adds up to, respectively, 34, 34 and 33. Diagonal addition of numbers from top left to bottom right leads to 34 again. Thus 34 is obtained four times, and 33 obtained twice. The use of an Arabic alphabet in place of an actual number is not clear. However, sād is often given the numerological value of 90 or 900, but possibly that is not a significant factor here. The alphabet might have mystical or

unknown significance, which was not disclosed by the fakir.

*Formula 9 for treatment of stoppage of urination:*

If passing of urine stops in a patient, the fakir advised the chart (below) to be written in water soluble ink on a porcelain plate. The plate was then washed with water followed by drinking of the water by the patient. The corresponding chart with English numerals is shown below the Arabic numeral chart.

٧٨٦٢

٨	١١٢	١١٤	١
١٣٢	٢	٧	١٢
٣٢	١٦٢	٩	٦٢
١٠	٥٢	٤	١٥٢

786

8	11	14	1
13	2	7	12
3	16	9	6
10	5	4	5

Addition of numbers row-wise, column-wise, as well as diagonally from left as well as right shows that the number 34 is obtained seven times, and the number 24 is obtained three times. The number 24 is obtained when the bottom row numbers are added up, the extreme right column numbers are added up, and when the individual numbers are added up diagonally beginning from top left.

If a patient sneezes continuously without any signs of coughs, mucus or cold, then the patient has to recite ‘durood’ thrice followed by reciting Surah Al-Fatihah along with “Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim seven times and blow on mustard oil [oil obtained from pressing seeds of *Brassica juncea* (L.) Czern. (Cruciferae)]. After Isha prayers (night-time daily prayer recited by practising Muslims), the oil is massaged on the throat. It is to be noted that mustard oil is considered a good home remedy in Bangladesh for treatment of cold, coughs, and mucus.

*Formula 10 for treatment of dry sneezes:*

*Formula 11 for treatment of stomach ache:*

Ayat-al-Kursi (Quranic verses from Surah Al-Baqara, 2: 255-257) is written with saffron [obtained from stigmas of *Crocus sativus* L. (Iridaceae)] dissolved in rose water [hydrosol portion of the distillate of rose petals, *Rosa damascena* Herrm. (Rosaceae)]. The writing is then washed with water followed by drinking the water.

٧٨٦

٩	٦	٣	١ ٦
٧	١٢	١٣	٢ ٣
١ ٤	١	٨	١١
٤	١٥	١٠	٥

786

9	6	3	16
7	12	13	3
14	1	8	11
4	15	10	5

The number 34 appears to have special significance for not only this number is present in Formulas 8 and 9, but also in Formula 12. The number 34 is obtained eight times (addition of numbers of rows 1, 3 and 4 from top; addition of numbers of columns 1, 2 and 3 from left; and diagonal addition of numbers from either direction). The number 35 is obtained twice.

*Formula 13 for treatment of fever:*

٧٢٧

١ ٢٨ ٢٨	١ ٢٨ ٣١	١٢٨ ٢٤	١٢٨٢١
١٢٨٢٢	١٢٨٢٢	١٢٨٢٧	١٢٨٢٢
١٢٨٢٣	٢ ١٢٨٢٦	٢ ١٢٨٣٩	١٢٨٢٦
١٢٨٣	١٢٨٢٥	١٢٨٢٤	٢ ١٢٨٣٥

786

12828	12831	12824	12721
12822	12822	12827	12822
12823	12826	12839	12826
1283	12825	12824	12835

The corresponding English number chart is shown below. A significant feature of the chart is that with the exception of one number (which is a four digit number), the rest of the numbers consist of five digits.

*Formula 15 for treatment of leucoderma:*

٧٢٧

٧٢٧ ٧٢٩	٧٢٧ ٠	٧٢٧ ٢	٧٢٩ ٧
٧٢٧ ١	٧٢٩ ٩	٧٢٧ ٠ ٤	٧٢٨ ٠ ٩
٧٢٧ ٠	٧٢٧ ٤ ١	٧٢٨ ٠ ٦ ١	٧٢٧ ٢
٧٢٧ ٠	٧٢٧ ٣	٧٢٧ ٠ ٣	٧ ٢٧ ٣ ١

The corresponding English number chart is given below.

786

*Formula 12 for treatment of fever:*

The chart given below is written on a white piece of cloth. A chicken egg is then wrapped with the cloth and the egg boiled through steaming. Following boiling, the patient has to eat the egg and wear the cloth along with egg shell pieces in an amulet tied around the hand.

On a Sunday, whole plant of *Datura innoxia* Mill. (Solanaceae) without the roots is tied to the right hand. The patient will undergo shivering for a while followed by alleviation of fever.

