

Available online at : <http://jurnalantropologi.fisip.unand.ac.id/>

Jurnal Antropologi: Isu-Isu Sosial Budaya

| ISSN (Online) 2355-5963 |



Plants for the Ancestors; Traditional Knowledge and Beliefs of the Mentawaians on Siberut Island

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Submitted: 09 May 2025

Review: 16 May 2025

Accepted: 31 May 2025

Published: 10 June 2025

KEYWORDS

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Mentawai, botany, healing medicine.

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A B S T R A C T

The indigenous people on Siberut Island have an old tradition and knowledge base inherited from their ancestors. This cultural heirloom has been nurtured and cared for by the Mentawai clans to honour previous generations and provide benefit to current and future generations on Siberut Island. The knowledge of the environment and spiritual values wrapped in their culture is unique. It is exclusive and has attracted subsequently attention from non-indigenous people. The indigenous of Mentawai are not the only ethnic group in Indonesia. Study programs have been undertaken to explore the many Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) roots of communities living in remote places. It is to raise attention to the significance of ethnic awareness of their spiritual and physical environment to preserve and explore for the many types of ethno botanical products that remain uncharted. When viewing western medicine supplied at the pharmacy, it has to be realised that many started their medicinal use in a village somewhere close to a forest of field. This paper uses a qualitative research method with ethnographic data collection. By relying on observation and in-depth interviews. As well as consulting the knowledge of traditional healers, possible new cures might be encountered from our natural environment. In Indonesia the importance of TEK has been particularly stimulated by the introduction of regional autonomy in the year 2000. It has reinforced indigenous political as well as regional economic power, to develop local natural resources for a national and international trade. It has introduced an economic development that has strengthened awareness of local botanical potential and involvement of gender opportunities in a resurgence of interest in medicinal plants and domestication in Mentawaiian herbal gardens.

A. INTRODUCTION

This study focusses on spiritual ethnobotany of the indigenous communities on Siberut Island in the Mentawai archipelago near West Sumatra. Extensive field studies have been conducted on on cultural practices, the natural environment, changes introduced from external sources, and resulting impacts of

these changes (see Schefold, 1974; 1982; 1988; 1991; Av e and Sunito, 1990; Persoon, 1992; 2002; 2003; Bakker, 1999; 2007; Reeves, 2000; Hammons, 2010; Eindhoven, 2019; Singh, 2020; Tulus, 2000; Tulus and Eindhoven, 2024). Some academics discuss the fields of botany and ethno-medicines. Among them, Reeves (2000) and Singh (2020) emphasize the significance of Mentawai botany in traditional rituals of Rereiket watershed. Reeves' chapter titled "*Pulijajat* for prevention and *pabetei* for the cure" is

particularly noteworthy. Hammons (2010) also offers insights into the importance of botany in the reciprocity that is integral to the lives of Mentawaians, both in their relationships with others and with sacred spirits. However, Hammons did not disclose which particular botanical species played an important role in offerings to the ancestral spirits or *Saukkui*. Singh, in his research on the basics of shamanism and magic in the Rereiket Watershed, published stills of the shaman or *sikerei* with various plants. He mentioned that turmeric is one of the botanical species used in the initiation ceremony of a candidate *sikerei* in order to be able to see invisible spirits (2020: 78).

Wanda Avé was an early researcher who focused on the identification of ethno medicine or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) on Siberut Island in collaboration with Satyawan Sunito (1990). Similarly, Revees (2000) and Singh (2020) have explored indigenous Mentawaiian cultural knowledge. The abundance of publications focusing on Mentawai indicates the diverse research themes and development projects that have occurred in the region. Many aspects fall under the theme of traditional ecological knowledge, as defined by Berkes (1993:3; 2008: 7). This knowledge base encompasses social and environmental aspects as well as traditional belief systems passed down through generations. It underscores the interconnectedness between living beings, including humans, and their environment and spirits. However, despite the existing literature on Mentawai culture, there remains a lack of in-depth discussion on the ritual plants used in sacred offerings.

These divisions of the botanical world are significant in Mentawaiian culture, especially on Siberut Island, as they are related to the Mentawaiian belief system of Arat Sabulungan. They hold vital information regarding the human relationship with their surroundings, including landscapes of forests, hills, rivers, swamps, and other natural resources found in those areas.

