

TRADITIONAL HEALER OF THE BODOS: THEIR ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE SOCIETY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY

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REGISTRATION NO: HIS001 OF 2019-20

BU REGISTRATION NO: BUP0261/2013



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2021



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the present dissertation entitled **Traditional Healer of the Bodos: Their Role and Significance in the Society**, is the result of original research carried out by Bidintha Narzary under my supervision and the best of my knowledge and belief, neither this dissertation nor any part of it forms the basis of any research degree either in this University or anywhere else.

I am pleased to forward the thesis to the Bodoland University for its evaluation by the concern examiners.

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Oinam Ranjit Singh who has helped me immensely throughout until the completion of this work. I am very much indebted to him for his insightful guidance and untiring motivation and suggestions.

I would also like to express my gratitude towards the faculty members of the Department of History, Bodoland University Dr. Jaysagar Wary, Dr. Sudev Chandra Basumatary, Jaydip Narzary and Dr. Nushar Bargayary. I offer my heartfelt regards to them for their insightful recommendations and help.

I am also very grateful to my parents, my sister and my friends who were always there for me. I am indebted to them for their encouragement and support in various ways during my research work.

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CHAPTER: I

Introduction

The Bodos, who are considered as the Mongoloid group of the people, are mainly inhabited in the North Eastern part of the India particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley. However, the history of the arrival of the Mongoloids into India is uncertain but their presence in India was recorded since 10th century B.C. in the Vedas.¹ Linguistically, the Bodos include the Tibeto- Burman speaking people who are spread in North Bengal, East Bengal, Assam and Burma. Historically the Bodos constituted a large number of people like Rabhas, Garos, Dimasas and Kacharis of Cachar district, Tipras, Sonowals etc.² Tracing back to the ancient Vedic scriptures of *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*, the scripture informed us about the *Kiratas*, the ancestor of the Bodos as the cave dwellers on the mountain ridges of Himalayas, who the Aryans obtained drugs, herbs and soma plants.³ They later assimilated with the composite Hindu civilization of Aryan, Austric and Dravidian race that led to fusion in the culture, language and mixture in blood with the other people resulting to racial intermixture.⁴ Thus, Bodo was a generic name for the Tibeto-Burman speaking group of Sino-Tibet origin. In present times, Bodos are scattered throughout Assam concentrated mostly in the Northern bank of Brahmaputra valley.⁵ The Bodos depended mostly on agriculture and rice was the chief crop cultivated along with other crops like pulses, cotton, sugarcane, tobacco etc.⁶ Rice was their staple diet which was supplemented with variety of vegetable collected from neighboring forest and meat like pork, chicken, mutton etc. were also consumed. Their livestock includes cattle, pig chicken, cock, goats etc. Castrated cocks were very important to Bodos as it was served during important events in the household and often offered during rituals and sacrifices as well. *Jumai* (rice beer), traditional beverage of the community holds an important place in Bodo household which were usually made by women in the house. It was served to welcome guest, during various celebrations like festivals, ceremonies, rituals etc. It is also considered as medicine which gives relief from bowel disorder, cholera etc.⁷ Besides, women were also indulged in various craft making activities like weaving,

endi (silk) rearing etc. However, they adopted traditional techniques and methods for all kind of activities like cultivating, fishing, weaving, medicine making etc.

The traditional techniques and methods have been inherited body of knowledge which passed through one generation to another through ages. These legacies has thus been preserved, developed and transmitted in order to keep their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity on the basis of their continued existence. In that process they developed their own cultural pattern, social institutions and legal systems. There are regional variations and similarities on the principles and philosophy of the traditional healing. It could be seen that there were similarities based on the knowledge of the law of nature and on the basis of understanding of how it influenced the lives on earth. The traditional practices involved dancing, singing, collecting food from the forest, fishing, craft making, and medicinal practices etc., which were part of the socio-cultural practices of the people.

The traditional medical system is a community's ideas and practices relating to illness and health. The traditional healing system is often considered to be ethno-medicinal system that are culturally established and can only be understood in the context of the wider culture of which they are part of.⁸ The study basically deals with ethnomedicine or the medical culture of the Bodos and their medical knowledge. The medicinal knowledge was developed as preventive and protective measures against any form of sickness and illness they suffered from. Some set of scientists believed that further evolution and urbanism led to new patterns of ill health.⁹ Domestication and agriculture were held responsible for the changes in the conditions of life which was responsible for producing potential parasite and disease-producing micro-organisms. Tropical diseases like malaria was borne out of slash and burn technique of agriculture which caused mosquitoes to breed in stagnant pools of water.¹⁰ It also highlights the community's belief towards the causation of disease and their preventive and curative measures and their diagnostic method and treatment. Ethnomedicine is an area of anthropology and a part of culture which gives an idea about the beliefs and the societal norms and values of the community. The study also reveals about the animistic belief of the community and their relation and equation with the environment.

The medicinal practices of the Bodos are also deeply rooted with the traditional religion, belief system, customs, social values and environment which therefore make it necessary to study it in a historical context. The healing practice includes indigenous methods like performing rituals, animal sacrifices and certain magico-religious elements. Various ancient communities believed in magic and religion in terms of causation and treatment of diseases.¹¹ The healer in the Bodo community is referred as *Oja*, who perform rituals, chant mantras and provides various kinds of medicines, amulets etc. The aspects of the traditional healing practices and traditional medicines of the community are deeply rooted with the traditional religion, customs, belief, culture and environment. Everything that is considered to have life is believed to be interconnected and intertwined which affects each other. Thus, the community believed on living with harmony with everything around them to ensure balance in spirit, mind and body. The reference of appeasement to the local deities like *dwi ni mwdai* (river deity), *hagra ni mwdai* (forest deity), *gamini mwdai* (village deity) etc¹² indicates the perspective related to illness associated to imbalance or disruption with nature.

The traditional healers have their own field of expertise and their techniques also differ considerably. Besides appeasement to gods and goddesses, the healers also provided medicines made of herbs, plant and animal sources etc. There were two types of healers among the Bodo society on the basis of their healing techniques; the spiritual healer, one who dealt with rituals and appeasement of god and the herbal healers who just provided medicines to treat the patient. Their treatment was not just curative but it was believed to have protective and preventive properties as well. The healers made different kinds of medicines like tablets, juice, ointment etc. depending on the nature of the sickness. Ointment was for external use which were generally given in order to relieve pain or to treat skin diseases, wounds etc. some healer even provided amulets, *kashinis* etc. that had to be worn either on the wrist or on the neck. It was believed that such things kept away the evil spirit from the patient and the family.

The Atharva Veda, Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and various other literatures of the ancient communities mentioned about the medicinal practices.¹³ However, the traditional healing practice of the Bodos has not been documented in any written form but it has been kept alive in the form of practices. The *mwntwr*

(incantations) chanted reveals about the beliefs associated to the traditional healing practices of the Bodos. It is still being practiced and the people depend on traditional healer to get themselves treated from various diseases. The oral sources help in reconstruction of the traditional healing practice which informs that healing was basically governed by belief system and their indigenous religion. Generally, belief was an inherited attributes and acceptance by the people which were followed while practicing rituals. Faith was also an important mechanism in healing that was primarily governed by religion. Religion was an efficacy through faith, which depended on the will of some higher power, some power whose interventions were sought by rites of supplication and propitiation.¹⁴ The traditional healing in ancient societies was basically depended on faith where they attributed the causation and treatment of disease to gods and goddesses.¹⁵ They believed that in order to get themselves treated from the illness they had to pacify the gods and goddesses.¹⁶ The healer therefore arranged for performance of rituals where they acted as a mediator between the gods and human. The traditional healing exists in many forms beyond the knowledge of herbs to spiritual healing and the methods of healing varied. There were several factors that led to variation in methods; some of which includes climate, geography and the availability of materials used for the purpose of treatment. The methods varied from *Oja* to *Oja* where some performed rituals to pacify gods and goddesses to treat the people from illness while there were some who stroked the body of the patient with the help of *Sal Daokhumwi* (wild fern) with reciting *Mwntwrs* (incantation) to release the patient from the possession of the evil spirit. The Bodos believed that a person is regarded as normal till he is free from all kinds of affliction, be it mental or physical.