*Formula 14 for treatment of eye pain:*

Surah 'Abasa (80<sup>th</sup> Surah of the Quran) is recited 75 times followed by keeping with the body the chart (below), which according to the fakir is a numerological chart of Surah 'Abasa.

The patient is advised to recite Surah Al-Bayyinah (98<sup>th</sup> Surah of the Quran). The patient also has to write the numerological chart of the Surah (given below) in water-soluble ink, wash the chart with water and apply the water to the body by massaging.

7879	7800	7812	7897
7811	7899	7804	7809
7800	7814	7806	7802
7800	7803	7803	7813

The interesting part about these charts is that with the exception of the chart given in Formula 4 (for treatment of epilepsy), the rest of the charts seem to follow the classical way of writing Marba taweez or tawiz (amulet, talisman or chart), which contains four rows and four columns. However, the fakir departed considerably from a classical Marba taweez

chart with his numbers. To give an example, a classical Marba taweez set-up is given below. The numerological value of a Quranic verse or Surah is determined followed by mathematical calculations and then numbers assigned from the lowest to the highest as shown in the Table below.

8	11	14	1
13	2	7	12
3	16	9	6
10	5	4	15

For instance, the numerical value of Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim has a numerical value of 786. 30 is deducted from its numerical value to obtain

756, which is divided by 4 to obtain 189. So a typical Marba taweez chart will be like this taking 189 as the first point (i.e. 1).

196	199	202	189
201	190	195	200
191	204	197	194
198	193	192	203

However, there are other forms of taweez writing, like the Maslas taweez with three rows and three columns. The fakir certainly seemed to depart from the classical forms of taweez writing to prepare his own charts with numbers in a method not disclosed by him.

*Formula 16 for treatment of diarrhea:*

The following chart was advised by the fakir to put inside an amulet and keep with the body.

٧٨٦

٣٠٢	٢٩٧	٣٠٤
٣٠٣	٣٠١	٣٩٩
٣٩٨	٣٠٥	٣٠٠

The corresponding English numerical chart is given below.

786

302	297	304
303	301	399
398	305	300

*Formula 17 for treatment of leg pain:*

The following chart was advised by the fakir to tie to the waist to alleviate leg pain.

٧٨٦

٣٢٢٧٨	٣٢٢٧١٣	٣٢٢٢٧
٣٢٢٧٩	٣٢٢٧٥	٣٢٢٧٥
٣٢٢٧٤	٣٢٢٨١	٣٢٢٧٦

The corresponding English numerical chart is given below.

786

32278	322713	32227
32279	32285	32275
32274	32281	32276

An interesting point is that one number has six digits while the rest have five digits.

*Formula 18 for treatment of piles (hemorrhoids):*

The following verse was advised by the fakir to be recited by the patient and then the patient had to blow on a floral cluster of *Musa sapientum* L. (Musaceae). The floral cluster was then to be pierced with a thorn obtained from the leaf of *Phoenix dactylifera* L. (Arecaceae). This is to be done seven times. Then the floral cluster has to be kept in the sun. The fakir said that the more the floral cluster will dry up under the sun's rays, the more hemorrhoids will be cured.

"Inalla-ha yuh sikus sattati wal arda anta lutla wala-in zalatan min aha-lim min bahli. Innahu kana hali-omum gafurora."

*Formula 19 to create affection between husband and wife:*

On a Sunday or Tuesday afternoon, both husband and wife has to trim their nails and burn the nails together. Then they have to utter their respective mother's names and recite Surah Al-Q'ari'ah from the Quran seven times and blow on themselves. Then they have to put on fresh clothing, and put the ashes of the nails in amulets and wear the amulets on the right hand.

*Formula 20 for treatment of waist pain:*

The leaves of *Amaranthus spinosus* L. (Amaranthaceae, local name: kata dugi) are collected on a Saturday night, put in an amulet, and tied to the waist.

The most interesting point about this healer (fakir) was that he made use of both medicinal plants as well as Quranic verses in his treatment methods. The Quranic verses were used in several forms: direct recitation of verses from the Quran, writing verses in water-soluble ink and then washing the ink with water followed by oral or topical administration of the water, and using Quranic verses in a numerical format. The mode of derivation of the formats was not disclosed.

Religion or spiritual beliefs and medicine go hand in hand in practically all cultures of the world. And usually, the more severe or incurable the disease turns out to be, the more the patient or his/her relatives turn to spiritual pathways for treatment due to failure of other forms of treatment, including modern allopathic treatment. As such, they turn to whomever the person believes as the Creator (there may be more than one deity in pantheistic forms of religion like Hinduism) for cure. Turning to the Creator can take several forms like direct prayers, recitation from holy books considered to have come from the Creator or Supreme deity or multiple deities, offering sacrifices to the deity or deities, wearing verses from holy book(s) in amulets, and even drinking or topically administering written verses from holy book(s) which has been written on paper or other materials in water-soluble ink. In the Islamic world, and with Muslims, prayers are made

to Allah and verses recited or worn in amulets or applied internally/externally from the Quran.

