



News Letter

## An amazing cow's urine therapy practice in Myanmar

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**The medical practice of Myanmar traditional medicine is shrouded with mystery. Many of the customs perpetuated through the ages had their roots in religious beliefs. In some parts of Myanmar, the traditional knowledge which dates back to the Buddhist era is still preserved and practiced as a holistic method of treatment. This paper highlights an amazing cow's urine therapy practice performed by the traditional medicine practitioners of Buddhist culture in Myanmar.**

**Key words** Myanmar traditional medicine, cow's urine therapy, Buddhist culture, blind therapy.

### Introduction

Traditional healing is widely practiced in Myanmar, as it has been since time immemorial.<sup>1)</sup> It is the largest country in South-East Asia and shares the borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. It is a country with a strong cultural heritage, with predominant Buddhist religion which has influence in daily life as well as in the art of traditional healing. The medical practice of traditional Myanmar medicine is shrouded with mystery, and some of the customs practiced even today have roots which date back to the Buddhist era, over 2500 years old. Buddha's teaching "Dedana Naya" is an integral part of Myanmar medical tradition and many traditional medicine practitioners have tremendous influence on Buddhism.

As a part of our continued study program on the status of traditional medicine system in Southeast Asia<sup>2-10)</sup> supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Monbukagakusho), we carried out the field investigation regarding the status of traditional medicine in the remote areas of Myanmar, and interacted with the local healers in Rakhine state, Ayeyarwady division and Yangon division during November 2004.<sup>2)</sup> In our continued field investigation carried out during November 2005, we found an amazing practice of cow's urine therapy in Mandalay, that has been supposed to be the original Buddha Medicine. During a face to face interview with the traditional practitioner Mr. Tin Winn in Mandalay, we collected information regarding the preparation method, drug administration method, efficacy, present status etc. In this report, we present the brief overview of the information gathered during the face to face interview, together with the practice of cow's urine therapy in other parts of the world.

### Traditional healer Mr. Tin Winn

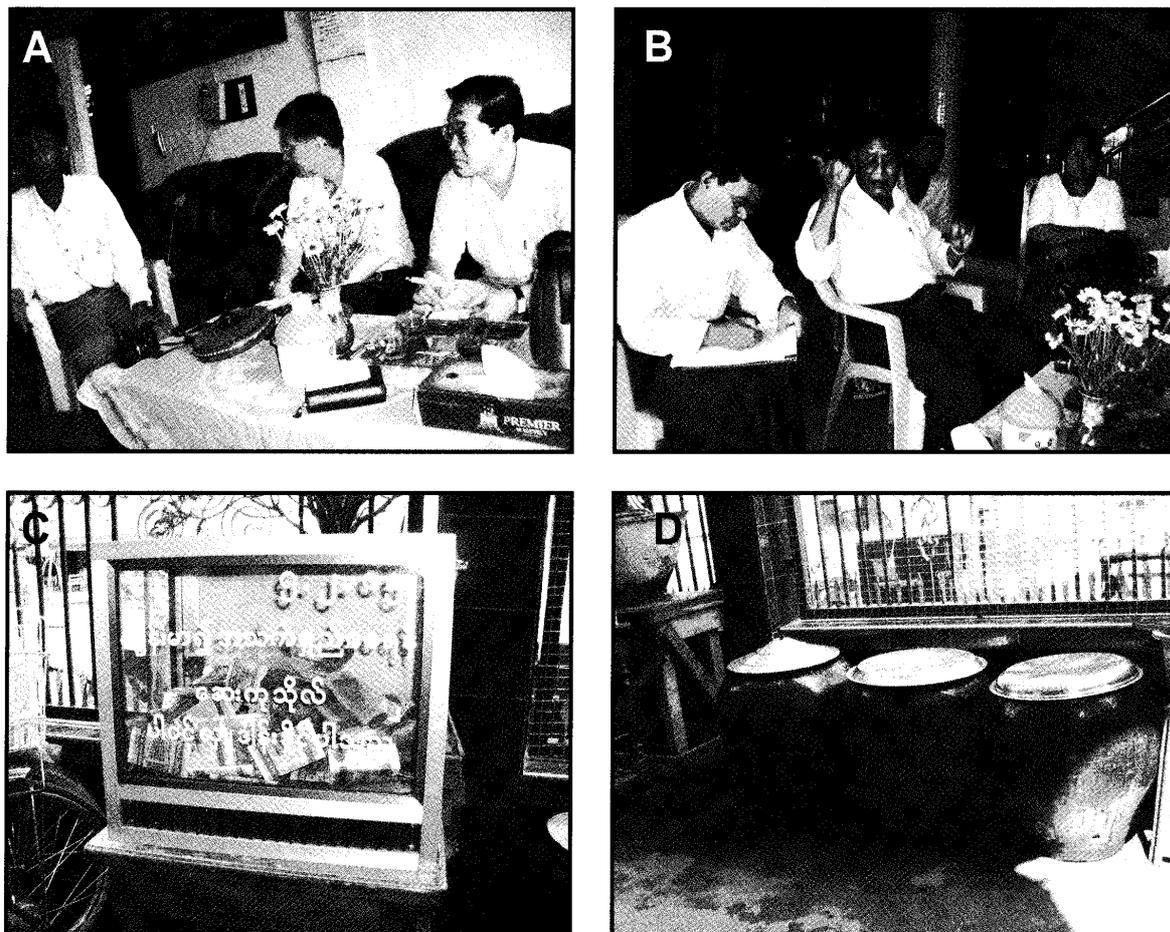
Mr. Tin Winn (Fig. 1), a 53 year old traditional

