



# Traditional Health Care Practices of the Bodos of Rural Area of Assam, India

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## ABSTRACT

The popular talk “Health is Wealth” signifies the importance of health care. A good health makes the life prosperous and happy. The traditional health care practice of the indigenous communities refers to the use of various natural products such as plants, animals, flowers, birds, fish etc. The traditional medicines are based on beliefs and experiences of the indigenous people in the maintenance of their health and treatment of the physical and mental illness. The supernatural beliefs and performance of the various rituals are also observed as a significant part of the health care practices. The present article focuses on the traditional knowledge of health care and the use of various natural objects by the bodo tribe of Assam, India.

**Key Words:** Ethno-medicine, Indigenous, Health Care, Traditional Knowledge, Shaman.

## INTRODUCTION

For a prosperous and happy life a good health is one of the urgent necessities. Therefore a good health is only possible through the proper health care practices. The simple societies are significant for their traditional knowledge on health care practices. The indigenous people understand the nature very well. Nature is super market for the indigenous people from where they collect their foods and other resources (Boro,2022). Their traditional health care practices are based on the natural objects like the various parts of plants and animals. Those natural objects are not only used as medicine but it also has a significant value on their socio religious life which they use to sacrifice and worship as their deities.

Traditionally, before advanced technology and pharmaceutical medicines were developed, almost every community of the past and present, small and great used various herbal plants as medicines in the treatment of various ailments (Yuhlung and Bhattacharyya, 2014). The traditional medicine in Indian context has a long established history and a wider acceptability (Sharma et. al., 2015). In the past few decades pioneer work in identification, documentation and recognition of traditional medicine has been done in India (Badgujar et. al., 2008). The value of local knowledge system for global health care has been demonstrated at different levels: (a) in providing primary health care to the rural poor in the absence of

(mainstream) biomedical health care; (b) in being a more satisfying health care option to many transnational migrants as compared to biomedical health care; and (c) as a way to select interesting candidate plant species for the discovery and development of new pharmaceuticals (Vandebroek, 2011). Today Anthropology and other interdisciplinary subjects focused on the study of ethno-medicine and traditional health care practice through the extensive field investigation. Ethnomedicinal surveys provide data and information basis for conservation and sustainable utilization of local wild plants and also contribute to preserve cultural and genetic diversity (Raj, et. al. 2018).

## THE PEOPLE

The Bodo Kacharies are the largest Indo-Mongoloid racial group in Assam. The Bodos are linguistically Tibeto-Burman of Sino-Tibeto origin. The Bodos are also called as *Kacharies*. In the Monograph “*The Kacharies*” by Endle writes that the origin of the *kachari* race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history. (Endle, 1911). In Assam they are mainly distributed in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Barpeta, Nalbari, Baksa, Goalpara, Darang, Tezpur, North Lakhimpur and Kamrup district. In the kamrup district of Assam the Bodos are distributed at Dhupdhara, Boko, Chaygaon, Rani, South gauhati, Sonapur, Khetri area and in the southern part of kamrup district. Major numbers of Bodo people are Hinduism. Christianity is also adopted in many part of Assam. Originally the religion of the Bodos is said to be animistic. From the very ancient period they are originally worshiper of nature. Their religion is known as *Bathou*. The term “*Ba*” means five and “*Thou*” means root. So they worship five natural element i.e. air, earth, water, fire and sky. The Bodos worship their supreme God Bathou Brai with other deities in almost regular feature. They worship *siju plant* as a symbolic representative of Bathou Brai. In the Boro society there are several clan or social groups prevalently branded with ‘ary’. They are *Swargiary, Basumatary, Narziary, Musahury, Goyary, Daimary, Kherkhatary, Mahilary, Lahary, Hajowary, Islary* etc. The derivation of their clans mainly found from their traditional beliefs is remarkable. (Basumatary,2015). As a worshiper of nature the knowledge of the bodos regarding the various natural objects is very significant. The present study is conducted among the bodos of Jalukbari village of Boko area for understanding the traditional health care practice and the use of various flora and fauna as medicine.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for the present study collected through an extensive field investigation. The observation method is applied for the identification of the various plants, animals and flowers which are used for medicinal purposes. Both Structured and unstructured Interview is extensively applied as a key method for the present study. The people especially old person and medicine man is selected as key informants for gathering the data regarding the preparation of medicine and treatment in different ailment and diseases. The photographs of the medicinal plants are taken from the field by the help of informants.