Looking at the arrangement of this relationship, humans are active and interacting creatures. As can be observed, similar to other cultures, humans are able to develop various ways to use, manage and exploit their environment. Indigenous communities, such as those in Mentawai, have cultural barriers in place to prevent over exploitations. In Mentawai, this is grounded in their cultural concept of reducing disruptiveness when listening to their cultural messages. It is crucial in Mentawai culture to enhance the harmony between humanity and the environment (Scheffold, 1991; Delfi, 2005; 2013a). This is not only to maintain a natural balance, but also to prevent sudden shocks to the system. Actions that surprises, such as shouting in anger or screaming, are believed to disrupt the harmony between humans, nature, society, and the supernatural world. For instance, Delfi et al. (2022) illustrates how to avoid disturbances or show disrespect when entering a forest

(leleu). Disruptions in the relationship with nature and society can lead to a strained connection with the supernatural world. The Mentawaians strongly believe in Sabulungan and their supernatural realm, and understand the repercussions of sudden and exploitative behaviours. Rituals play a significant role in restoring harmony and reducing disturbances caused by human activities. Rituals involve human relations with others that are "triadic", in which humans are at the center. The natural environment, social environment and the supernatural world surround them. Disruption in the relationship with the supernatural world will have negative consequences for humans, both personally and socially. Here the role of the *kerei* as a mediator is essential. The *kerei* is capable of bridging the communication gap between human earthlings and the spirit world.

The choice to focus on traditional knowledge of ritual plants as the primary research subject is based on several factors. Firstly, the Mentawai people's knowledge of ritual plants is a largely unexplored area in previous research, particularly in terms of how plants serve as a conduit between the Mentawaians and the spirit world and ancestors. The two main themes of reinforcing ownership claims are intertwined with discussions surrounding medicinal plants, rituals of the Mentawai people, and the Sabulungan ritual. The three links between the discussion of ownership and the existence of the *sasareu* or immigrants show the construction of identity in the inter-ethnic relations which are analysed comprehensively. Based on these reasons, interesting ritual plants were appointed as topic of research. The focus of this article is to identify plants that are commonly used for rituals and secondly why the interest of these plants has increasing these days.

B. METHOD

This article uses a qualitative research method with ethnographic data collection techniques relying on observation and in-depth interviews. An emphasis is made on the principles in ethnography, as noted by Atkinson (2007). In practice, ethnography usually refers to a form of social research that focuses on understanding the fundamental nature of certain social phenomena. The approach taken in this study is a holistic approach. This approach aims to understand the traditional knowledge of the Mentawaians to the plant-kingdom in their environment. With a particular focus on the local Arat Sabulungan religion, it requires the display of several leaves especially in their remedial dance. Those plants could also be beneficial in medicinal applications. Besides those purposes, plants also act as a medium to comprehensively bridge the human relationship with the supernatural world. The use of flowers and leaves can benefit the systematically efforts to bring about results that originate from the thought of the local community in accordance with the factual reality of the people.

In this study the location of the community's socio-cultural research is in the Rereiket and Sabirut River basins, in the southern part of Siberut Island. According to Murtijo (2005) a holistic approach assumes that each socio-cultural element in a society does not stand alone but is

interrelated, thus a complete understanding is obtained. The next step is to understand the socio-cultural phenomena that are developed in the cultural aspects of society. Both technical, normative, political, economic, environmental and socio-cultural aspects. To analyse the facts and data obtained, this study uses an approach in cognitive anthropology, in which culture is seen as a tool of knowledge (Goodenough in Ahimsa-Putra, 2022) which are "cognitive organizations of material phenomena" (Tyler in Ahimsa-Putra, 2022). Of course, the Mentawai culture uniquely organizes the material phenomena, one of which is the plant-kingdom, in the environment. The relationship between the people and the natural environment along with their socio-culture and the knowledge base that is owned and reproduced, is useful. It is advantageous to study the context of the Mentawaians' understanding of their ownership claims in everyday life in relation to other groups outside of them.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Awareness Of The Local Knowledge Wealth

Often the Mentawaians talk about their traditional ecology, but compared to twenty-five years ago the attention of the Mentawai people has increased. In the past, when asked about the ways of life, such as processing sago, staple food, raising chickens and boars, gathering medicinal plants, catching fish and so on, not many Mentawaians questioned what the researcher's intent and purpose was. Today, the interests of the Mentawai people are much different than they were about 25 years ago. Especially if asked about the local belief of Arat Sabulungan.