The study also deals with the belief and practices of the Bodos in relation to causation and treatment of disease. The Oxford Concise Medical dictionary defines disease as “a disorder with a specific cause and recognizable signs and symptoms”.¹⁷ Disease and illness are not new phenomenon. Every primitive society had their own established social beliefs attached to their healing system.¹⁸ Some scholars have claimed the theory of psychodynamic on influencing religious beliefs. Freud argues that religion is an expression of illusion that served to support the beliefs of the people. Furthermore, he states the similarities between religious rituals and the rituals practiced by obsession neurosis impacts pathological counterparts. The study also highlights

about Cultural Bound Syndrome and the approach associated to it. It basically concerns about the etiology i.e., the causation of the disease and the perception towards it. The cause of illness was basically believed to have been caused by supernatural beings who were appeased through ceremonies in order to cure the patients. The cause of affliction was attributed to the practice of witchery as well as a result of revenge or jealousy over other party or person. Many scholars believed disease as an “Elusive Entity” which to a large extent is socially constructed and that their explication varied with changing social and cultural expectations.¹⁹ The concept of disease has also been compared to the theory of Historical Relativism which did not have any standard truth and that their interpretation could only be understood in their terms.²⁰ It was a persistent belief among the Bodos that disorders and diseases were perceived as a form of punishment for wrongdoings. These perceptions are likely to evoke intense feelings of guilt in the patient or the family of the patient. These show the nature and etiology of the condition that are influenced by the religious and cultural beliefs. There are some theories postulated by the western scholars regarding disease and their co-related practices. Disease as an abstraction of the vital essence; which was a prevalent belief among the primitive communities that disease was caused by some other supernatural being and disease as a result of possession; where a patient is believed to be possessed by a spirit.²¹ This belief existed among the Bodos as well where the *Oja* took the role to drive away the spirit from the patient.²² However, there seems to be certain similarity in the beliefs and the practices of several ancient societies. The *Mwntwr* chanted by the *Oja* also reveals the aspect of magico-ritual element in the treatment among the Bodos. It also reflects the beliefs and practices that existed among the people of the community that pacifies gods and goddesses to cure the person and bring him back to a normal state. The rituals were performed by the *Oja* and offerings were made to the chief God *Bathou* and to other local deities as well. Besides, in order to appease the gods and goddesses, there are references of sacrifice as well. The following is one of the *Mwntwr* chanted by *Oja* to appease the god to treat the child from stomachache:

“ohm zol khubir, dacha khubir, nalkhubir, dahalakhubir, nonsra phisa pohra don phisou don, bisorkhou nonsora daibadai khalam, nonsoro amokhikou mwjan khalam nangow, oi aphaphor, dahalakhubir, dakli amokhia udai cananoi aikhan bykhan zabay

baybla, bekhou mazan khalambla goy phatoi, ranadekhra hono hannonoi phao phuja hono honnanonoi raithi khanai ya donoi noncor nohonay zabai.”

The song throws a light on the magico-ritual elements in the belief system. The song is being sung for the water and curd deity, while the girl is suffering from stomach ache. The lord is being offered betel nut and leaf and the promise has been made to sacrifice and behead a red hen, when the girl is cured. It is believed that malevolent gods attack the children, which becomes impossible to treat them with just a medicine, so offerings and sacrifices are made. The same belief is said to have existed during the Vedic period where disease was believed to be caused by an external force rather than an internal physiological factor.²³ The traits of the *Ojas* have been compared to various healers like the Vedic healers and other contemporary healers or sorcerer of the world and the parallel process that went through. This shows that cultures of the same level of primitiveness manifest similar cultural characteristics.

The *Ojas* hold an esteemed position in the Bodo society and they are consulted not just to cure diseases but to treat them from social and emotional afflictions as well. There were several kinds of *Oja* who assumed different roles like herbalist who provided herbal medicines and some spiritual *Oja* who acted as the mediator between god and humans to solve the human problems including diseases. Traditional healing focuses on holistic as well as religious approach as a result of which the practice is still relevant in the present Bodo society. Besides, cost-effectiveness and dissatisfaction towards scientific medicine also contributes to the significance of *Ojas*.

The study also emphasizes on the role of traditional healer of the Bodos and their significant contribution in the field of medicine and treatment. Medicine is defined as the science of healing which contains the treatment and prevention of disease and the practice of the diagnosis for promotion of health.²⁴ The primitive people had significantly developed the concept of medicine under the spectrum of their culture beliefs and values. They had come up with traditional healing system that was basically governed by the beliefs associated with their culture. Traditional religion, *Bathou* played an important role in traditional healing practice. The ceremonies and offerings done performed by the *Oja* were done on the basis of *Bathou* rituals. The Traditional healing practice became to be a boon for the people during the absence of advanced

medical systems. The healing ability was acquired by *Ojas* in several ways which include inheritance from ancestors, transmitted from another healer, and some *Ojas* developed through training and initiation. They go through several years of learning and experimenting which go through various process of trial and error method. There are also healers who claim to be gifted who recognize that they possess the healing gift from certain age.²⁵

Religion has played a major role in traditional healing practices around the world. Almost all the religions believed that devotion to the spiritual path brings positivity in one's life.²⁶ It has governed human thought and behavior over the centuries which have influenced the lives of the individuals and upon groups and culture. It has stimulated consciousness in the form of meditations, prayers, hymns, rituals etc.²⁷ Faith is an important aspect of traditional healing which is based on a complex and cohesive system of thoughts and beliefs. The ancient Indian healing practices also derived its idea of healing from philosophical texts and scriptures.²⁸ Faith, spirituality and religion are inter-related and it worked as an important mechanism in traditional healing. Spirituality is an object of faith believed in the form of God, nature or person which guides them towards faith. Furthermore, Religion is the way of life with common belief, common spiritual pursuits and common faith. Almost all the religions believe that devotions to the spiritual path bring positivity in one's life.²⁹ Faith healing basically worked upon the psychology of the person and treats their mental as well as physical afflictions. The folk healing therefore become more convincing to the patient as the whole process takes place between the members of the same community. The relationship between mind and body that influences each other are considered to be the two aspects of same reality in the West as well as in the Indian tradition since ages.³⁰ The healer plays a potential role of the therapist where he controls the mind of the patient and initiate to the process of healing. The Bodos believed on spirituality and vital healing, it is evident from the reference of the rituals dedicated to the deities like *Dwi Ni Mwdai* (river god), *hagra ni mwdai*, (forest god).

