

## Traditional Knowledge of Bodos on Food, Health and Medicine

**Sunilal Basumatary**

### **ABSTRACT:**

The Bodo community, which is native to northeastern India, possesses a traditional knowledge system that combines food, medicine, and health. In this seminar paper, I explored Bodo traditional knowledge by examining the deep connections between their food practices, medicinal plants, and holistic well-being. Using an ethnographic approach, this presentation will investigate the Bodo community's distinctive food culture, which not only sustains the body, but also offers medicinal advantages. In this study I will analyze various traditional foods, and medicinal herbs, that are vital for health maintenance and disease prevention. Additionally, this seminar will highlight the significance of Bodo traditional medicine, which heavily depends on the local flora and fauna. This study explores the different medicinal plants utilized by the Bodo community, their preparation techniques, and their applications in treating various ailments. This seminar aims to foster a cross-cultural understanding, appreciation, and preservation of indigenous knowledge systems by examining the intersections of food, medicine, and health in Bodo traditional knowledge. Ultimately, this presentation seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation on the importance of traditional knowledge in maintaining the health and well-being of indigenous communities. The seminar will also address the cultural and spiritual significance of these traditional foods and medicines within the Bodo community. In this paper, I will discuss the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and practices related to food preparation and medicinal use, highlighting the role of the elderly in preserving this wisdom. Furthermore, the presentation will explore the potential of integrating Bodo traditional knowledge with modern healthcare systems to create more holistic and culturally sensitive approaches to health and wellness.

**Key Words:** Traditional, Knowledge, Bodo, Food, Health, Medicine.

## INTRODUCTION:

Assam is comparable to museum with a diverse range of ethnic groups and tribes, each of which has its own unique culture. Every community and society has its traditional beliefs as well as traditional treatment systems for a variety of common ailments that involves the use of a variety of traditional remedies. Among the various tribes of Assam, Bodo is one of the indigenous tribes of the state of Assam in the northeastern region of India. Bodos are very rich in their cultural heritage which is rich in folk literature. It has been found that the Bodo people of the north-east India have a traditional system of providing medical treatment, which is an essential component of their folk literature. From a linguistic standpoint, Bodo belongs the Sino-Tibetan language family. Renown historian of India S.K. Chatterjee write about the Bodo as “*..the Bodo, who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid block in North Eastern India, were the most important Indo Mongoloid people in the Eastern India..*” (Chetterjee, 1974:45). Again about the Bodo people one of the famous linguist aof Assam Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya quote about the Bodo as “*. Boro or Boro Kachari belongs to the Boro (Bodo) sub section of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family.*”(Bhattacharya, 2007:7). Bodos are renowned for their understanding of a wide variety of plants, which are mostly useful and beneficial for human health. The art of using plants and flora for the benefit of health has been learned by the Bodo people, which was customarily acquired, enhanced and handed down from one generation to the next. With regard to this traditional system of the Bodo, it is important to find a written record. However, we must agree that the Bodo people who live in rural villages or regions have a wealth of traditional knowledge about wild medicinal plants that thrive in their immediate environment. Herbal remedies and traditional medicine have been used by the Bodo people for the treatment of a wide range of illnesses since they were immemorial. It has been found that, the Bodo people that living near the forest area as well as rural villages gathered a wide variety of therapeutic plants and species from the surrounding forest regions and

neighboring location. The manner in which these therapeutic platforms were used varied depending on the characteristics of the condition and level of knowledge possessed by the Bodo people.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The present seminar paper is based on the healing and health care system of the Bodos, which has traditionally prevailed among the tribes, and the main focus of the study is outlined as follows:

1. To make an effort to document information about the traditional medicine and healing system of the Bodos of Assam.
2. To draw attention and continue of the primary health care system within the Bodo society.
3. To investigate the extent to which oral knowledge of medicine is prevalent and compile a small list of various plants and species that are used for medicinal purposes.
4. To learn how the elderly Bodo people made use of traditional herbs in their daily lives.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

Field work served as the foundation for the current investigation. For the purpose of data collection some of the techniques such as observation, interviews and short questionnaires along with case study approaches are used wherever possible. A combination of primary and secondary sources was used to gather the information for this study. The primary sources include the information that was gathered from some elder Bodo inhabitants of villages, whereas the secondary sources include a few books and journals that have been tried to study related topics.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Assam is one of the remarkable states of the North-East India, where a significant amount of land is covered by forests and jungles. In this jungle, there are a wide variety of plant species, including flora, fruiters, and creepers. The traditional medicine system may be described as a collection of health practices, methods, knowledge and beliefs that combine medicine derived from plants, and other natural things. These practices are used to diagnose, treat and prevent diseases or to preserve them well, either

individually or in combination. Every community and culture has its own distinct characteristics, and individual have always been able to deal with their own situations. Among the Bodo communities, those who practice traditional Bodo healing, also known as Ojas, are regarded as having a wealth of information about the different kinds of natural medicine that may be used for nutritional and therapeutic reasons, as well as for the treatment of disease. Traditional Bodo health care methods are indigenous healing techniques that pass down from one generation to the next. These methods have been passed down from generation to generation. Bodo is a community that mostly resides in or lives near jungles and rivers. Therefore, a large number of plants and flora with therapeutic properties are used for the treatment of certain diseases.