It's beneficial when reflecting on the experience of researchers on Siberut Island between 1990 and 1998. At that time there was a loaded atmosphere of concern when asking about Arat Sabulungan. The author still remembers when the clan elders in Ugai, Madobag, Saliguma, Muntei and Maileppet were interviewed. They quickly would reply: "Arat Sabulungan is no longer here, that is for the infidels" or "that means talking about the bad times, now it's not here anymore." "We no longer believe in it" or "that was what people used to do, now it is not allowed anymore, now our parents are Christians or Muslims".

From their ways of expressing we can read their discomfort in answering or explaining the past. Of course, it cannot be separated from the inclusion efforts of the religious projects from outside the Mentawai archipelago by the government and private sources to convert the non-believers. Such efforts were especially strong in the 1950s when the Mentawai people were required to embrace an official religion that was recognized by the Government of Indonesia. Within a period of approximately three months they had to make a choice of religion, namely becoming followers of Islam or Christianity (Sihombing, 1979). These efforts were to replace the local belief, Arat Sabulungan that had been their guide and life. Therefore, an extraordinary repression was felt by the Mentawaians and known today as the "Triple Religion Meeting" (Rapat Tiga Agama) event. In a coordinated effort many kerei, who did not

escape to the interior of the island were rounded up and taken to the subdistrict office where police and government staff cut their hair and had their religious attributes confiscated and destroyed (Rudito, 1993). It had forced the Mentawaians to leave the Sabulungan religion as inherited by their ancestors (Delfi, 2005). However, Arat Sabulungan continued to attract interest and admiration from abroad. Particularly from tourists from the 'global north', visiting Mentawai to experience the unique knowledge of nature and spiritual beliefs of the Mentawaians (Bakker, 1999, 2007). The outsider's interest from an academic, travellers' interest and NGO publicity might have influenced government to stop the interference in religious and cultural values. The conditions changed dramatically after regional autonomy was introduced and the Mentawai archipelago became a district. An autonomous region implemented that they had the right to influence and determine their own future. It can be noted from their awareness of cultural knowledge and rich environment that started from the circle of Mentawai scholars (Eindhoven, 2002). This awareness is closely related to the widespread academic discourse on the rights of indigenous peoples (Persoon, 2002; Eindhoven, 2007). The rapid development of communication technologies has strengthened the younger generation to strengthen their own culture, and made the Mentawaians aware, of the unique culture they possess. This prompted young scholars to develop a new catchy name for the archipelago with the inspiring name of "Bumi Sikerei" (Delfi, 2013a).

More and more Mentawai youngsters are studying at tertiary institutions in Padang City and also at other places in Java, Indonesia or abroad. Various cultural events have been initiated by the young Mentawaians, either through activities executed by the local government or by Mentawai based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The youngsters and student groups or local foundations are increasingly eager to present the cultural practices of the Mentawai ethnic origin. They bring folk stories that are made in cultural arts performances in the capital city of West Sumatra or in the district. This is not only for display and performance in big cities of Tuapejat and Padang, but also in the small villages around the region. For example, one of the Women Farmers Groups in Muntei on Siberut Island, call their group "Laggek Simaeru' or Excellent Medicine. It resulted in a district wide garden interest with natural remedial plants coming back into vogue. Several types of herbal plants that are often used for daily treatment are cultivated in the newly organised "pharmacy gardens". Awareness of one's own cultural uniqueness, previously considered to be characterize as "underdeveloped" or "being old fashion" has been turned into "cultural wealth", something to be proud of as quoted by an inhabitant of Muntei.