The traditional healing practice is still prevalent among the community as it is convenient for the people living in remote areas. Besides, they are sustainable and self-reliant form of health care practice. The unavailability of Public Health Care centers in

certain areas and inaccessibility due to poor communication leads people to rely on traditional healers. They are also easily available and affordable who exist almost in every village delivering health care services with the local resources available to them. However, there are certain drawbacks of the traditional healing practice as well; the healers do not go through any kind of intensive research, they basically follow trial and error method which could end up getting negative results. It is because of their lack of knowledge of emerging research and evidence in this area it fails to form a part of scientific medical practice as an alternative system of healing. So, it brings indifference and creates lack of interest for the alternative forms of healing and makes it labeled as superstition often.

The Bodos derived the natural resources from the environment. Environment was another important aspect of traditional healing. The healers used all kinds of materials that were locally available in their surroundings. They were basically naturopaths who dealt with all things natural for the purpose of treatment and cure. They depended on the environment around them for the resources for the purpose of making medicine. The plant sources like leaves, roots, stems, bark of the tree, fruits, seeds etc and the animal sources like fats, skin, nails, bird feathers etc. were all available around them. Most of the Bodo folks usually had the knowledge of treating themselves from fevers, flu, typhoid, jaundice and migraine. Although not everyone would be an expert in it, but most of them would have a brief knowledge about it. The eggs of the cellar spider have been used in treatment of fractured bones or injury. The *Laksa* or *Silaci*, a kind of lac was also mentioned in the Vedas as an important remedy to mend injury or fractured bone. The resources available in the environment provided the materials to the healers to make possible for them to perform rituals. The healer's knowledge of the local flora and fauna and their dependence on it could be seen. The healer did not just have the knowledge of the plant and animal sources but they were aware about their nutritional value as well. They were aware about the food sources that had to be consumed during the supposed time. The *Ojas* today has however seen to face some problem due to unavailability of certain sources. For example, earlier the materials and sources required for making medicines would easily be available to them. But now due to encroachments and population growth, several forests gradually

disappeared which become a difficult issue for the *Ojas* to get the materials for the ritualistic purpose.

Towards the end, the study also highlights about the initiatives taken by the governmental organization and non-governmental bodies' role in safeguarding the traditional healers of various regions. It also stresses on the role of the organization like AYUSH in promoting the folk medicinal practices by revitalizing the traditional techniques for primary health care services and also encouraging the healers for alternative medical practice.

Statement of the problem

Traditional medicinal system has been an important part of history of any primitive society as it deals with the socio-cultural aspect of their life. Although there has been numerous work done on the ancient medicinal system of various primitive communities, the traditional healing system of the Bodos before the advent of modern medicine has been left untouched. Though some scholars have attempted to discuss about the healers, socio-cultural and religious aspects of the life of the Bodos however, very limited work has been done on the traditional healers of the community of the present study. Attempt has been made to emphasize on the role and significance of the traditional healers and to examine the medicinal value of the herbs with the relevancy of the traditional healers in the Bodo society of the BTAD area.

Objective of the Study:

1. To discuss the belief and practices related to traditional healing.
2. To throw light on the traditional religion as an important aspect of Traditional Healing System.
3. To highlight the role of *Oja* and their significance in the society.

Area of study

The area of the study is mainly on the Bodo inhabited area of the BTAD. The dissertation attempts to study the traditional healers of the Bodo from the BTAD area comprising 4 districts. Kokrajhar district is nestled on the bank of river Brahmaputra which lies on the north of Bhutan and south of Dhubri district. It lies in between 26°18' N to 26°54' N latitudes and 89°46' E to 90°58' E longitudes.³¹ The area of the district is 4.04 percent of the total area of Assam which makes 3296.00 sq. kms.³² The Bongaigaon district lays on the east and towards the west lies the West Bengal border. Historically, Kokrajhar was a part of undivided Goalpara district until 1957 when it became sub division.³³ It was upgraded to Kokrajhar district on 1st July, 1983 which extended from the Manas river in the east to the Sankosh on the West.³⁴ There was change in the geographical area of Kokrajhar district after reorganization of the districts in 1989.³⁵ However, Kokrajhar district becomes part of BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) after the Memorandum of Settlement of February, 2003.³⁶ The area under BTC jurisdiction is called BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area District). It consists of four districts Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang. Udalguri was previously civil sub-division under the Darrang district prior to the formation of BTC. As a part of the accord signed on 10th February, 2003, Udalguri became one of the four districts under BTAD. Chirang was carved out of the districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Barpeta. Chirang was created as one of the four districts under clause 6 of article 332 by the 90th amendment act, 2003 of the constitution of India under the provision of sixth schedule vide notification no. Gag (b) 137/2007/pt/117 dtd. 30/10/2003. The district has been functioning with effect from 4th June, 2004. Baksa district was carved out of Nalbari, Barpeta, Kamrup and some portion of Darrang district. As a result of the historic Bodoland Territorial Council accord signed on February 10, 2003, Baksa was one of the most important Dooars of Bhutan.

Methodology:

The study of the present work is based on interdisciplinary method which includes historical and social anthropological approach. The historical method is mainly based on the published and unpublished sources as well as secondary work which are carried out by different scholars in the field of the traditional healers and the role of healers in the society. Social anthropological method is also employed to get the accurate picture of the subject which includes interview with the knowledgeable person, observation, participation and survey method etc. The collected data are analyzed critically qualitatively.

Review of Literature:

Primitive Mentality is a book by Lucien Levy Bruhl which is the sequel of his work *Les Fonctions mentales Dans Les Societes Inferieures or Mental Functions published* in 1910. The book is basically a work on the characteristics of the primitive mind as prelogical and mystic. Bruhl has made it clear that the objective of his work to show what causation meant to the primitives and their idea behind it. He states the differences between the mind of the primitive people and the civilized people. Lucien Levy Bruhl basically talks about primitive's distaste for the discursive operations of thoughts for example their thoughts and ideas were very limited and they just believed on what they saw. They basically did not bother to analyze it which seemed to lack the reflection of thought. They actually believed that the objects and its entities are involved in a system which is interrelated. The primitive believed that whatever happened around them were all consequence of manifestation of mysticism and occult forces. Bruhl emphasizes that the mental attitudes and processes in races are historical rather than biological which evolve by social experience rather than predetermined nervous structure.

Medicine Magic and Religion is a book by W. H. R. Rivers that deals with the concept of medicine from the primitive times. The book basically exemplifies the principles and methods which gives an idea for the study of the history of social institutions. Rivers informs about the methods adopted for treatment of diseases with reference to various primitive societies. He gives reference of two theories related to disease and its co-related practices which are disease as abstraction of the vital essence and disease as a result of possession. The book also reveals the idea that religion and medicine belong to same discipline. Rivers states that the fundamental aim of primitive religion was to safeguard life, which was achieved by certain simple mechanical procedures considered rational inference which is often believed to be false. Thus, the book helps in understanding the indigenous social and religious institutions that governs the belief of the people.

Chinese Medicine-New Medicine is a book by Frederick Fengtien Kao that informs about the development of Chinese medicine through ages. He talks about the traditional methods of making medicine which has been derived directly from the nature like plants, animals and mineral products. He also portrays the belief that existed among the people and the factors like the pathological causes or environmental conditions that contributed to making medicines. Kao primarily focuses on the evolution of Chinese medicine that began from trial and error method to rationalized medicinal system that was made in accordance to the law of nature. It is an important book that deals with ancient medicinal system and helps to understand the medicinal agents that were made to treat the pathological defects.

