



Exploring Ethnomedicines of Bodos and its Socio-cultural Significance

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Abstract- Traditional ethnomedicines refer to the medicines that are practiced by using traditional methods, and these medicines are most effective and play a key role in daily livelihood in the Bodo community. Certain medicines are not known by their particular name. And this medicine cannot be practiced without involving the social beliefs, religious beliefs, customs, social values, cultural and ecology. Basically, traditional medicines are a sustainable or renewable resource. Tribal people of northeast India do have a close relationship with the forest. The Bodo community uses natural resources for deriving long-term benefit without disturbing the ecological balances. Bodo community as they have associated with the forest, and around the forest, they have some senses about herbal medicines and beliefs for their livelihood. They also practice some preventive and curative measures for their health. This measurement and medicines are called ethnomedicines. In this study, we have focused on particularly the Kokrajhar district. In contemporary society, they have synthesized knowledge in respect of occurring and gathering knowledge of herbal medicines like neem, dubri bilai (*Cynodon dactylon*), khangsisa (*Leucas aspera*), usumwi, endi, haijeng, manimuni (*Centella*), khifi bendwng (*Poederia fatidol*), thaso gwswm (black yams), kamranga, thaigir, thaika pitai, sibru (*Lasia spinoa thaw*), and many other parts of species; they are animal birds, nails, fats, and bird feathers. They produce medicines by grinding it. They collect the medicines from the forest and animals for various diseases like cough, skin allergy, typhoid, stomach ache, gas, jaundice, bone fracture, normal fever, blood pressure, and drowsiness. Traditional ethnomedicines have become part and parcel of the Bodo community. But at the same time, they have also adopted some modern methods in producing traditional medicines like jaharua in Bodo, bhorom, and nalee. Bodo people also have spiritual belief systems for healing some patients or ill persons by so-called Oja.

Keywords- Bodo community, beliefs, ethnomedicines, socio-cultural.

I. Introduction

The Bodo has their own rich socio-cultural heritage for their daily livelihood. Bodos are natural worshipper as well. The traditional ethnomedicine of Bodos is a remarkable practices passed down through generations by oral transmission. Traditional ethnomedicines refers to the medicines which are practiced by using the traditional methods and these medicines are most effective and play a key role in daily livelihood of Bodo community. Certain medicines are not known by their particular name. "It is believed that the 'Bodo' is derived from the name of a place called 'Bod' situated in the north of Himalayas and west of China." Bodo has many traditionbal practices among them traditional ethnomedicine is most effective. The Bodo society cannot live without traditional practices as it has been a vital health care system for them. They practice some foods also as a medicine. It is a common phenomena in Bodo society. Before the



development of society and still today they prepare traditional medicines rather than medical store for normal disease, like the juice of tulsii leaf with honey in cough and cold; aloe vera etc. This ethnomedicine has a socio-cultural values for generation to generation.

This can also highlight the cultural as well as economical values. “ It enhances in the development of an indigenous healing practices for various diseases and ailments among the various indigenous people residing in the nook and corner of this region where modern health care system is still unavailable.” The traditional ethnomedicine can heal diseases. “ The Bodo people even deny to take doctor’s advice in some major diseases; instead they call an Oja (medicine man) for treatment. The Oja is supposed to be competent to deal with the ordinary ailments of village life using mantras, formulae and ayurvedic medicine” The Bodo people also recently developed some medicines and some herbs are unknown by specific name. “Traditional healing of the Bodos has a set of cultural values and belief systems attached to it. It does not just reveal about the healing during the early times but it also disclose about the culture of the particular society. The healing practices impart an idea about the early society, beliefs and social norms” The traditional healer in Bodo community is known as Oja. Some Bodo people are practicing ethnomedicines for social values and they earn money to survive.

II. Objectives of the study

The present study intends-

- To know the traditional ethnomedicinal practices in the Bodo community.
- To know the importance of traditional medicinal herbs in contemporary society.
- To know their socio-cultural values in livelihood.

III. Methodology

In this paper, we have used qualitative methods. The descriptive and analytical methods are used to carry the study on ‘Traditional ethnomedicines of Bodos and its Socio-cultural values’. Primary data are collected from interviews and discussions with elderly people. Secondary data are collected from journals, magazines, historical articles, and books.