Early 2024 the author brought a group of anthropology students from Padang and were welcomed to collect new data on their Mentawai lifestyle and environment. This awareness cannot be separated from the global or international discourses that focus on issues of forest or environmental conservation (Persoon, 2002; Eindhoven, 2001; 2007; Darmanto and Setyowati, 2012). Awareness and pride in their own cultural uniqueness emerged in

conversations between them, in a broad public sphere or in small groups. In practice many young people do not wish to follow the way of their parent's life, although in the Mentawai villages, many people still faithfully follow the rules of life prescribed by their ancestors. Hunting in the forest and catching game, raising boars, making dugout boats, hardly any of the young people use those traditional skills. But on the other hand, the Mentawai youth on Siberut are increasingly active in documenting various traditional matters that are taking place in the Mentawai communities. This is all happening with the increased use of cell phones, even though they might have to walk quite a distance from their village to be connected to the internet network.

2. Arat Sabulungan, The Forest And The Ritual Plants

Sabulungan is the Mentawai regional religious belief system, which is seldom left out in the study of Mentawai. In many sources, Arat Sabulungan has been defined and based on the etymological understanding, *Arat* is defined as custom and *Sabulungan* is defined as a collection of leaves derived from the word "bulug" or leaf. The word *bulug* can also be said to be close to the word "buluat" which means offering (Tulius, 2000). The local belief that emphasizes the harmony of life between the visible and visible world is a Mentawai distinctiveness. The origin of the traditional belief is in the aspect of spirituality, where human death is not the end of everything. The spirits of deceased person will move to a special place, which in Mentawai belief is called *Uma Sabeu* or Big House. It is from this place the ancestors can see the real world of their children and grand-children. Even though they are no longer alive, the deceased ancestors still have ties with the humans living on earth. Therefore, this visible world in that belief is enveloped by the invisible world. It is also called the world of Sabulungan, or the world that is invisible to ordinary people (*simata*). *Arat* can be equated with *adat* or custom. This custom is considered to contain rules that originate from the Mentawai ancestors through stories and practices in daily life.

Customs that are associated with practises inherited from their ancestors remain important. This means that the values and teachings of previous generations are not lost over time. For example, in Lampung Province, in the re-told stories of Semende community, they are connected to ancestral values which play an important cultural guiding role. Especially in viewing the relationship between current practices and historical traditions. Those can create a legitimacy of ancestral instructions. In a way, fostering a sense of identity while enhancing an authority, institutionalised by the ancestors (Delfi, et.al, 2023).

Sabulungan etymologically can be said to originate from the root word *bulug* which means leaf or from the word *pasibulu* which means to offer as discussed above (Hammons, 2010 and Delfi, 2013b). As for the addition of the prefix "sa" and the suffix "an" to the word Sabulungan indicates a condition which means a group or group. So Sabulungan can be interpreted as a collection of leaves or an offering (*buluat*) for the guardian spirits of the *uma* (patrilineal clan group). These leaves are also ceremonial and enchanting material in religious rituals and are also

mediums for the visible world and offerings to the *uma* guardian spirits of the supernatural world. Plants are an important element in various ceremonies for the Mentawaians. Therefore, these plants can be called offering or "for spells or to make things happen" as indicated by several *kerei*. The ceremonies and spells that cover the various life activities of the Mentawai people are two very important things in the life of the Mentawai people because: first, the spell is not only needed to influence the existing spirits, both good spirits (*Saukkui*) and evil spirits (*Sanitu*), but also needed to persuade the human soul (*magere*).