Superstition in medicine is a book by Dr. Hugo Magnus which talks about superstition in Greek medicine prior to the 6th century B. C. The book initially deals with how religion also plays an important role in superstitious healing, as sometimes celestial beings were also held responsible for the cause of disease. Hugo stresses on the role of religion in eliminating the disease prior to the development of scientific medicine. The book helps to understand the role of religion as an important institution that basically governed the mind of the people in primitive times.

Psychology, Religion and Spirituality by David Fontana emphasizes on the major role of Religion in shaping human thought and behavior. Fontana focuses his

study on the psychology of the human mind which is governed by religion. He points out that religion stimulates consciousness in various forms like meditation, prayer, hymn, rituals etc. He opines that religion controlled the lives of the individuals influencing upon their groups and culture. The book helps to understand the effects of religious and spiritual belief on human thoughts and behavior and upon physical and psychological health.

Ann Mc Elroy and Patricia K. Townshend's book *Medical Anthropology in Ecological Perspective* deals with the concept of holistic and ecological approach of health and well-being in the primitive times. It also highlights the relationship between nutrition and subsistence. The book mainly focuses on the socio-cultural environment that determines the notion of health and well-being. It discusses on the mental and psychological related issues as a factor of Cultural Bound Syndrome. This book mainly helps to understand the concept of socio-cultural and environmental relation of every primitive society.

Stephen Boyden in his book *The Bionarrative: The Story of Life and Hope for Future* discusses about the process of evolution of life and the ecological changes that takes place in between. He talks about the state of earth before the human evolution took place and then he discusses about the changes and drawbacks of the evolutionary process where he mentions about the process of human civilization which started with the phase of food production, a shift from hunting and gathering. It is considered as an early urban phase and a shift in the production of economy. These changes were responsible for creating changes in the society and bring social complexities. It also brought biological changes including diseases leading to its spread globally.

Planet Medicine is a classical work on the evolution and development of medicine with times by Richard Grossinger. Grossinger discusses about various healing methods and its connection from around the world like Tibetan medicine, Chinese medicine, Ayurveda etc. He stresses on the epistemology of somatic and energetic system of healing of the people in primitive times. The book basically reveals about the cross-cultural and epistemological connection of medicine and disease from all over the world.

The Evolutionary Medicine is a book by Wenda Trevathan where she mentions that social, psychological and physical illness are caused due the incompatibility between the lifestyles and environment created by human. She talks about the evolutionary histories and strategies to viruses and bacteria to which human play host. She also talks about how cultural ideologies, values and socialization experiences of medical researches often prevent disease and human disorder from being conceptualized in evolutionary terms even if there are relevant data available that make it necessary and logical.

Mary Lindemann in *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* uncovers the social and anthropological perspective on medical history rather than stressing on pathological or biological reasoning. She compares the concept of disease to the theory of Historical relativism where she opines disease as a socially constructed entity that varied with changing social and cultural expectations.

Religious Medicine the history and evolution of Indian Medicine is a book by Kenneth G Zysk. This book provides information about the prehistoric and historic practice of medicine in India as mentioned in Vedas and other ancient text. Zysk attaches an idea and interpretations regarding the origin and the development of the Ayurvedic healing practices. He points out that the Vedic Indians held demonic beings responsible for the cause of diseases and that various rituals were performed in order to evict them and keep them away. Various mythology mentions about the plants and herbs used during the rites. He further states that the medical treaties of Charaka and Sushruta did not disappear completely but was gradually superseded by a system of medicine based on empiro-rational principles and practices. He also talks about Vedic medicine which is completely based on the belief that benevolent and malevolent deities or spirits of the cosmos can affect as well as treat the human realm. The book contains various oral traditions, i.e., verses from *Atharvaveda* and also from *Rigveda*. Zysk also talks about the interrelationship between humans and environment, living in harmony. He states that disease was assumed to be something that resulted out of disruption in the equilibrium between man and environment. Superstitions to certain extent played an important role and demons and gods were held responsible for cause of the disease and treating it. Primarily the book is a portrayal of the ancient tradition of

healing in India that deals with causation and treatment of disease which is homogeneous to the folk healing practices of various ancient communities.

Indian Medicine by Dr. Julius Jolly is a book that deals with ancient Indian way to deal with diseases and its cure. The book is a work of history that deals with Indian medicinal practice in ancient times that compiles together the medicinal practices from various ancient literatures like Ayurveda, Charaka Samhita, Bhavaprakasha. The book gives an idea about the traits used by healers to cure diseases in ancient times.

Medicine and The Raj British Medical Policy in India 1835-1911 is a book by Anil Kumar deals with the introduction of western Medicine in India, opening up of various medical institutes and how it took over the traditional medical science. Kumar also talks about introduction and spread of Homeopathy in India on how it sneaked to India through Lahore. He also wrote a book on his findings on the flora and fauna of the parts of Northern India and the Himalayan region, especially Punjab and Kashmir in his book *Materia-Medica*. He talks about the western medicine as a threat to the existing traditional healing practices which cause insecurity to the *vaid*s and *hakeems*. The book basically gives an idea about the transitional role of scientific medicine that replaced the traditional medicinal system in India.

Folk literature of Bodos is a book by Dr. Anil Boro which is basically a collection of various oral sources and oral traditions of the Bodos that highlight the various social, religious, economic and cultural life of the Bodos. It is made clear in the “Forward” of the book that the Bodos are no longer a primitive or superstitious race but they still live by folk beliefs, institutions, practices, folklore and art. He has interpreted various folksongs and incantations related to traditional healing where he mentions about *Oja* (healer), who plays an important role as a mediator between the God and the devotees in order to treat the patient. He mentions about *Bathou*, the traditional religion as an important aspect of traditional healing. The book is basically a collection of folklore that helps in reconstructing the primitive and superstitious nature of the Bodo community as it portrays the folk beliefs, institutions, practices, folklore and art and culture of the community. Though the book is clearly a work of folklore, it highlights about the beliefs and practices but it does not include details about *Oja*.

Renu Boro's book *Muli Jolonga* provides detailed information about various medicinal plants. The book is basically a manual that contains information regarding various plants and plant products like leaves, roots etc. that could be used as home remedy to cure and prevent various ailments. Besides, she also includes the methods and procedure to use them. She makes it clear that the intention behind the book is to preserve the medicinal knowledge practiced by the Bodos since the early ages. With the advent of western medicine, the traditional medicine and its benefits have been forgotten by the people. Also, she states that due to population growth, deforestation and encroachment of people in forests several herbs, shrubs, plants, trees have taken its way to extinction. Basically the book is a manual to the home remedies that subdues the role of traditional healer.

Folk Songs of the Bodos is a book by M.M. Brahma which compiles various folk songs relating to various aspects of life of the Bodo people. The songs have been translated into English and Assamese text as well. The book also includes various folk songs for various ritual, prayer and philosophy. Nonetheless, the book is basically a collection of oral sources that provides information to reconstruct the early Bodo society.

Boroni Muli Bifang Laifang is a book written by Dr. Birendra Kumar Brahma, Brahmanand Patiri and Hati Basumatary which was published by Bodo Publication Board, Boro Sahitya Sabha. The book contains information about the herbs and plants that are found in the locality which carries medicinal properties to treat various ailments. The book also makes us aware about the Bodos on how they have intertwined culturally and socially with the pristine forests around them. The book also informs about the similarity of traits in the Bodo traditional healing practices with that of the Ayurveda and the Tibetan healing practice. Though the book is a guide to use various medicinal plants and herbs for different kinds of disease, it does not reveal much about the healing procedures.