medicine practitioner of Tanpawady Qt, Chan Mya Tha Si Township, Mandalay division, started his cow's urine practice nearly 15 years ago. During the interview (Fig. 2, A and B) he said that cow's urine medicine is the most powerful medicine that can cure any kind of ailment. He began to practice cow's urine therapy at the age of 48 years old. During that time, he was suffering from an unknown malady, which he explained was not cured even after visiting many western hospitals and clinics. He was a mechanical engineer by profession. Although he was a rich person, his money could not buy the sound health that he wanted to have even after treatment with many western drugs. His frustrations from his suffering finally led him to go to a monk in a Buddhist monastery, where he was treated with this amazing mysterious medicine made from cow's urine fermented with three different kinds of medicinal fruits in



**Figure 1.** Cow urine therapist Mr. Tin Winn.

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**Figure 2.** A and B) Scenario during interview with Mr. Tin Winn. C) Donation box: people voluntarily donate money according to their capacity. D) Clay pots containing cow's urine medicine.

different proportions. To his surprise, after a week of consumption of the fermented cow's urine medicine, he felt his body being rejuvenated and that he got his life back from hell. He then decided to serve the people voluntarily with this medicine and opened a separate small factory around 5 km away from his house, near a Buddhist monastery where the monks live. Since then, he began to be involved in social work to help the people. This special fermented product is believed to cure all kinds of diseases including cancer. This medicine can be used as a blind therapy, without doctors' prescription for any kind of diseases.

Mr. Tin Winn lives in a joint family with 43 members in their house, and is a well known industrialist and businessman in Mandalay. According to him, no members in his family have visited a western hospital for a medical checkup in the last 15 years, and all the family members only take fermented cow's urine as a medicine for any kind of disorder. Each member of the family daily consumes 100 ml of fermented cow's urine medicine every morning.