The *magere* has to be happy in its life in order for it to want to stay in someone's body. If the *magere* is neither happy nor sad, it may depart from the body. A Mentawai *magere* that feels unhappy in a human body can depart for a while, [non-indigenous interpretation "a soulless body"] and this will cause someone to fall ill. If the unhappy *magere* departs the body because it no longer wants to be with someone's body, it can result in someone's death. After the individual dies, the spirit of the deceased will join the other spirits in *Uma Sabeu* (the big house where all the spirits gather) Second, the spell intended to influence the spirits requires certain objects in the form of plant material. The Mentawaians do this with offerings of plants that function as spells (*gaut*) and intermediaries (Delfi, 2013b). These intermediaries are actual plants (Schefold, 1991; Coronese, 1986). For example, "*mumunen*" (*Mussaenda sp*), is an intermediary spell plant or *gaut* in many ceremonies. The word *mumunen* contains the root word *umun* which means "to praise" or to flatter so that this plant is for offerings in a child's naming ceremony. Through this intermediary plant, the Mentawaians also hope that one day their children will grow up to be proud of their family and community. They are anticipated to receive praise from the surrounding community. This plant is also used for other ceremonies, which have more or less the same purpose, namely to get praise or flattery and pleasure in life. As for this offering or *buluat*, the plants in each *uma* (communal building) or in *lalep* (individual house) are especially placed in the *bakkat katsaila*. *Bakkat* means container or place of origin or property. Thus, *bakkat katsaila* is a container for *katsaila* plants. Physically *katsaila* is a young leaf or shoot from the *poula* or *enau* plant (*Arenga pinnata*), which is called *doro* or *dorot poula*. The name of the plant is changed to *katsaila* when the leaves functions as offerings (*buluat*) for ancestral spirits. The use of the word *katsaila* is considered a euphemism for Spirits. According to Avé and Sunito (1990: 11) the word *katsaila* has a symbolic meaning that shows respect for their ancestors. *Kat* literally means food, and "Saila" means "Evidence of Ancestor". Therefore, often in incantations when the leaves or shoots of the *enau* plant (*Arenga pinnata*) are used in offerings.

We will review below a mantra uttered by a *Skerei* or *Sikebbukat Uma: ai saila ka oringen* (which averts all diseases) *ai saila ngagam bolo* (which keeps evil spirits away) *ai saila ngangan ulou* (which avoids big snakes) *ai saila ngangan rusa* (that keeps us away from the wind).

A similar effect can be experienced from the *taipotcala* offerings. If the plant is not used as a sacrificial plant or not for *buluat*, then it is called *keppubea*. Both *taipotcala* and

keppubea are physically the same, namely *Sterculia Coccinea Jack*, but the word *taipotcala* is considered more refined and polite. Usually the offering plants that are placed in the *Katsaila* area are in the form of leaves with small branches, fruit and roots. For plants that are considered offerings, this is "buluk batak" which is considered to have woody stems. The contents of *bakkat katsaila* include: *buluk batak*, *buluk seksek* (leaves from shrubs), *bua batak* (fruit of woody plants), *uat batak* (roots of woody plants) and *uat seksek* (roots of shrubs). The plants offered include: - Mumunen (*Mussaenda sp.*) (Mumunen plants are offered with the intention of being praised or to receive praise) - Aileppet (*Graptophyllum pictum*) the *aileppet* plant is offered for *maleppet* or for cooling - Taipotcala (*Sterculia coccinea Jack*). The *taipotcala* plant is offered (to be kept away / remove from bad things). - Duru' or *ruru'* (*Medinilla alternifolia*), Duru' plants are dedicated to *ruru'* or gather or unite) - *Katsaila/poula* (*Arenga pinnata*). The *poula* or *katsaila* plant is offered to prevent *saila-saila* or to avoid bad things. - *Katuitcak* (*Mussaenda ecuminata*). The *katuitcak* plant is offered for *maicak* or so that it can be seen. As for the roots (*uat*) of *batak*, they are *uat tadde'* (*Phrynium hirtum*), *uat mumunen* (*Mussaenda sp.*), *uat Simakkainauk* (*Hedychium coronarium*) and *uat duru'* (*Medinilla alternifolia*). *Seksek* roots include: *uat taimalauklauk* (*Trichomanes milefolium*) and *katuitcak* (*Mussaenda ecuminata*).

There may also be differences which types of plants are the main plants in offerings to their *uma* guardian spirits among the patrilineal clan groups scattered throughout Siberut or the Mentawai archipelago. In general, these plants can be found in *bakkat katsaila* in the *Uma* longhouses in Siberut, especially in the Rereiket River basin. Although there are many leaves or plants which, are called *bakkat katsaila*, their function is intended for the house or *uma* (clan) as a whole. Therefore, although the *sibakkat uma* or the owner of the house is not a *kerei*, but those who take *katsaila* must be the *sibakkat uma*. Each of these intermediary plants has a special function and the Mentawaians distinguish between "good" agents (*simaeru'*) and "bad" agents (*sikatai*). For the good intermediary herbs, it is offered to ask for what is desired, wished for and in relation to what and about everything else that is needed to know. For intermediary plants that are categorized as bad, they are offered to ask for anything that is not expected, unwanted, shunned, avoided, or that is evil. Matters that bring destruction or could bring disaster. The offering plants mentioned above are also used as herbal medicine, called *laggek* by the Mentawai Siberut people, both on the east coast, such as in Muntei and Sempungan or in Rereiket (Ave and Sunito, 1990; Sagari, et al, 2022). The faith of Arat Sabulungan has noted an importance on the plant material in their environment.