As mentioned before, religious-medicinal beliefs are practiced in every culture of the world, as far as it is known. This is an aspect not confined to primitive societies only, but takes place in even the most developed societies and countries. Religion and medicine has been shown to go hand in hand among the Brokpas of Ladakh in Tibet [2]. The use of magico-religious-spiritual practices as preventive and curative measures has been reported for the Tai-Khamyang tribe of Assam in India [48]. The Maoris (aboriginal tribe) of New Zealand take a four-pronged approach to health, namely te taha wairua (spiritual dimension), te taha hinengaro (mental dimension), te taha tinana (physical dimension), and te taha whānau (family dimension) [21]. The Sonowal Kacharis of Dibrugarh, Assam believe that supernatural forces lie behind the occurrence of diseases, and besides medicinal plants, they also treat diseases with magico-religious practices [8]. These practices include prayers, sacrifices, and wearing of amulets. Although the traditional healers of the Mising tribe of Assam uses medicinal plants for therapeutic purposes, nevertheless magico-religious practices are conducted first prior to administration of medicinal plants [10].

Healing practices among the Zulus of South Africa concentrate on uMvelinqangi (God), amadlozi (ancestors), nature, and a person's connection with these spiritual forces. The traditional healer in the Zulu community functions both as a healer and a priest. Umthandazi (faith healer) also exists among the Zulus in addition to inyanga (traditional herbalist) and isangoma (diviner). Thus the Zulu mode of treatment consists of several parts; the diviner may find out the cause of the disease, while the treatment of the disease rests with the faith healer and the traditional herbalist or doctor [50]. It is further emphasized that faith as a part of healing practices is not confined to the more backward societies of the world, but is a common practice among the citizens of the most developed countries. For instance, even for USA, it has been reported that "a growing body of scientific research suggests connections between religion, spirituality, and both mental and physical health" [19].

Religious beliefs can take several forms; many Muslims in Bangladesh rely on faith healing side-by-side with medical healing; on the other hand, many Muslims of Bangladesh refuse to take medicines while fasting during Ramadan, or refuse to take medicines containing alcohol. Some Muslims go so far as to refuse any form of allopathic medicine, but rely solely on faith healing; the latter consists of wearing amulets containing portions of the Muslim divine text (Quran), or reciting from the Quran, or drinking water in which verses of the Quran written with water-soluble ink has been washed with, or sprinkling water on the body in which an Imam

(Muslim priest) has blown into following recitation of selected verses from the Quran. The healing practice may contain special prayers to God following recitation from the Quran and salat (ritual prayer performed by the Muslims five times a day). Some Muslims even performs 'nafl' salat for recovery from sickness. The practice is not confined to the Muslims only; Hindus also offer special prayers and 'pujas' (worships) and visit temples or shrines, which they consider as the most sacred. The use of the cross and holy water is part of the Christian spiritual healing process; it has been reported that orthodox Christian priests of Ethiopia offer both holy water ('tsebel') along with the cross, which in turn is accompanied with traditional medicinal plants obtained from traditional healers for healing [27]. The samhita of the Atharvaveda (Hindu religious text) contains 114 hymns or incantations for the magical cure of diseases. The above only are some examples, because the literature on spiritual beliefs as part of the healing treatments is so vast as to be beyond the scope of the present study.

Numbers have always taken a mystical and strong spiritual dimension in many communities of the world. Such communities believe that certain numbers have special significances, and can exert a strong effect on the human body and psyche. In fact, even in the modern age, many people from various religions (including the major religions) believe numbers to affect human health and prosperity. The Egyptians believed in the importance of numbers [9]. In the Vedas of the Hindus, the numbers most often mentioned are 1, 3, 7, and 10 [25]. The Hasidic Jews also give importance to numerology; the 613 'mitzvot' is supposedly connected to 613 parts of the body; violation of a 'mitzvah' can cause its homologous body part to be diseased [44]. Numerological charts are prepared even as of this day by Hindu astrologers to predict a person's fate, which includes possible sicknesses. Numbers have always been an important concept in traditional Asian medicine. In Ayurveda, Unani, or Chinese traditional medicine, various numbers of 'elements' and their imbalances are contributing factors for a disease, and rectifying the imbalance is the way to cure. Once again, the existing reports on numerology used for medicinal purposes, and the magical significance of numbers are too great to be beyond the scope of this study.