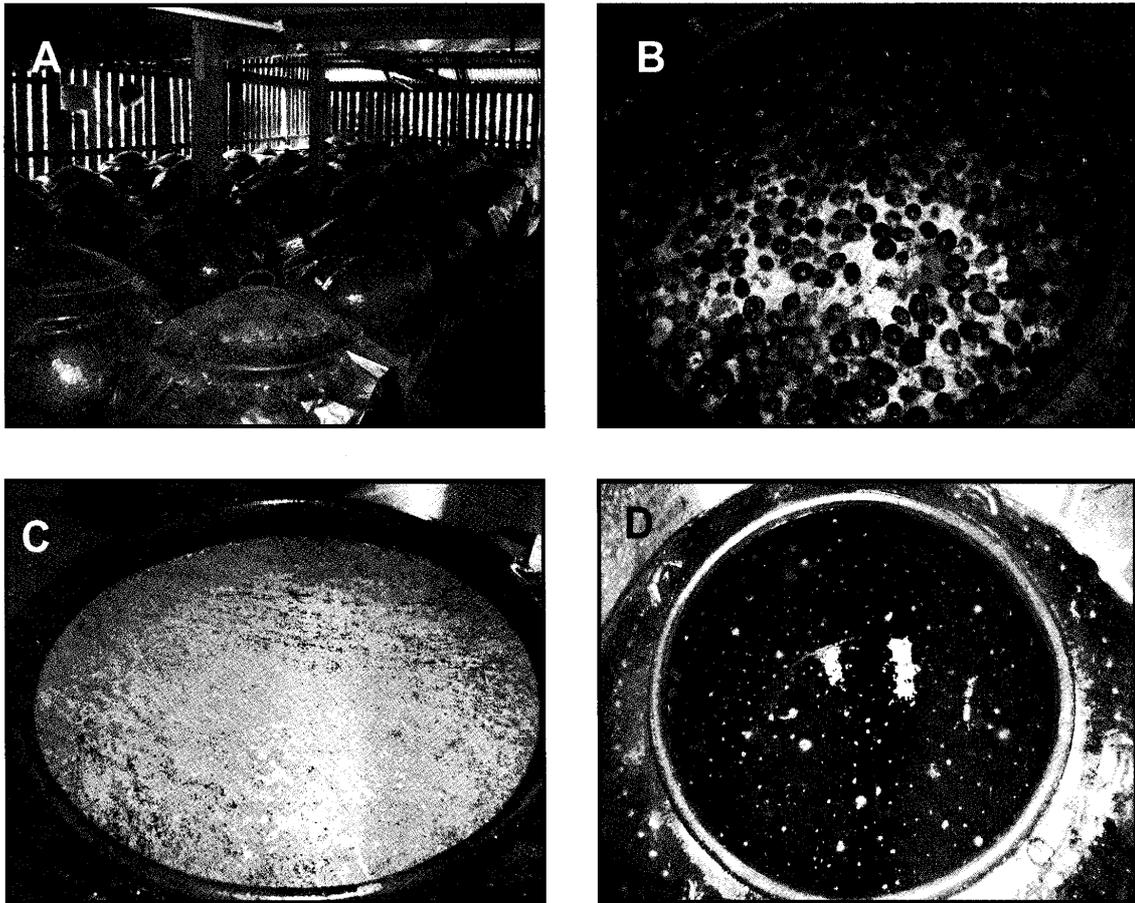
He collects cow's urine from the Taungy and Pindaya region, which is famous for vegetable and cattle farming. Each day, 50-100 liters of cow's urine is being collected and brought to the factory by volunteer donors. In the factory, this cow's urine is pickled with three medicinal fruits *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Phyllanthus simplex*, *Terminilia chebula* and fermented in a clay pot (Fig. 3, A-D).

In a small notebook (Fig. 4) that he provides to people, some information about this medicine is written, that the medicine was prepared according to the instruction of Buddha. People can take it confidently without any hesitation for good health. Certain symptoms may arise after drinking this medicine such as the body may feel warm immediately after drinking, or they may experience palpitation, dizziness, vomiting, frequent urination and diarrhea. The patients are advised to write down their disease symptoms prior to consumption of this medicine and write down their physical conditions after one month's consumption of this medicine.

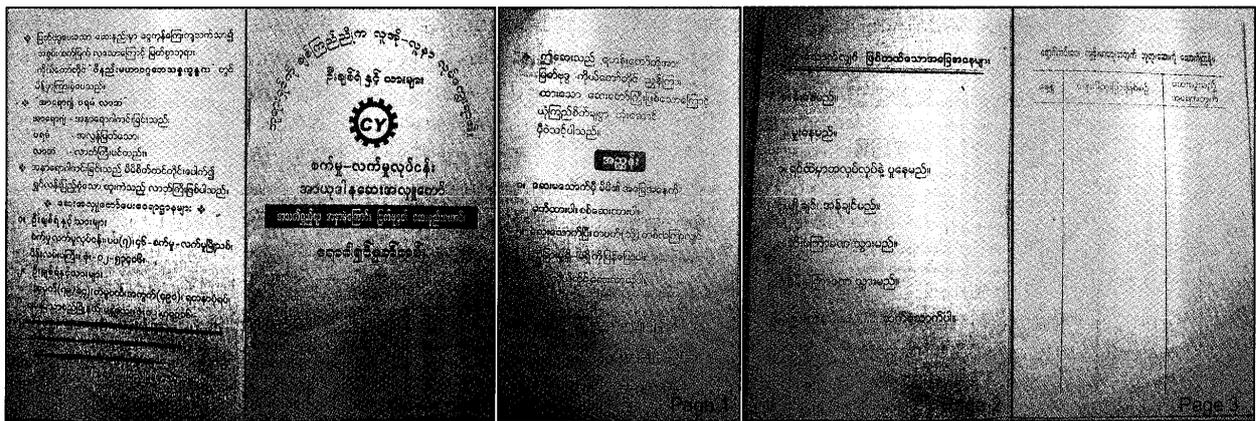
### Cow's urine medicine preparation method