IV. Significance of study

Traditional Bodo medicines often use locally available herbs with proven therapeutic effects. Such studies can provide scientific validation for these remedies, contributing to herbal medicine and Ayurveda. The main significance of this study lies in the fact that it highlights the importance of medicinal plants and their role in local healthcare. It promotes conservation efforts to protect endangered medicinal plants used by the Bodo community. Ethnomedicine among the Bodos is deeply intertwined with rituals, traditions, and spiritual beliefs. Understanding these practices provides insight into their cultural identity and heritage. Sustainable harvesting and cultivation of medicinal plants could create livelihood opportunities. This study is therefore, vital for safeguarding



indigenous knowledge, promoting cultural identity, and exploring sustainable healthcare solutions.

V. Traditional medicines and its socio-cultural significance

As a human being, we cannot survive alone without the social, cultural and environment values. According to Brahma et al. (2002), Bodos are culturally and socially intertwined with the pristine forest around them and are known to have developed a unique system of herbal medicines, some of which are not even found in the Indian Ayurvedic system. The ethnomedicines are directly related to our health and because of its utilizations in day to day life, in some places where there is no good communication and no transportation, people from that place mainly give preference ethnomedicines alongwith some other religious beliefs and practices. “Herbal medicine has a worldwide acceptance due to two important factors: cost efficacy and fewer side effects. In the midst of modern or western medicine, the relevance of herbal medicine cannot be subsumed. There are giant companies, industries, brands like Patanjali in India, dealing with various products where herbs being the real resource. In Indian context, the Ayurveda system of medicine has been based upon the knowledge of plant varieties” According to them, plants have a spiritual connection to the human body as well as can be used to heal a range of maladies.

There are no certain books written by Bodo people earlier but the extensive knowledge of plants or herbs are results of generations of trial and error, as well as thorough observation of how plants affect the human body. Basically tribal populations have such a thorough awareness of medical herbs. “One factor is because they frequently live in close proximity to nature and has a profound appreciations for it. They also have a rich oral story telling culture, which allows them to pass down their medicinal plant wisdom from generation to generation. Another reason tribal communities have such an indepth understanding of medicinal plants is that they frequently lack access to modern treatment. As a result, people have had to rely on traditional healing methods for generations”

The Bodo medicine man uses several plants part for therapeutic purposes. Plant's leaves, bark, roots, flowers and fruits can all be utilized to formulate herbal medications. They treat common illness such as fever, cough, cold, flu, jaundice, typhoid, malaria, pneumonia, gastic, dysentery, diarrhea, head ache, stomach disorder etc. The Ojas within Bodo community uses different methods and techniques to treat different diseases by using herbs in the form of fresh drug, juice, powders, paste etc. Some common type of treatment like cuts and wound sprain and skin diseases where external application is involved, is practiced by all those who get affected immediately. Bodo Ojas use to collect medicines from nature which are being applied in three ways –eating, drinking and external apply.

- “Leafs of plants are brought and grinded with the help of rock and its juice is drunk.
- Some are consumed by making powder or by breaking into small pieces.
- Some are grinded with the help of rock and applied externally.
- Some are cleaned after collection and then eaten”



VI. Economical development from traditional herbs (ethnomedicines)

The marketing for the ethnomedicines is very poor for the Ojas due to unavailable or poor marketing system, lack of advertisements, national and international supply. A few Ojas or medicine men they earn some money by selling ethnomedicines. Oja is of two types-- herbal Oja and spiritual Oja. Some Ojas are very much expert in their field and fully knowledgeable for preparation of medicines. And they gathered all the herbs and plants from forest. Some Ojas also use to garden the herbals at home. This practice becomes habitual in daily life. As per observations, the Ojas use pure herbal and sometimes they also add or buy from the market to make more effective and for quick heal. So, by practising ethnomedicines, Ojas earn some amount of money for their survival. Where some spirituals Ojas also earn some amount of money by healing some diseases by chanting so called mwntars (mantras). If the herbal medicines are advertised then it may bring more benefit in contemporary society and would become economical and safe treatment by utilizing mostly our own resources. The practice of ethnomedicines requires an ethical practice. And also it must be bounded under the ethical framework.

There are some drive for economical growth:

1. As we know that many dozen drugs are made of natural herbs and natural resources. This natural herbs or ethomedices can contribute to the discovery of new pharmaceutical products which can be commercialised. And it can be leading to increased revenues in pharmaceutical sector as well as local economies. It can expand or potential to be exported to international markets.
2. The cultivation of medical plants may have benefit for local use or can be exported to the other countries as well. If this plants are cultivated the farmer can get a new market and also become one of the agricultural business which would boost income in rural area. For example-Manamuni, Neem pat, tea, essential oily plants etc.
3. The ethnomedicines are as cultural heritage which can be a part of eco-tourism and it can attract the foreigner visitors and the traditional herbs that can be explored to the other countries as well as can produce some jobs for the local people of that particular areas.