**Table-1. Indigenous Medicinal Plants and its usage**

Serial No.	Local name	English name	Scientific name	Part Used	Form and Process of usage	Ailment and Disease
1	<i>Siju</i>	Indian spurge tree	<i>Euphorbia neriifolia</i>	leaf	Juice	Cough
2	<i>Bahekata</i>	Basaka	<i>Phlogacanthus jenkinsii</i>	Flower and leaf	1. Flowers are fried by putting little bit oil and sometime without oil. 2. Juice prepared from the leaves	Gastric, stomach problem,
3	<i>Akhan</i>	Crown flower	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Leaf	Paste and Juice	Toothache, cough and chest pain.
4	<i>Teteli</i>	tamarind	<i>Tamarindus indicus</i>	Ripe fruits	Ripe tamarind juice	High blood pressure
5	<i>Amarlota/sugunilota</i>	Tende twig	<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>	root	Juice	Diabetic
6	<i>Madhuriam</i>	Guava	<i>Psidium guajava</i>	leaf	Juice	Enterobiasis and bowel problem
7	<i>Sirota</i>	Maha tita	<i>Andrographis paniculata</i>	leaf	juice	Enterobiasis
8	<i>Dhamkhu/Doron</i>	Thumbai	<i>Leucas aspera</i>	Leaf and flower	Little drops of Juice used on the nose	Sinusitis, cold
9	<i>Masala bon/garmony gass</i>	Common floss flower	<i>Chromolaena odorata</i>	leaf	paste	Stop bleeding
10	<i>Amita</i>	Papaya	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Fruits, leaf	1. Ripe fruits 2. Dried leaf stem in form of cigarette	1. Irregular bowel problem 2. Dry cough.

11	<i>Nemutenga</i>	Lemon	Citrus limon	Fruits	1. Lemon juice wetted cloths used on the forehead  2The smell of leaf and fruits	1. High fever 2. Vomiting problem
12	<i>Kolful</i>	Banana flower	Musa paradisiaca	Flower	Eats in form of Fried and curry	To treat deep cut and wound
13	<i>Ganmoris /jaluk</i>	Black pepper	Piper nigrum .	fruits	Juice with boil water	Common cold, flu etc.
14	<i>Noharu</i>	Garlic	Allum sativum	Cloves	Juice, fried garlic used to massage and smell to cure cold	High blood pressure, cough and cold
15	<i>Neem</i>	Indian ilac	Azadirachta indica	leaf	Paste and juice	Skin care ,Enterobiasis
16	<i>Nilajibon</i>	Sensitive plant	Mimosa pudica	Flower, leaf,root	Paste and juice	Piles, urine problem, skin care
17	<i>bhedailota</i>	Skunkvine	Paederia foetida	leaf	Fried, soup with small fish	Liver and Stomach problem
18	<i>Tulsi</i>	Holy basil	Ocimum tenuiflorum	leaf	Juice	Cough
19	<i>Chamgha</i>	Cuckoo pint	Arum maculatum	Root	Raw root is eaten	Skin disease

					with banana	
20	<i>Sewali</i>	Night flowering jasmine	Nyctanthes arbour-tristis	Flower, leaf	Curry prepared from the flower and sometime fried. Leaf are in form of juice.	Dry cough, Enterobiasis, indigestion, diabetes
21	<i>Nayantara</i>	Periwinkle	Cathartus roseus	Flower, leaf	juice	Cough, Diabetes

**Table.2.The plants used in medicinal purposes:**



***Siju***

(*Euphorbia neriifolia*)



***Baheka***

(*Phlogacanthus jenkinsii*)



***Akhan***

(*Calotropis gigantea*)



***Amita***

(*Carica papaya*)



***Sirota***

(*Andrographis paniculata*)



***Sewali***

(*Nyctanthes arbour-tristis*)



***Tulsi***

(*Ocimum tenuiflorum*)



***Jaluk***

(*Piper nigrum*)



***Nayantara***

(*Catharanthus roseus*)



***Cham gha***

(*Arum maculatum*)



***Modhurium***

(*Psidium guajava*)



***Kolful***

(*Musa paradisiaca*)