The role of the flora combined with the hunted fauna in the life of the Siberut people was interpreted by Tresno's research on the endemic primates (2017). The importance of boars was also mentioned by Irwandi (2023) in his study that investigated the relationship between animal and the Rereiket people. Both animals and many other objects share a spiritual relationship according to the Mentawaians. In Singh's study (2020 and Singh et.al, 2021) he describes the plants used in ritual. The *kerei* might be holding a particular leaf in his hand to invite *Sikameinan*,

the river-spirit, to enter a bowl of water. Apart from that, in the work presented by Singh, many types of vegetation are utilized in rituals. Although not all indigenous ordinary Mentawaians (*simata'*) are able to give names to the plants by heart that are important rituals of the *sikerei*, they still know that those leaves are important in these ceremonial practices. Knowledge of the ritual plants in Siberut Island are often associated with the thick forests or *leleu*. As the forests are an important space for resources and spiritual events. It is where leaves and herbs can be picked and at the same provide hunting space. It is also the space for supernatural beings to dwell, including the ancestral spirits. Reeves (2000) mentioned that the *leleu* is a relatively undomesticated and anti-social space. The *leleu* is said to be an anti-social space and if not careful a space full of danger, with wild animals and scary supernatural creatures such as *silakkokoina*, *silakkikiau*, *tinigeilat* and *simatutu bagha*.

Cultural understanding and interpretation of the forest environment, that are inhabited by supernatural beings as described above are also encountered in the Minangkabau community. In the Minangkabau forest of Nagari Simanau in the Solok Regency, one of the supernatural beings is known as "ampang limo" by the community. It is imagined as having taking on the shape of a tiger (Delfi and Oktayanty, 2022).

In Mentawai, the forest or *leleu* is the space that stores the resources needed by the Mentawaians. It can be understood from what the *Sikebbukat Uma* or clan elders said that *leleu* is *purowrowkat* or hunting place, *umanda Saukkui* (place or communal house of ancestral spirits), and the *kudduat laggek* (place for medicinal plants). In addition, *leleu* is also the Mentawaiian "fruit orchards" (Delfi. et al, 2018) The fruit can be picked directly or collected after it falls on the ground, when the children are free to take them. This was noted by Henley (2001: 106) "A Mentawai child can rattle off the names of 60 to 80 wild jungle fruits they consume on a regular basis". In this manner it can provide substantial nutritional intake and supply vitamins at the same time. Although it might be a dangerous place, it is impossible for the Mentawaians to shun the *leleu*, especially in Siberut.

There are many activities of the Mentawaians who for their subsistence living must enter into the forest to extract resources, walk to their fields or visit other villages. Therefore, the Mentawaians must live on the edge of the forest, and keep the supply of resources in balance. Because the forest is also shared by the supernatural world, this precautionary attitude towards visible and invisible things is important in the beliefs of Arat Sabulungan (Delfi, 2013b). This balance in the relationship between humans and forest spirits must be maintained in order that the spirits do not have a negative impact on humans (Schefold, 1985b; 1991). This relationship becomes even clearer when humans who access the forest obtain permission from the forest "master" who are *Saikaleleu* or *Taikaleleu* by means of persuasion in a prayer. The life of the Siberut Mentawaians who still adhere to the teachings of their ancestors is manifested in the form of being careful

Figure 1. Tattoos on the hands of a Mentawaiian. The curly tattoos are in reference to the leaves and top of ferns



Source: Private collection Maskota Delfi 2021

in treating their natural surroundings. In particular the forest, but in encounters with outsiders (migrants) have made the Mentawai people also experience changes that have negative and positive consequences. Meetings with outsiders made them also aware of the uniqueness of their cultural practices, but on the other hand, this condition also made the Mentawai people become dependent on new items.