VII. Challenges in production of medicines

In the era of globalization and changing of the climate, medicine men are facing lots of problems in gathering the herbal due to deforestation and misuse of plants and herbs. In today's society due to increasing number of families, the herbal medicines are also becoming less and destroyed. "However if herbal medicines are to assume a respected place in contemporary health care, the quality of data and the quality of herbal products themselves as well as regulatory control of herbal medicines must improve greatly". "Constraints associated with the dealing of herbal medicines: Both new raw herbs and the extract contain complicated mixture of organic, chemicals, which may include fatty acid, sterols, alkaloids, flavonoids, glycosides, saponins, tannins, lignans, and terpenes as well as other small molecules such as pesticides and oligosaccharides. It is often



difficult to determine which component, if any, of the herb has biological activity in humans.”

There are many challenges-

1. Due to use of some pesticides in the forest, some medicines are destroyed.
2. Bio-diversity loss, over-exploitation and improper use of medicinal plants.
3. Difficulties in marketing.
4. Lack of trained personnel and equipment.
5. Poor agriculture and propagation methods.
6. Lack of research development on ethnomedicines.
7. Lack of facilities to fabricate equipments locally.
8. Due to commercialization of herbal medicines, it raises concern issues in producing ethnomedicines.

VIII. Preventive measures and Remedies of ethnomedicines

There are some common herbs used for various diseases and its remedies-

1. Dubri bilai (cynodon dactylon) is very useful from long time ago which is used in all types of bleeding and skin trouble. Entire Dubri bilai (leave) is extracted and its fresh grass is crushed and also the juice is mixed with warm milk and taken.
2. Athiya Thalir (a Seeded Banana) is a common in every household, it is believed that juice of Athiya thalir adding a piece of salt can cure a loose motion.
3. Phati gaja (phat gaja) is consumed in empty stomach in the morning for treatment of kidney stone and also used in case of burning on skin.
4. In case of bleeding due to cut or wound, burilakhan (Leaf) is applied. We also see applying basil leaf and marigold leaf. Applying these leaves can stop bleeding.
5. The Bodos use neem leaves for curing allergy and stomach problem. As per belief of the Bodos, if one consumes neem daily for long in empty stomach in the morning, he/she is not attacked by poison even bitten by a snake.
6. The Bodos know that if grinded roots of Endi, leaves of jarma (leaf), leaves of onthai bajab is applied surrounding the wound, it may be saved from infection.
7. Manimuni (Centella asiatica) is also used as medicine by Bodos, even consumed in the form of curry. We get good results so far as indigestion is concerned, if we consumed centella in empty stomach in the morning.
8. The Bodos eat usumwi (spilanthus acmella linn) leaf by cooking curry with chicken if appears DOBRA (boil) at tongue.
9. The Bodos believe and use that in case of nose bleeding khangsingsa (leucus aspara Br) is crushed and its fluid is poured at the nostrils to stop bleeding.
10. Thagir (Dillenia indica) is used for the relief of hair related problems, cough, cold, jaundice etc.
11. Kamranga (Averrhoa carambola) known as star fruit used to eat either raw and cooked. It is taken as remedy for jaundice and high blood pressure.
12. Khipi bendwng is a climber and is used by Bodos as traditional medicines since long. It is beneficial and useful in relieving a number of diseases like jaundice, rheumatism, diarrhoea and liver damage etc.
13. Bel (Aegle marmelos) is used as medicine by the Bodos, for various ailments like diarrhoea, dysentery, liver problem, indigestion and all the stomach related problems since long time.