***Amarlota***

(*Tinospora cordifolia*)



***bhedailota***

(*Paederia foetida*)



***Dhumkhu***

(*Leucas aspera*)



***Nilaji bon***

(*Mimosa pudica*)



***Nemu***

(*Citrus limon*)



***Neem***

(*Azadirachta indica*)

**Table.3 Fauna /fish/birds/reptile etc. used in various medicinal purposes**

Serial No.	Local Name	English Name	Scientific name	Part Used	Process of usage	Ailment and Disease
1	<i>Ketela pohu</i>	hedgehog	Erinaceinae	liver	Juice makes from dried liver by boiling.	Dry cough, gastric
2	<i>Hihu</i>	River dolphin	Platanista gangetica	Body fats	Oil prepared	Used in body for massage to reduce joint pain
3	<i>Paro</i>	Pigeon	Columbidae	All body parts	Consumed by preparing soup	Low blood pressure, physical weakness, muscle pain
4	<i>Murgi</i>	Chicken	Gallus gallus domesticus	All body parts	Consumed by preparing soup	Low blood pressure, physical weakness, cold
5	<i>Kusia</i>	Asian Swamp eels	Synbranchiformes	All body parts	Consumed by preparing soup	Low blood pressure, weakness
6	<i>Gongatop mas</i>	Ocellated puffer fish	Tetraodon cutcutia	All body parts	Dried form and mixing with water	Indignation and distended abdomen
7	<i>Magur mas</i>	Catfish	Clarius batrachus	All body parts	Normal soup	Physical weakness
8	<i>Singi mas</i>	Indian catfish	Heteropneustes fossilis	All body parts	Normal soup	Physical weakness
9	<i>Kekora</i>	crab	Brachyura	All body parts	Fried, curry prepared with tart	Jaundice
10	<i>Shamuk</i>	Snail	Gastropoda	Body part	Curry with black gram	Vision problem

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table.1** shows that there are 21 indigenous medicinal plants/herbs used by the bodos of Boko area, Assam in the treatment of some ailment and disease. The indigenous people are primarily aware and have knowledge about the various plants available on their surroundings. They usage those plants as foods and in their health care practices. The most common ailment and diseases like cold, cough, fever, blood sugar, blood pressure, indigestion, liver problem, gastric, skin disease etc. are treated through the various parts of plants.

**Table.3** shows the various fauna, birds, fish, crab etc. which are significantly used in the traditional health care practices. These are also an important part of the indigenous food habits. It is also observed that the plants and animals are used through magico-religious practices to cure the disease.

Among the bodos beliefs in spells and amulets are significantly observed in their traditional health care practice. The bodos believes that the *memang* and shadow of ghost are the malevolent spirit. If any person come on touch with those spirits may suffer in unconsciousness, strokes, abnormal behaviour etc. The persons suffered in those conditions are treated by the *oja* (shaman). The *oja* performs various religious rituals, utters

mantras to treat the persons. The *oja* gives *tabis* (amulet) which is made with metal and the various parts of animals and plants.

Like many other natural objects the use of ginger is significant in the bodo society to cure indigestion and ward off the evil eye vision. Super natural belief is one of the parts of the tribal social life. In some case when a person is suffered in indigestion problem it is believed that the person is vision by evil eyes. To cure the indigestion problem and to ward off the evil eye, *adajara* is taken from the medicine man. *Adajara* is the ginger which is given by the medicine man to eat the person suffered in indigestion due to evil eye vision. This kind of ethno-medicinal practice is most commonly observed in the bodo society.

## CONCLUSION

The traditional health care practice of the bodos is significant for the use of various plants and animals. The traditional knowledge and practice of a community defines its culture and is one of the main institutions that a culture identifies itself with. With modern formal education and the awareness of health in terms of scientific explanation of medical professionals, people have lost faith in the validity of traditional medicine (Giri, 2019). But the value of the traditional health care and Ethnomedicine are inescapable. There are many challenges face Ethnomedicine in future due to rapid loss of biodiversity. Ethnomedicine is the foundation for the invention of new medicines. Proper documentation of traditional knowledge on medicinal plants with their identification and cultivation should be done which helps to preserve traditional knowledge as well as medicinal plants (Miya et.al., 2020). The traditional knowledge of the plants and animals has a broad scope in the modern medical research.

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