Whether the numerological charts and amulets as prescribed by the fakir (healer) are strictly Muslim in nature is a matter of controversy. While some Muslim scholars do not think that wearing of amulets (containing verses from the Quran) is 'shirk' (i.e. sin or unlawful), others think it to be all right for such verses are taken from the Muslim holy book, i.e. the Quran. Numerological charts, in some sense, can be compared with magical formulas. Such magical formulas form a curative practice among the Tobelos of Halmahera Island, Indonesia [49]. Disease, from

an esoteric view point, is the result of displeasure arising from incurring the wrath of supernatural forces, and as such, can be countered with equal or more forces, which by themselves are esoteric or magical in nature. As such, the use of amulets (whether it contains medicinal plants or holy verses or number charts) worn against the body is a counteractive measure against 'evil' or destructive forces. The amulet here is working as a talisman and protecting the health or warding off or even curing disease through protection against evil forces or displeased deities. While amulets are in general more worn against supernatural phenomena like the 'evil eye' or 'evil wind', like as in Jordan [20], the fakir in Bangladesh used amulets against common diseases. The Chinese paper charm is commonly worn as an amulet by some Malaysian Chinese communities [22]. In Ethiopia, herbal amulets are usually the last step of a therapy, and such amulets contain ingredients used in primary therapy [52].

To conclude, the fakir used a mixture of the exoteric with the esoteric in his healing practices. Incantation or reciting of Quranic verses is an example of the exoteric tradition of religion, i.e. it makes use of contemporary and practicing religious beliefs. Prescribing amulets or Quranic verse dipped water can be considered examples of esoteric. Levin (2008) pointed out several esoteric healing traditions including kabbalistic tradition, mystery school tradition, gnostic tradition, brotherhood tradition, Eastern mystical tradition, Western mystical tradition, shamanic tradition, and the new age tradition. The practices of the fakir possibly fall under the Eastern mystical tradition (with a Muslim inclination) as suggested from the fakir's use of Quranic verses for treatment. However, it is to be noted that the fakir also used other methods, like the use of a dead man's skull, which may have been borrowed from the Tantrik tradition of the Hindus, and so also falls under eastern mystical tradition. Also the fakir delved in medicinal plants, as evident by his use, for example, of *Amaranthus spinosus*. Overall, the fakir used several methods of treatment unlike the typical folk medicinal practitioner of Bangladesh, and as such, can be called unique.

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(2013) Use of Quranic verses, amulets, numerology, and medicinal plants for treatment of diseases: a case study of a healer in Narsinghdi district, Bangladesh. *Am.-Eur J Sustain Agric* 7: 415-425. Sultana A, Rahmatullah M (2016) A critical analysis of some medicinal plants used by a folk medicinal practitioner in Savar, Dhaka district, Bangladesh. *World World J Pharm Pharm Sci* 5: 2157-2166. (2015) Medicinal uses of plants by a female folk medicinal practitioner of Narayanganj district, Bangladesh. *World J Pharm Pharm Sci* 4: 361-368. Zaman T, Keya KF, Akter S, Sagar MH, Khan MS, et al. (2015) Plants as medicines: documentation of medicinal plants used by a Khasia tribal practitioner in Habiganj district, Bangladesh. *World J Pharm Pharm Sci* 4: 55-63. INTRODUCTION. Medicinal plants belong to a big plant group with a great interest due to its pharmaceutical, cosmetic and nutritional application. In addition, they are also an alternative to traditional crop with species in high demand at the current international market. In some cases, the crude extract of medicinal plants may be used as medicaments. About 121 (45 tropical and 76 subtropical) major plant drugs have been identified for which no synthetic one is currently available. Plant derived agents are also being used for the treatment of cancer. Several anticancer agents including taxol, vinblastine, vincristine, the camptothecin derivatives, topotecan and irinotecan, and etoposide derived from epipodophyllotoxin are in clinical use all over the world. The use of oral rehydration solutions is the main treatment, but it does not shorten the duration of diarrhea. Curative treatment. Although most cases are mild and self-limiting, there is a considerable morbidity. Antibiotics are effective prophylaxis but are not recommended for widespread use (62, 63) and there is thus a need for cost-effective alternative treatments. Several studies showed interesting effects of probiotics on inflammatory bowel disease in animals. Intracolonic administration of *L. reuteri* R2LC to rats with acetic acid-induced colitis significantly decreased the disease, whereas *Lactobacillus* HLC was ineffective (84). The traditional uses of medicinal plants used to treat diarrhoeal diseases in Ethiopia were collected from available literature published in scientific journals, books, theses, proceedings, and reports. Literature was searched in different electronic databases (Web of Science, MEDLINE, Science Direct, and Google Scholar) and accessed between April 2016 and September 2017 using specific search terms such as "medicinal plants", "traditional medicines", and "Ethiopia or Indigenous people". After identifying potential literatures, we searched if there is a report of medicinal plants used for treat...