D. CONCLUSIONS

Arat Sabulungan is the local belief that remains an important part in the life of the Siberut Mentawai people. Plants that have been used by many of their ancestors have contributed in an important role of the indigenous cultural practises, especially in Siberut Island. This was the main reason why the research was carried out in an area where the younger generation is still handed down the knowledge of the older generation. Although they might have been officially noted as adhering to one of the institutionalised approved world religions, in the research it was discovered that Arat Sabulungan is still alive. Officially government sanctioned world institutional religions have long been introduced in Mentawai. Apart from the Catholic religion which is formally embraced by the majority of the population on Siberut Island, Islam has quite a large number of adherents, in Matotonan and Saliguma settlement. Becoming a Catholic or Muslim does not mean that the teachings in the local religion of Arat Sabulungan have been abandoned by the Siberut Mentawaians. The most prominent thing to prove the existence of Arat Sabulungan in Siberut is the presence of offering plants in the communal longhouse or *uma* and their private shelters. A well maintained Bakkat *katsaila* with offering plants (*buluat*) indicates the faithfulness in the community. Plants for offerings are always renewed or added to the *bakkat katcaila*, especially when there is a *puliaijat* or clan ritual. This is intended for "prevention" or what Reeves calls "*puliaijat* for prevention; *pabetei* for the cure". By knowing the type of offering plants, we can understand

that preventive efforts are very important in the cultural values of the Siberut people. Certain plants are collected because according to the belief of the Mentawai people these plants have special characteristics to achieve goals or "expectations" for something that is not visible. That hope is aimed at "*Ula Manua*" (creator) who determines matters of good or bad.

Certain plants are used for prevention, but when still experiencing pain, then it might be required to be treated (*pabetei*). Therefore, a healing process will start with the offerings first. In the process of treatment or *pabetei*, the *sikerei* as a traditional healer performs the ritual first. While observing certain taboos during the treatment process. This is noted by the *sikerei*'s attempts to cast certain spells. When that part of the ritual is completed the rest of the selected individual(s) drink the medicine concocted by the *sikerei* or *siaggai laggek* (local healer). The *sikerei* or *siaggai laggek* also understand more about the knowledge than commoners have. It is more important for them to build relationships with the *sasareu*, migrants, because it makes them more aware that they possess cultural capital that not all other people can obtain. If the *sikerei*'s healing practices continue, and knowledge of the offerings is documented, it will serve as a reference point for knowing more about other current medicinal plants. It is hoped that this can lead to new botanical discoveries that will be useful not only for the Mentawaians, but also for humanity at large. Avé and Sunito have made a substantial contribution on medicinal botany in Mentawai which is in need to be expanded on. Travellers to this island have provided many *kerei* and herbalist to practice's their appreciated knowledge on plants, dance and also tattoo rituals that enrich global knowledge. It is a social process of learning, sharing and shaping knowledge.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

There are many individuals and communities who have contributed to the completion of this article. It would not have been possible without the inspiration and guidance of Professor Heddy Shri Ahimsa Putra. Our foremost gratitude is to the Mentawai communities who made it possible to carry out this research, especially those living on Siberut Island, particularly the clans along the Sila'oinan, Rereiket and Siberut River valleys. They became almost like our extended family, always welcoming us with their smiling faces and eager to handle our difficult questions. *The Kerei* (shaman), *Sikebbukat Uma* (clan elders), *Sikalabbai* (wives and mothers) and their offspring never seemed tired to give us time to explain their life and tribulations to us. We are also very thankful to the children from the mentioned river valleys who accompanied us on our field trips and gave additional information on the beneficial use of the many plants we encountered in the forest. They introduced us to edible forest fruits we had never encountered before, which in turn, increased our own enthusiasm in this research topic.

We express our gratitude to the Department of Anthropology at the Faculty of Social and Political

Sciences of Andalas University. We would have been lost without the fantastic support from our academic assistants from Andalas University, who were recruited from the students at the anthropology department. In particular we need to mention the Andalas student Muhammad Zaki Ramadhan, who while at the communal house of the Tatebburuk and Sakukuret clans, assisted in the final research. We are also grateful to Wanda Avé and Satyawati Sunito whose published nature report assisted us in providing the botanical names mentioned in this article. There are many other individuals who should be noted by name, but unfortunately, it is impossible to acknowledge everyone one by one.

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