- 1) Mix *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Phyllanthus simplex* and *Terminilia chebula* in the ratio 1:1:2.
- 2) Wash it with clean water.
- 3) Put into a clean clay container.
- 4) Pour cow's urine into the container until above the level of the fruits.
- 5) Leave it for at least 3 months.

The fermentation should be carried out at least for three months (Fig. 3, D). The therapeutic efficacy of medicine increases with time. Fermented cow's urine that is more than one year old has much therapeutic value. During the



**Figure 3.** The cow's urine medicine under preparation: A) Inside the factory showing clay jars containing cow's urine fermented with *Phyllanthus embilica*, *Phyllanthus simplex*, *Terminilia chebula* in the ratio of 1:1:2, B) fermented cow's urine medicine a month later, C) fermented cow's urine two months later showing white fungus growing and D) the white fungal turbidity disappeared after three months of fermentation and is ready to use as a universal medicine.



**Figure 4.** Notebook containing instructions about cow's urine medicine.

fermentation process, initially certain fungus develops and become turbid (Fig. 3, B and C). However, this turbidity disappears after three months. The fermented urine is then filtered and supplied to various monasteries in the cities of Mandalay and Yangon and to the people who need it (Fig. 5). They offer this medicine for free, however the recipients need to record in a small log book about the amount they took. People can voluntarily donate some money in the donation box (Fig. 2, C), and the funds collected will be again

used for this social work.

**Origin of fermented cow's urine therapy**

In Myanmar, cow's urine medicine is locally known as *Pheya-se*, literally meaning 'The Buddha Medicine'. It is considered to be a panacea for many diseases. The oldest Buddhist text *Tipitaka* gives a glimpse of cow's urine medicine. This medicine has been described in the ancient

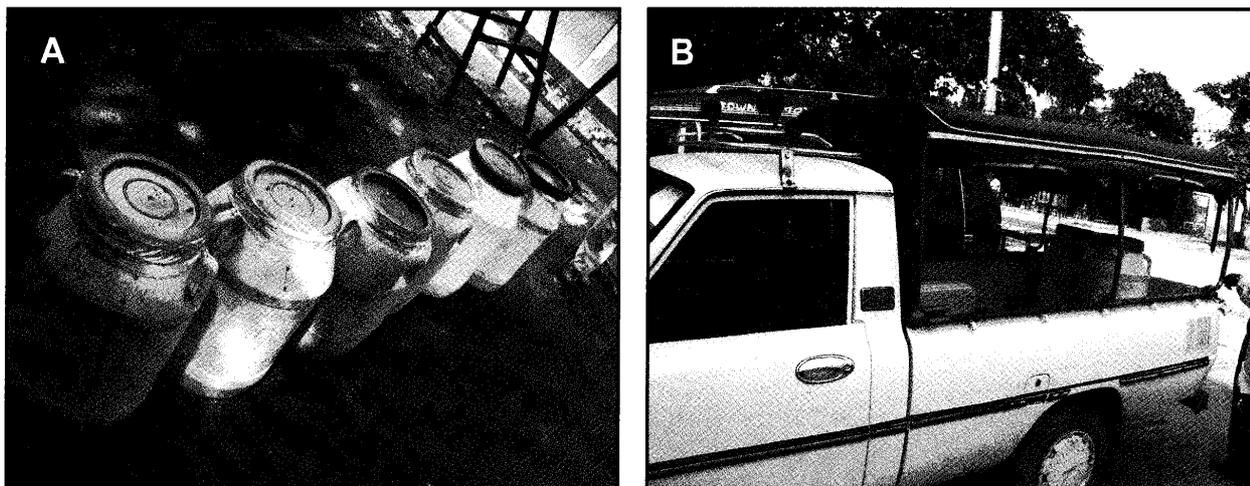


Figure 5. The cow's urine medicine is supplied to the monasteries in the different cities by volunteers.