In the early days, when modern medicine had not been developed, people all over the world relied on obtained from bio-resources to treat their illness. Traditional medicine can be described as information that people have received over the course of time from nature for the purpose of healing ailments. This knowledge is obtained by individuals through the practices of traditional knowledge systems in the surrounding environment. The local healthcare system is very important for the functioning of the healthcare system in a significant portion of the nation, particularly at the grassroots level. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as *“..the sum total of knowledge, skills, and practices on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different culture, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement, or treatment of physical and mental illness;”* in the same way when we talk about traditional medicine, it refers to the same thing. There are a variety of medical formulae and approaches used by the Bodo people of Assam to make use of natural remedies. The religious beliefs, customs and traditions of the Bodo community provide the foundation for these practices. The Bodo people are mostly familiar with plants in their immediate environment, which has resulted in a wealth of ethno botanical knowledge.

The significance of the traditional form of knowledge has been recognized by the legal system of India, nonetheless, it is necessary to properly understand the nature of each traditional type of knowledge in a manner that is congruent with the cultural features of each society. Because traditional knowledge is strongly ingrained in the culture of a

particular civilization, it is essential that it be genuine. A concept known as customary practice serves as a guiding principle for the process of the information transfer. Traditional knowledge of medicine must be addressed. This branch of traditional knowledge is directly connected to individuals healthcare. In light of this fact, the study of traditional medicine cannot be conducted in a vacuum, it is important to point out that it is inextricably tied to the culture, religion, and belief of the indigenous people or the local people, as well as the environment in which they reside. Consequently, it is essential to investigate the nature of these treatment techniques and gain an understanding of the fundamental issue, while focusing on the legal protection component of the situation. Not only does the knowledge of healing include the issue of plants or herbs, it also encompasses a vast spectrum of therapeutic information. In traditional medicine, they are familiar with information on the use of medicinal characteristics of a variety of plant species, as well as animal therapeutic remedies.

#### **MEDICINAL CUISINE OF THE BODOS:**

- i. **Jari(Usumai):**This herb grows in every session and is found everywhere in the Assam. Usually, its stems and leaves are consumed by the Bodo people as a curry. To treat a variety of illnesses such as normal fever, cough, and cold pneumonia, the Bodo people eat this plant or herb along with small fish and chicken as curry. Sometimes, this herb is cooked with chicken as a soup, and different kinds of spices are added to relieve cold and cough. The flower of the 'Jari' is also used for the treatment of oral cavity conditions.
- ii. **Jwylaori:**The medicinal plant used by the Bodo people is a scented herb that grows in elevated and dried areas, and is generally found in household garden and open paddy fields. The leave of the 'jwylaori' are smooth having a exuding a unique aroma which is almost 2/3 inch width and 4/5 inch length. Generally this herb is used by the Bodo people to treat whooping cough and long fever as curry with chicken and dried fish with rice, and is sometimes consumed as soup.
- iii. **Mani Muni:**This is one kind of herb plant is generally available in wed areas, paddy fields, and open grassy spaces in nearby homes. This plant is mostly found or available during February and can be found throughout the month of April. The leaves of the plant are used as a

vegetable to cure diseases such as jaundice, typhoid fever, pneumonia, chronic cough, and other spicy ingredients, including chicken and pork. Sometimes the leaves of this herb are cooked with chicken and other spicy ingredients as soup to relieve the long fever and cough.

- iv. Mathigaldab: This is a wild vegetable herb that grows attached to the ground. It expands in the ground like a carpet and is unable to grow to a high level of the ground. The Bodo people generally eat 'mathigaldab' as curry or sabji with pork, chicken or crabs to cure jaundice.
- v. Thalir Fosla: Thalir fosla is another medicinally beneficial tree used by the Bodo people, commonly known as banana trees in English. The banana tree (thalir fosla) is widely found throughout Assam and in any part of India. The 'Bodo' people typically consumes the inner stem of the banana plants to reduce uric acid level. Additionally, the Bodo people incorporate the stems of banana trees into their cuisine by preparing a curry with pulses showcasing their resourceful and traditional approach to nutrition.
- vi. Thaso Gwswm: Thaso gwswm or arum tree or stem in English is one of the therapeutic plants that can be found during the winter session in Assam. Generally this plant grows up to two to three feet tall from the ground. The leaves of this tree are wide up to half to one foot. Generally, in Bodo culture pregnant women traditionally cooked and consumed the stem of this plant with elephant fruits, believing it to be rich in iron and most beneficial to their health. It is also believed that by consuming the 'thaso gwswm bishong' pregnant women can boost their iron levels, thereby ensuring a healthy pregnancy and strong vibrant baby.
- vii. Khiphi Bendwng: This plant is known as a moon creeper in English. It is a medicinal creeper that grows in jungle. The plant has an odor scent that is slightly longer than average. Traditionally, Bodo people keep their stems by cutting pieces in a glass of water at night and drink the water in the morning in an empty stomach to relieve stomach pain, dysentery, stomach discomfort and acidity. It has been found that its leaves are also consumed as sabji with potato for acidity problems.
- viii. Khansinsa: Khansinsa is a remarkable medicinal herb used by the Bodo people, and is available in paddy field and grassy jungle areas. It has

tiny flowers with small fruits, and the leaves are relatively small in sized. Generally the Bodo people use its leaves raw juice is used as a drop and also as a soup throat problems and worm. Its leaf juice is poured into the nose to stop bleeding from the nose.