A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and ceremonies of the Bodos is a book by Dr. Kameshwar Brahma. The book highlights all the aspects of cultural life of the Bodos which deals with various aspects of cultural and social life of the Bodos. He mentions about how religion and beliefs governed different facets of their life. He also

informs about the role of the *Oja* as a medicine-man who interacts with god to treat the patient. Kameshwar Brahma also stresses on causation as the action of god when displeased with human behavior. He also states about how magic was an integral part of tribal religion and a factor of some supernatural order. While he mentions cursory about the role of the *Oja*, their significance has not been discussed.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Belief and Practices related to Traditional Healing

Chapter III: Traditional Healing Practices

Chapter IV: Role of *Oja* and their significance in the society

Chapter V: Conclusion

Chapter one is an introduction which starts with the historical background of the Bodos and brief profile of the community. It also deals with the society of the early times that gives an abstract idea about the cultural and social life of the people. The chapter also throws a light on the indigenous knowledge of the community and their co-existence with the environment.

Chapter two is about the belief and practices that corresponds to the traditional healing practices. It throws a light on religion as an important aspect of disease and healing which basically governs the whole process. The chapter also deals with causation of disease which is attributed to god and various ways to pacify them and various other theories postulated by western scholars regarding the disease and belief associated to it.

Chapter three emphasizes on various indigenous healing methods and materials that goes into making medicines. It also discusses about the importance of various

herbs and plants that are found locally which are nutritious and healthy and about its health benefits.

Chapter four stresses on the role of *Oja* in healing before the advent of modern medicine. It also highlights the importance of Oja in contribution to alternative medicine in today's time. The chapter also deals with Cultural Bound syndrome and the role of Oja in eliminating fear and counseling people.

Chapter five is a conclusion which has discussed about the advantage and the disadvantage of traditional healing practice. It also throws a light on the ignorance towards the healers and how it has become a threat to the healers as most of the species of herbs and plants are on its way to extinction. Emphasis has been made to highlight the initiatives by various organizations to promote the indigenous healing practices.

Endnotes:

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- ² Brahma, Kameswar, *A Study of Socio- Religious beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos with reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District*, Punthi Pustak, Calcutta, 2015, p.5
- ³ Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p.34
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p.16
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6
- ⁶ Endle, Sidney, *The Kacharis*, Bina Library, Guwahati, Assam, 2012, p.14
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p.18
- ⁸ Pool, Robert, Geissler, Wenzel, *Medical Anthropology Public Health*, Open University Press, 2005, p.51
- ⁹ Boyden, Boyden, *The Bionarrative: The Story of life and hope for the future*, ANU Press, 2016, p.68
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- ¹¹ Rivers, W.H.R., *Medicine, Magic and Religion*, International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method, Kegan Paul and Co. Ltd., London 1924, p.213 and Magus, Hugo, *Superstition in Medicine*, Library of Alexandria, USA, 1903, p.108
- ¹² Brahma, Kameswar, *op.cit.* p.
- ¹³ Zysk, Rivers, *Religious Medicine*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York, 2017 p.16
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.200
- ¹⁵ Brahma, Kameswar, *op.cit.*, p.213
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78
- ¹⁷ Lindemann, Mary, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.6
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- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.6
- ²¹ Rivers, *op.cit.*, p.1
- ²² Personal interview with

²³ Zysk, *op.cit.*, p.16

²⁴ Goldberg, Benjamin, Ragland, Evan, *Early Modern Medicine and Natural Philosophy*, Springer, p.20

²⁵ Personal interview with Bankho Basumatary, Age- 78, S/o- Merga basumatary, Vill-Batabari, P.O. – Choraikola & Dist- Kokrajhar, Date of interview- 12.10.2018

²⁶ Fontana, David, *Psychology, Religion and Spirituality*, British Psychological Society and Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003, p.6

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6

²⁸ Dalal, K., Ajit, *Cultural Psychology of Health in India: Wellbeing, Medicine and Traditional Health Care*, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2016

²⁹ Fontana, *op.cit.*, p.44

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.66

³¹ District Census Handbook, Kokrajhar, Village and Town Wise Primary Census Abstract (PCA), Directorate of Census Operation, Assam, Series-19, Part XII-A, 2011, p.3

³² *Ibid.*, p.3

³³ District Census Handbook, Kokrajhar, Village and Town Wise Primary Census Abstract (PCA), Directorate of Census Operation, Assam, Series-19, Part XII-B, 2011, p.9

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.9

CHAPTER: II

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES RELATED TO THE TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES

The ancient society had adopted their own way to deal with all aspects of life. People of those days had developed a strong belief system that influenced the various facets of life including social norms, customs and traditions. The Bodos believed that any kind of accidents and misfortunes like mishaps, loss, diseases etc. were created by gods and goddesses. All these unfavorable events that occurred to them in their life were regarded as a dejection of the god and goddesses according to their action. They had a strong belief system that disease was a phenomenon that was caused by the divine beings. So the Bodos believed that it was important to appease the god and goddesses who had been responsible for the cause of the diseases. In course of time and in different stages of their life, there had been developed the beliefs and practices of the nature of the diseases and created aware to manage it through their traditional system.

Customs and traditions related to healing

The traditional healing is an age-old healing customs and practice of every society before the invention of modern scientific medicine. It has been kept alive till today as some sections of the people desire to choose traditional medicine than that of the modern one. The ancient Indian text like Rig Veda, Atharvaveda, folk literatures, manuscripts, seals documented the ancient healing practice.¹ Some ancient societies documented their practice of the traditional healings and the medicines on the text or manuscripts however some societies did not keep on record in text and manuscript of the knowledge of the healing practices but they passed on the legacy from one generation to the next orally. The Bodos do not have any written document on the traditional healing practices along with the traditional medicines but the knowledge has been kept alive through the practice even

today. The oral traditions and the rituals of the Bodos disclose about the mode of traditional healing and the customs which still in current in the present society. The traditional healing practices include making of herbal medicines, spiritual healing, rituals and sacrifices, which revealed about the magico-religious belief attached to it where they believed that disease has been caused due to the influence of evil spirit. In such kind of healing and rituals the *Oja* (traditional healer) has taken a key role in which he performed offering, chanting *mwntwr* (mantra) to take holistic approach for healing and treating the mind, body and spirit rather than just emphasizing on particular illness. Besides appeasing gods and goddesses to restore their health, the *Ojas* also provided medicines which are made of herbs collected from the forest and environment around them. Even today the traditional healer provides the medicine in the form of tablet, powder, ointment, juice etc. and there are some medicines which are provided in the form of amulets to be worn in particular part of the body with a belief to ward off the evil spirit. Some medicines are also prescribed by the *oja* for dealing with ailments like flu, headache etc., in which the aromatic treatment of various herbs are pounded and mixed with oil.