14. Singri (*oxalis corniculata*) is used by the Bodos to treat various diseases like fever, urinary tract infection, diarrhoea, muscular swelling, boils and pimples.
15. Tulushi (*Ocimum sanctum*) plant has many medicinal properties. It is not only considered as a holy plant but it is also a medicine for various diseases. Paste of fresh Thulushi leaves is a very effective traditional medicine of the Bodos for skin troubles like acne and itching.
16. Or jumudai (leave) is used in skin diseases and burned at body .
17. if Moss (*Badanali*) is fried and applied at burnt point of human body , one can get relieved soon.
18. sujina bilai (leave) is used to make curry for the remedy of blood presure, difficult and painful urination, kidney and blood stone, night blindness, piles.
19. Gwkha gwkw (mixed of all edible vegetables) are eaten in Bwisagu sonkranti (Bihu in Assamese) to heal all the diseases. There is believe system in Bodo community that this gwkha gwkw has healing power due to its varities of medicinal values.
20. Basikhi flower and its root is used to recover from the jaundice and typhoids. Firstly Basikhi roots are grinded and boiled it for while and take bath, which works for external as well as internal heal.
21. Thaika pitai (fruit) is eaten to control the high blood pressure.
22. Jharua bori is given to eat if anyone suffers from fever, which is prepared at home. This jharua bori is made by long pepper, black pepper, clove, cassia bark, ginger, cardamom, jabrang (a kind of spice), usumwi fithai (fruit), bwrdrwn banlu (a kind of small silly), fenugreek which are grinded together on rock and given shape of small and then made dry.
23. Dalsini (*Cinnamom*) is used for headache due to cold, to delay menstruation after delivery to increase breast milk, feeling shortage of breath (bad breath), loss of taste(mixed with honey).
24. Neem is used for skin problem, infection, burns, itching and burning sensation, teeth and gum boils.
25. Ginger is used in common cold, ear ache, blood pressure (ginger with honey), cold, running nose sneezing, indigestion, vomiting, lack of appetite, vomiting pregnancy, cancer preventive.
26. Amai pitob is usually made of some herbal medicine which is used for jaundice as well as drowsiness.
27. Sijou is religious plant as well as also used as a medicine for various diseases. It is beneficial for various diseases like tumor, piles, inflammation, fever, cough, anemia and ulcers.

Following Village Medicine men/women are consulted for the present study:



Name-Kateb Brahma,
Vill-Chatu adabari,
Age-62 yrs,
Disease dealt by her- Jaundice



Name-Katiram Brahma,
Vill-Charaikhola,
Age- 66 yrs,
Disease dealt by him-
Headache, Typhoid, Bar Gazri
(evil spirit)



Name- Amala Basumatary,
Vill-Chotu Gendrabill,
Age- 49 yrs.
Disease dealt by her- Toothache,
Jaundice



Name-Basudev Wary,
Vill- Simbargaon,
Age-46 yrs,
Disease dealt by him- Broken leg,
Paralysis



Name- Rubasi Basumatary,
Vill- Serfanguri,
Age- 50 yrs,
Disease dealt by her- Broken leg



Local Name- Har-jora



Local Name- Narenga pata



Local Name- Jangli Kakrikhola



Local Name- Samkhangrang



Local Name- Aparajita bibar

IX. Result And Findings

Present generations know little of traditional ethnomedicinal practices and it is rapidly dwindling as the time is passing. They are some reasons for dwindling of traditional practices. The Ojas frequently keep much of their information hidden for fear of exposing it to the outside world. And some are terrified of being stigmatized of practicing witchcraft because many outskirt and interior villages are still superstitious and believe in magic and withcraft. But we do still get to see that old Ojas use to teach his/her favourite persons. Some Ojas learned from the experiences of others practices. The Bodo ancestors knew more than what today's generation knows. Although new generations know little about ethnomedicines, the Bodo people are well trained in some



herbal medicines which are edible and provide vital nutraceuticals for immune boosting like mwita bangal(a kind of leave) which is used to escape from sun light reflection, kipi bendong (leave) for drowsiness (amai mwnai). Dal sini(Cinnamom) is used for urinal problems.

X. Conclusion

we are surrounded by ethno herbs and medicines. We can say that, an environment plays key roles in producing traditional ethnomedicines. Bodos' culture , religion and values-- all are derived from the nature itself. Bodos can not survive without the natural herbal medicines and spiritual beliefs. When Bodo family are in problems such as diseases and mental illness they take the help of both medicine man and spiritual Oja. The new generation practices less than what ancestors did. There are some common medicines which are known by all the generations like, kipi bendong, manimuni, thaso gosom (leave of black yams), nwrnsing bilai, neem, aloevera leave, agwrsita rwda(root), thaika pitai, kangsis bilai (leave), mwita bangal, sujina bilai(leave), bashiki leave and root, usumwi, dubri bilai, sijou bilai, karwi(kar), indi bilai (castor leave), tintlang (tamarind) etc.

The ethnomedicinal practices of the Bodos represent a rich heritage of indigenous healing that is deeply intertwined with their cultural and ecological knowledge. These traditional remedies, primarily based on locally available herbs and spiritual healing, have been effective in addressing various health concerns for generations. However, the growing influence of modern medicine, deforestation, and a shift in lifestyle pose a threat to the survival of this knowledge system. To safeguard and promote Bodo ethnomedicine, it is essential to document these practices, encourage scientific validation, and integrate them into broader healthcare frameworks. By preserving this tradition, the Bodo community can maintain its cultural identity while contributing to sustainable and holistic healthcare solutions.

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