- ix. Thulunshi: Thulunshi is known as 'tulsi' or holly basil in English which is a shrub type plant. This plant is found in every location in India. This plant is also used by the Bodo people as a holly plant which is planted in the center of the 'bathou thansali' or center of the alter. Although this plant is used holly or religious by the Bodo people, it is also used as a medicinal plant. Generally, the fragile leaves and stems of tulsi plants are used for the treatment of several ailments, such as cough, flue pneumonia, skin diseases, and indigestion. The juice of its raw leaves is consumed as soup for indigestion and gastric problems.
- x. Bos Biphang: This plant grows in dump areas or moist environments. This shrub has long leaves with no branches. It has a tuberous root that is similar to that of turmeric and has a good scent. Generally its root is used as a medicine for the cold, additionally, when an infant suffers from flue, its raw small parts of the stems are kept just nearby to the sleeping child.
- xi. Mwnamndari hagra: It is a small herb that is generally found in jungle and drier locations. The plant grows up to 2/3 feet height and its flower are white. Generally, green leaves are used for the immediate prevention of bleeding from cuts and wounds.
- xii. Phatgaja: This is another types of shrub plant that grows in wed and dumped places. In Assamese 'pat' means 'leave', and 'gaja' means 'grows'. Generally this plant grows from the leaf that is why it may be called as 'pathgaja' in Assamese and 'phatgaja' in Bodo. Its leaves and stems are very soft, and grows to a height of 2/3 feet from the ground. The Bodo people drink green leaf juice in the empty stomach to get relief from urinary burning, stomachache and many other conditions. This plant is mainly used as a traditional remedy for kidney stone disease.
- xiii. Neem: It is a large kind of tree that has been used by the Bodo people as a great medicinal value traditionally. Generally juice of leaf of this tree is used for the treatment skin itch, chicken fox and utilized as a blood purifier.

- xiv. Thinlang Phithai: This tree is known as tamarind in English. It is a large tree that is available all over India. Generally, its fruits have a high medicinal value and are used to control high blood pressure. It is believed that if the ripe fruit of this tree is consumed daily there is no possibility of pressure stroke in any person. The Bodo people keep the fruit of this tree as pickles which are kept in salt water for a long time, give a strong sharp taste and are consumed medicinally for long time.
- xv. Golnemu: Golnemu is known as citrus lemon in English. This tree is tall up 10/15 feet height with an oval leaf. It can be found largely in many parts of the Assam and all over India as well as in some Asian countries. Generally its fruits have a high medicinal value that test sour. The Bodo people keep this fruit in salt water for a long time and consume it as a pickle. It is used for medicinal purpose to control high blood pressure, indigestion problems and cure kidney stones.

## CONCLUSION:

Even today and in the age of digital technology, there is still a significant development in the use of traditional medicinal system that has been practice among the Bodo tribe with their traditional knowledge. Today research and technology have developed in the field of medical science, but modern science and technology have not been able to completely replace the local health cure tradition. Within each and every community, the traditional system constitutes the foundation of human culture. It is the foundation of the origin of modern and contemporary society. Today's human civilization is unable to completely ignore the ancient traditions that have been in place for centuries. Therefore it is possible to consider this a source of contemporary system. An extensive number of Bodo folk cure system were utilized in the early in order to save lives, and some of these practices are still being utilized in the technological advancement of civilization.

## Reference:

Bhattacharya, P.C., *A descriptive Analysis of Bodo Language*, 2007(re print), Guwahati.

Boro Renu, *Muli Jolonga*, 2007, Swdwmsri Harimu Afat, Catholic Mission, Bijini, Chirang.

Brahma, Dr.K., *Aspect of Social Customs of the Bodos*, 2008(Reprint), Bina library, Guwahati

Brahma, Kameswar, *A Introduction to the Traditional Practices of the Bodos*, 1999, Kokrajhar.

Brahma, Kalicharan, *Boroni Jolonga*, 2000, NL Publication, Kokrajhar.

Boro, Dr. Indira, *Harimu Arw Boro Harimw*, 2017, Bodo Publication Board

Chatterjee, S.K, *Kirata Jana Kriti*, 1974, Culcutta.

Narzee, Bhaben, *Boro Kocharini Somaj Arw Harimu*, 2003 Chirang Publication Board.