The folk songs and the hymns that have been chanted by the *Oja* signified the belief system of healing practice of the Bodo. The songs are mostly dedicated to the local deities, which testified the vital aspect of religion in the field of healing. The Hindu system of medicine as mentioned in Ayurveda also refers to dieties like *Asvin*, *Rudra* and other Gods with reference to disease and its cure.² Atharvaveda especially contains various charms and spells that reflect the beliefs of the people of the ancient times.³ The hymns and the prayers chanted also indicate about the belief attached to healing. It mentioned about ritual dedication to various gods and goddesses to appease them. For example the *Rudra's* disease which included sores, wounds or swellings could be cured by *Rudra's* medicine i.e., *jalasa*, a medicine of watery texture.⁴ The Atharvaveda also informed about the personification of plants and herbs which were used for the healing various kinds of diseases.⁵ *Kustha*, an aromatic plant with divine power which acted as the principal medicine for curing fever as being born out of various divinities has been described in Atharvaveda.⁶ The practices also depict about the magico-religious nature, where religion governed the healing practice. The same nature of healing practice was seen in the Greeks

prior to the invention of scientific medicine.⁷ Their traditional healing practice dealt with beliefs which were superstitious in nature and believed that, everything that went around in the world including disease and its cure was influenced by god.⁸ Disease and illness is not a new phenomenon. Every primitive society found their way to deal with it and made the medicines from the material resources available to them. It is evident that mostly the nature of healing is religious, where religion seemed to have governed the healing practice by imposing its belief and thus the ritual have been organized accordingly. The nature of the traditional healing practices of the Bodos is also religious in nature which is influenced by their traditional religion, *Bathou*. *Bathou* is the traditional religion of the Bodos which worship nature, laid on the principle of *barr* (wind), *orr* (fire), *haa* (soil/earth), *dwi* (water) and *okhrang* (sky). Taking all these elements into account, the rituals are conducted and offerings are made to pacify the local deities.⁹

There is a Bodo word which runs as: “*daokha shila sanai sunai langfwijbwdw*”.¹⁰

Free English Translation:

Wild crows take away the pain and suffering from our lives.

The above word indicates the environmental concept of the Bodo and their relationship with the nature. In the belief system of the Bodos, pain and suffering are mainly caused by some malevolent spirits who sometimes took the form of crow or eagle and only they could take it back away. The malevolent spirits are responsible for ailments and diseases so rituals and offerings are organized to appease them. The Bodos believed that if someone conducted any actions against the social norms then he or she may suffer from the disease as a punishment of the god or demon for his or her misconduct.¹¹ Another belief current among the Bodo is that anyone who suffer from disease are considered to be the result of the occult power because of the practice of the sorcery or witchcraft.¹² Such belief system did not only exist among the Bodos but also found among the other primitive societies as well.¹³ The primitive society in New Zealand, we found “*Atua*”, a demon which resided inside humans and ate his flesh from within which made the person sick, as result of the practice of witchcraft.¹⁴ It was considered that the healer and the priest was the only person who could handle the situation by treating the person with the means of

holistic approach or by exorcising the demon out of the human body.¹⁵ It was the prevalent system of the belief among some primitive society that gods had assigned the priest the responsibility for looking after the people, where priest had to act as the inter-mediator between the God and humans. So, the priest basically looked after the people in case of sickness and treated them as a physician and it was also widely believed that they were given the miraculous power by the God to deal with the sickness and diseases.¹⁶ The mental and physical instability of the person came to be considered due to the influence of the witchcraft practitioner. Most of the primitive communities agreed on the causation of the disease as creation of human agency, some by supernatural or spiritual beings and some as the result of natural causes.¹⁷ These instances make it clear that the primitive societies were manipulated psychologically and governed by certain beliefs that were religious in nature. It is evident that *Bathou*, the traditional religion of the Bodos has elaborate rituals which have been practiced during the traditional healing. During the traditional healing practice, the rituals and prayers are offered to the *Bathou* with the dedication to overcome the unwanted situation as well as to treat the diseases. Dr. Kameshwar Brahma opined that “.... like human beings the gods and goddesses are roaming invisibly. They create troubles the necessity of *Oja* (medicine man) is very great in the Bodo society even today. The *Ojas* understand well when and what diseases attack the people because of the ill motives of the gods and goddesses. Among the different societies besides the tribal societies, the beliefs and practices are prevalent...”¹⁸ The *mwntwr* (hymns) chanted by the *Ojas* or the traditional healers are indicative of the nature of the belief of the Bodos. One of the mantra chantra by *Oja* goes as follows:

*“Oi phipha guru,
 Anan gocay binan Gacay non’
 Ondo ondo nonni ogaian
 Boro phicapharkhou ondo nono
 Oi carzigiri nono
 Nonno phothano, nonno loy zahoyo
 Nonnikhhroi dercin laocin raobo goila’*

Oi Bathouabo bandoba cizouabo goronba
Boroni khugaya phonba
Bima phipha guru, binikhaino bathou
Phathinanoi, cizou gainanoi, gaca gainanoi'
Kham zotha ciphun lananoi non phipakhou oncayo

Ondo apha phipaguru ondo
Ondor cinao gogloiconanoi thanay
Boro phicaphorkhou ondo nono.
Oi phipaguru, khomcinifrai bokhonnanoi
Cranao lando zonkhou.
Corgocaniphray bor carcrinanoi
Hordo nono zon phica phorno. ”¹⁹

Free English translation:

“Oh God, our father protect your ignorant Boro children. You are the creator, preserver and destroyer. All in one, you are peer less. The altar of *Bathou* has five bamboo rings. The *Sijou* plant has five edges, so the Bodos have five principles. We plant *Sijou* on the altar and light the oil flame and offer worship with beating drums and flutes and cymbals play. Oh father, be merciful.”²⁰

The Rigveda mentioned about *bhisaj*, a medicine man or healer, who basically had the knowledge of medicinal plants, recited incantations and knew the traits of healing.²¹ It also informed that the *bhisaj* played the role of *Shaman* and sometimes could even go to the state of trance, where he danced and recited incantation.²² The similar kind of nature is seen in the *kherai puja* which includes music and dance. It is believed that during the time of ritual, the God or the Goddess entered into the body of *Daudini* and the God or Goddess speaks through *Daudini*. *Kherai* ritual is especially conducted when the family witnessed

continuous misfortune or to purify the house. Besides *Daudini*, *Oja* is also equally important who acted as inter-mediator between the *Daudini* and humans and questioned about the misfortunes of the particular family to find out the solution. As the ritual starts, the *Oja* chants the *mwntwr* and asking to *Daudini* to identify who is responsible for the evil effect. The act of the questioning of *Daudini* is a belief system of the Bodos in which the God or Goddess who is in the body of the *Daudini* will give some indications of the questions being asked. With these indications the god will suggest the best solution through the *Daudini* to solve the problems of the family or the concerned person for the well being of the household. The ritual includes sacrifice of chicks in which *Daudini* drinks its blood.²³ The practice shows the magico-ritual nature which constituted part of the healing ritual. This belief suggests that the external factor created by demons or by someone with the help of some supernatural being was responsible for the disease. The practice of sorcery and witchcraft is believed to have been existed in the Bodo society. *Khetra Hamnai* a belief, is believed to have prevalent where the malevolent gods attack the person in the dream in the form of wild animals resulting in him to lose his health day by day and lose his blood completely.²⁴ These state of condition could be overcome with the ritual performed by the *Oja* where he used articles like knife, a pair of bats, vermilion, a piece of charcoal, a small branch of bamboo, rayon of red, white and black colours, a toad and a branch of *endi* (eri, silk).²⁵ The Kotas of Niligiri seemed to have similar pattern of belief where malevolent manipulated their lives, causing problems to them. During such time, the healers were consulted from their neighboring tribe Kurumbas to overcome from such situations.²⁶