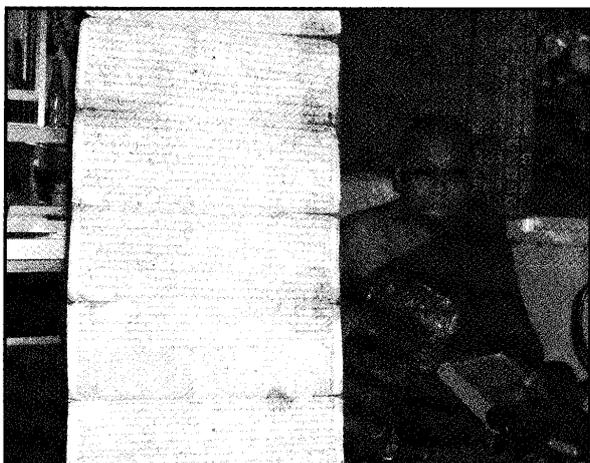


Figure 6. An ancient Buddhist literature, which contains information about cow's urine therapy.

Buddhist scriptures such as the *Vinaya-Pitaka*, the ancient collection of Buddhist monastic discipline, the *Sutta Pitaka*, the ancient collection of the Buddha's discourses, and in commentary texts written by Buddhist monks.<sup>11)</sup>

In the *Vinaya Pitaka*, cow's urine medicine is mentioned in several places (Fig. 6). According to it, there are "the four supporting resources", considered to be an absolute minimum for the Buddhist monks to be able to live the holy life in line with Buddha's teaching. They are 1) robes made of rags taken from a dust heap, 2) morsels of food given in alms 3) a dwelling at the foot of a tree, 4) decomposing urine (fermentated urine) as medicine as a resource. In *Mahavagga* (a text found in the *Vinaya-Pitaka*), Buddha recommend the *Haritaki* (*Terminalia Chebula*) impregnated with cow's urine for a monk suffering from jaundice. These historical texts suggest the origin of cow's urine medicine to date back to the Buddhist era, over 2500 years old.

### Cow's urine therapy in other cultures

Cow's urine therapy is not only practiced in Buddhism but also in other religions and cultures. These traditions, however, have a somewhat different interpretation than the Buddhist texts on how to use the medicine. Cow's urine has been described as a universal medicine for improving general health in Ayurveda. The medicinal properties of cow's urine have been described in many ancient Hindu texts like *Charak Sanhita* and *Shshrut sanhita*. Cow's urine is one of the ingredients of *Panchagavya ghrta*, an Ayurvedic formulation prepared with five components of cow origin, viz. cow milk, ghee, urine, dung and curd in equal proportion and is claimed to be useful against liver disorders, fever inflammations, anemia and also as a rejuvenator. A number of formulations in Ayurveda describe the use of *panchagavya* components either alone or in combination with drugs of herbal or mineral or animal origin. According to *Susrut sanhita*, cow's urine has several medicinal properties (*Sloka* 45/220, 221)<sup>12)</sup> (Fig. 7). Its properties are also described by *Charak Sanhita* (*Sloka* 100).<sup>12)</sup> Cow's urine is extensively used in Ayurveda for purifying certain materials which