Beliefs associated to traditional healing

The magico-ritualistic healing practice also disclosed about the psychological involvement in the treatment in which the *Oja* controlled the entire ritual processes and the treatment was done based on the psycho therapeutic process. However, with reference to the Chinese traditional healing, it is believed by the anthropologist that psychological role played an extraordinary role in traditional healing, where the healers treated the patients to fit in an accepted pattern of health.²⁷ Basically the healers emphasized on overall treatment

than emphasizing on just particular sickness. They considered on treating the person not just for his physical wellness but to work on his mental and spiritual well-being as well. It is a popular belief in ancient India that a healthy person was someone with good mental and physical state, a person was happy if he was not disturbed by any somatic and psychic disorder.²⁸ Primarily, healing aimed at bringing harmony, balance and peace to the person and believed in mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing, a process that balances mind, body and spirit.²⁹ The process of healing brings together the mind, body and spirit in sync which is one of the beliefs of ancient Indian Health care system.³⁰

The hymns recited by the *Oja* also narrate about the sacrifices made during the time of the ritual. In order to appease the god, the mantras chanted recounts how *oja* promised to offer various articles like a pair of betel nut and betel leaf, unusual kind of hens or cocks, chicks etc. when the person recovered from illness. The *Oja* is a mediator between the god and man and conveyed the message lay down by the God and his demands to the people. To fulfill the demands by the god the family had to undergo certain rituals with offering that were asked by the God through the *oja*. The following incantation made during Kherai imparts an idea about the offerings:

“Bathaoano bandoba,

Cizouano goronba,

O ayo..rouli cona.

Athal dainikhou phathal dainikhou

Gua murikhou phan philikhon

Hodon baidi mondon mon

O ayo.. rouli cona

Cari cari oncari

Laizamni phathali

Oncari boncari

Boico mathani ali

Conani alari bathi

Ladon baidi mondon mon

O ayoi.. rouli cona

Zalay zalay phorzalay

Ceca arzilay.

O ayoi.. rouli cona.

Can ni giri canza,

Bhumini giri zaza,

Ma khalam baogan ayoi

Khemani giri noncorno ayoi

O ayoi.. rouli cona.”³¹

Free English translation:

“*Bathou* has five edges, *Sijou* has five ridges, O mother, who goddess of omniscience, we think we have offered pigeon and chicken, and also areca nut along with betel leaf to *Bura Bathou* and also to other gods and goddesses. O mother, thou art of the goddess of omniscience, we think that gold lamp is lit; the leaves are placed in rows with the powder of rice on them on the earth raised in line. Men are born in generations; a disciple is born after a preceptor dies. O *BuraBathou*, *Nabaraja*, *Rangraci*, *Barigontham*, *Mathadonga*, *Moithahaji* and you, the omniscient goddess! The east is the origin of the sun; the king is the owner of the land. We are the doers of the wrong and you are the fountain of mercy, so do have mercy upon us.”³²

The mantras unfold the appeasement of *Bura Bathaou* along with other deities. Further it signified to have been concocted extensively to fulfill the demand of god and goddesses in order to remove all the miseries faced by the concerned person. Offerings like pigeon, hen and cock along with betel nut and betel leaf to the gods and goddesses are also the main content of the mantra. The tradition however was not only confined to the Bodo community but also the other communities in the prehistoric times and also put through similar practices where religion was an important aspect of healing in which the rituals of the healing practice was common among the ancient communities to overcome their troubles by the means to console their gods and goddesses.³³

Midwives generally took care of the pregnant women and the newly born children where they guided the mother as well the children in everything including the foods they were supposed to eat.. In the social restrictions and the taboo of the Bodos, the pregnant woman was forbidden to go to cremation ground with the belief that the evil spirit would influence the expected mother and the fetus in the womb.³⁴ In the tradition and the custom of the Bodo, as soon as the new child is born a ritual is performed by the elderly women of the family sprinkling *dwi gwtar* (holy water) on the child with uttering the following word:

*“Ai gotho, nwngha gw dw ma mwn, Bangal na Jungal, Garo na Gongar, Harsha na Mepal mwn? Dinwi ni frai Boro jabai.”*³⁵

Free English translation:

Hey Child, whoever you were before, whether Muslim, Garo, Non- Bodo or Nepali, you have become Bodo from today.³⁶

When the child refused to take the mother’s breast milk, while the mother continuously try to feed her baby, in such cases the child would be taken to healer or Oja. The *Oja* then performs a ritual reciting the following words:

“Ohom zol khubir, Dakha khubir, khala khubir.

Nal khubir, dahala khubir.

Noncra phica okhra don, phicou akhra dong

Bicor khou noncor aday bidet khalam.
Noncornono goy phatoi hogan an
Acamodoi phaophuza hogan an
Rana dekhra noncoro cotha khinthibay an
Dohayde noncoro amokhikhou mozan khalamnago”³⁷

Free English translation:

Oh, you *Derah* (spirit), old man/old women, you who are wood cutters. You have foolish children and grandchildren. Forgive them for their mischief and cure them. If they are cured, offerings will be made otherwise there will be no sacrifice made. If you are truly God I pray you repeatedly to cure the child immediately.

The mantra transmits an idea on the belief that existed among the people where supernatural possession or spirits is believed to have harmed the person. The mantra is dedicated to *Derha*, the spirit who is considered to be mainly responsible for the cause of the sickness. Prayers and rituals were dedicated to the rivers, tree, forest etc who were believed to be the local deities to them. This act of the rituals and prayers give a clue to us the ecological concept of the Bodo and their attachment to the nature hereto. The river, tree, forest etc. have been personified with the local deities. The prayer has been offered with the recitation of the mantra dedicated to the *mwdai* (spirit) by the Oja who begged the spirit to forgive the person who caused annoyance by his conduct. The motive behind the ritual is to please the *mwdai* (spirit) and to recover from the sufferings caused to the humans by *mwdai*. The rituals consisted of several types of offerings and sacrifices determining at the intensity and nature of the disease. Sacrifices were generally made of animals and birds like goat, cock, hens, chicks etc of particular colour and type that would be demanded by the *oja* who was believed to be the mediator between gods and humans and who headed the rituals

As promised, the *oja* performs the puja and made an offering after the child had cured. The oja chants prayer:

“*Oi aphaphor zolkhubir, dakha khubir,*

Khala khubir, dahala khubir.
Dakhli amokhia udoi cananoi
Aykhan baykhan zabay baybla
Bekhou mozan khalambla
Goy phatoi rana dekhra hono hannanoi
Phao phuza hono honnanoi raithikhanaiya
Dinoi noncorno honay zabay.”³⁸

Free English translation:

Oh you father, the God of *Kubera*. The other day, as I promised you that I shall make an offering of betel nut and leaf if our child is cured. The child is cured with your grace. Hence, I bring you the betel nut and betel leaf.