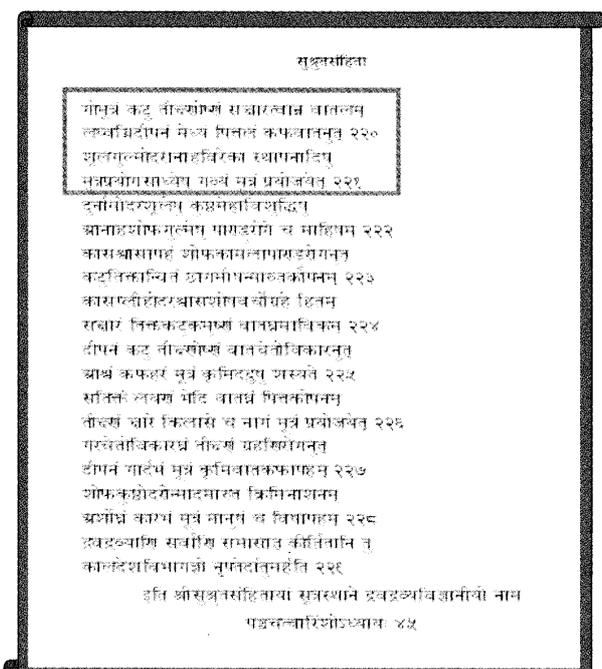


Figure 7. *Shshrut Sanhita*, showing the paragraph describing medicinal properties of the cow's urine.

otherwise possess toxic properties. Cow's urine concoction is a popular traditional remedy for convulsive seizures in Nigeria. Its major pharmacological actions include anticonvulsant and hypoglycemic effects. Cow's urine medicine is also a popular Buddhist discourse among the Buddhist people in Thailand and Sri Lanka.

### Cow's urine business

As the therapeutic efficacy of cow's urine has been widely praised for its numerous health benefits, the cow's urine business is booming in several parts of the world. Especially in India, urine distillate from cow is sold under the product name *Kamadhenu Arka* by Vigyana Anusandhana Kendra. This is the urine distillate suggested for drinking to improve general health and is available in different sized bottles. The Hindu nationalists in India also have campaigned the cow's urine as a medicine to cure all, from constipation to cancer, and from diarrhea to diabetes. Cow's urine is also available with the label "gift of the cow" in the market, and is being enthusiastically promoted by the government of Gujarat, one of three states in India dominated by Hindu nationalists. Many cow's urine derived products are often sold under the brand name *Goratna*, or "jewels of the cow". One can even find shampoo and after shave products containing cow's urine.

### Scientific basis of cow's urine therapy

Recently, a patent has been granted in Canada for the use of bioactive fraction from cow's urine distillate (*Go Mutra*) as a bio-enhancer of anti-infective, anti-cancer agents and nutrients, where the investigators claimed the bioactive fraction of cow's urine distillate as a bioavailability facilitator for anticancer therapy directly or in combination with anticancer agents.<sup>13)</sup> They claimed the use of this fraction also as an antifungal agent, and for tuberculosis (TB) therapy including multi drug resistant tuberculosis. Another U.S. patent was granted to the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), India, that claimed a novel pharmaceutical composition containing cow's urine distillate as an antibiotic.<sup>14)</sup> They claimed the cow's urine as the most effective animal origin substance/secretion with the capacity of general health improvement. The composition containing cow's urine can protect and repair DNA from oxidative damages. Yet in another patent, the investors Jain *et al.* described the process of manufacturing herbal medicinal composition with cow's urine which claimed that cow's urine can be safely used for the treatment of 48 different kinds of diseases.<sup>15)</sup>

Experimental studies on the cow's urine mixture to fasting grey rabbits confirmed the significant hypoglycemic effect of cow's urine when given by oral or intraperitoneal means. Hepatoprotective activity of *Panchagavya ghrta*, which contains cow urine as an essential part of the medicine has been reported by Achliya *et al.*<sup>16)</sup> Cow's urine concoction is a popular Nigerian herbal preparation containing cow's urine.<sup>17)</sup> Its major pharmacological actions include

anticonvulsant and hypoglycemic effects. All these innovations provide the strong scientific basis to ancient tradition of cow's urine as a medicine in different cultures.

### Conclusion

Although cow's urine is used as a medicine in different cultures in different forms, the practice of fermented cow's urine is found to be a unique tradition of Buddhist culture in Myanmar. Further scientific evaluation of this fermented cow's urine medicine is highly essential to make this Buddhist era medicine into a universal medicine of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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### Japanese abstract

ミャンマーの伝統医療における医学的慣習は神秘に包まれている。世代を超えて永続しているその慣習は、現地の人々の宗教的信仰に基づいているものが多い。ミャンマーの一部の地域では、全人的治療法として仏陀の時代の頃から存続している知識がいまだに保存されていて、それが慣習的に使われている。この論文ではミャンマーの仏教文化の中で、伝統医によって行われている牛の尿を用いた驚くべき治療法について強調している。

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