The mantra apprises about the appeasement to the gods where the local deities like *dwinimwdai* (river deity), *jolongabwrai* (medicine god) are being remembered.³⁹ Water is considered as an important element that could heal various ailments hence, river deities are made offerings. The Vedic text mentions about water as one of the important source through which medicine is derived.⁴⁰ The verse in the Atharvaveda quotes:

“The waters are indeed medicinal; the waters are the *amiva*-dispellers and the waters are medicines for every disease. Therefore, let them make be medicine for you”⁴¹

The children are believed to be under the evil eye of the malignant spirit known as “*Jolonga*”. The *oja* is the person who could bring back the signs in the state of stability by appeasing the *Jolonga* with the performance of ritual and making offering and his main duty is to protect the people from the influence of the evil spirit. Not only this the *ojas* could request the god and the goddesses to pardon and to bring back the normalcy of the person who was displeased by them as a result of his or her misconduct, misbehave and against the social norm. The belief prevailed in the Bodo society was that mental or the physical affliction as well as the catastrophe took place in the life of the man or the family due to the practice of the sorcery by someone who was not in good term with that family or

individual.⁴² The witch or wizard was held responsible for a person's ill-health, which was either a result of jealousy or an act in order to take revenge. It was the only solution to consult the *oja* for resolving the physical and mental unrest faced by them. The *oja* would execute a ritual which include slightly beating on the body with the help of *Sal Daukhumai* (wild fern), while reciting mantras and blowing air from their mouth in order to drive out the evil spirit and the negative forces from the body of the patient.⁴³ Also, for catastrophic situations like this, a religious ceremony called the *Kherai* had been arranged by the family on a fixed timing generally after dusk and continuing to dawn as it was considered to be an appropriate time. The Vedic healing also believed that dawn, noon and early evening was the best time for the ritual.⁴⁴The *oja* was the overall in charge of the whole ceremony, where *Doudini*, performs shamanistic dance and speak out with the power of the God and the Goddesses about the ways and the means to sort out the problem and also foretell for the future with the guidance for the solutions for the safety and security of the life of the person and the family. Several men and women took part in the ritual where some men played the musical instruments like *kham* (drum), *jota* (cimbal), *siphung* (flute) and weapons like *thungri* (sword) and *dahal* (shield) which were the main component of the ritual.⁴⁵ *Doudini* came in the state of trance on the tune of the music played by the men holding the *thungri* (sword) and *dahal*(shield). *Doudini* who had the power of ancestral divinity entered in the state of trance answers on the questions of the illness or distress of the family. As in belief, the *Doudini* had the divine power to understand the fortunes and misfortunes to be taken place in the family as well as the measures for the prevention of the misfortunes.⁴⁶These beliefs are still in current in the Bodo society especially in the remote areas. As and when a person was in fear of the influence of the evil spirit, the *oja* who possessed the knowledge of the healing could resolve. The healing was not only confined to one person but also to the communities of the entire village who came together in the field of the village to perform the ritual. The community conducted the traditional ritual where *Doudini* played the role of the shaman with the performance of the shamanistic dance together with the traditional musical instrument played by men. The medico-religious healing was practiced in other parts of the country too in the ancient period. The Vedic period witnessed the performance of ritual healing where *Bhisaj* played

the principal role in dealing with patients and treating them.⁴⁷ Similar nature of practices were also seen in South India where healer taken the leading role in treating the people from various ailments. The Sangam song also gives an idea on such practices which involved shamanistic rituals, dance and appeasing the gods.⁴⁸

There was parallelism in the belief system throughout the world regarding the etiology of disease. Disease was usually believed to have caused by the outside forces. Two theories attached to the causation of disease. One, disease cause by the vital forces and second, disease caused by the supernatural beings.⁴⁹ According to the first theory, the human body is endowed by the forces and when the forces do not align it brings organisms in disagreeable sensation and abnormal functions thus causing disease.⁵⁰ The other theory is widely believed by almost all the folk cultures around the world which lay the causation of disease on supernatural being.⁵¹ The ritual of appeasement to spirits throws a light on the belief about the supernatural beings that are responsible for the diseases or afflictions in people's life.

The practice of traditional healing is still prevalent in the Bodo society and most of the people still prefer going to traditional healers rather than relying on modern medicine. Tropical climate brings along with it several diseases like malaria, typhoid, dengue etc. which affect the people during certain season. It is very frequent that people suffer from jaundice very persistently, causing fluid in the body which affected their digestive function and even liver, resulting to yellow eyes and urine. Although reasons like unhygienic sanitation, improper diet and excessive dehydration could also lead to jaundice. And another reason could be excessive alcohol consumption which is encouraged during the social ceremonies and celebrations by the community.⁵² However, several ancient sources claim that climatic conditions are responsible for it. Chinese literature, *NeiChing* (Canon of Medicine) makes the earliest reference of Jaundice in China.⁵³ It is evident that in the Southern Sung dynasty, jaundice was not just a factor of fever but environmental factor like moisture could also cause it.⁵⁴ The charm mentioned in Rigveda and Atharvaveda informed about the belief where sun and its source of heat is responsible for it which makes the person yellow so to drive away the demon the healer uses a yellow coloured

bird for its ritual.⁵⁵The Bodos believe that it could be caused by malignant spirit forced as a result of the practice of sorcery where the person's energy and blood are being drained out which in turn makes the person yellow and nauseate.⁵⁶ People still prefer going to traditional healers rather than depending on modern medicine when they suffer from Jaundice as they believe that *ojas* are more effective for the management and curing the jaundice. The traditional healer for the treatment of jaundice gave tablet pounded out of a mixture of several herbs and *endi pitwb* (silk cocoon) also is given for wearing around the neck. There were different types of medicines, some medicines were prescribed to be taken orally, and some were given for application while there were some which were advised to be worn around the body which was believed to ward off the evil spirit. Some *Oja* provided *khasini*, a thread to be worn on the wrist as it was believed that it drove away the evil forces.

It is very important to understand the socio-psychological and cultural concept of health of the Bodo where they attributed the cause of ill health to spirits and demons. Mental illness was another important affliction where they held that evil spirits were responsible for it. They believed that mental illness was either the factor of the practice of sorcery or witchcraft or were caused by gods and goddesses when they were displeased with the human behavior.⁵⁷The traditional healing also emphasized on treating mental illness where the healer counsels the patient by organizing some therapeutic rituals.⁵⁸ It has been believed by the Bodos that in case the medicine could not work in the body of the sick person, the Bodos believed that it would be under the influence of evil spirit. In such situation the malevolent gods should be appeased through the performance of certain rituals. The *oja* performs the ritual by offering a pair of betel-nut and betel-leaf along with other items including flowers, fruits that are available to them.⁵⁹ The fear was removed from patient and the family and the practice make assure of securing from the evil spirit. The prevalent belief system of the Bodo society shows the important role of the *oja* in alleviating the fear where the patient and his family completely relied on him. While the *ojas* did not have any demand for their service they were offered rice beer and castrated cock in return.

Traditional healer played a potential role in alleviating the pain and suffering from people's life. The mind played a primary role in healing both mental as well as physical afflictions. It also manifests the cultural and religious ideologies of the community. The mantras recited reflect about the belief system and the practices and highlighted about the cultural values. Believe and trust are the mechanism on how the healing works which shows that mental actions are necessary for the body response. Healing is more or less a social activity where family members of the patient, neighbours and other villagers participate.⁶⁰The whole process of healing takes place in presence of several people where they come and share their problem, grief and difficulties related to life. The *Ojas* not only tried to remedies the sickness but also counseled the sick people to bring normal life or in the state of normal with the holistic approach.⁶¹ Moreover, the healers' treatment emphasized on the treating the person to regain normal functioning and not as a patient emphasizing on his specific problem.⁶²It was centered on holistic approach where the *Oja* counseled the patient to work together on the improvement of the patient physically, mentally and spiritually. The *Ojas* treated all kind of afflictions. Some *Ojas* were expert at fixing broken bones and to healing of that. The *Oja* learned the art of healing from their predecessors and through the ages of the experience. There were several efforts of trial and error which went through in operation of the healing practice. The healers were believed to be the master in their field and their success was determined on the good response of people towards them. Another important aspect of traditional healing was environment which provided the resources and materials to make medicines. Time and experience taught them the knowledge about the utility of the natural resources. In return of that the *Oja* executed the rituals and offerings in honour and acknowledgment of the gift of nature.

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CHAPTER: III

TRADITIONAL HEALING AND FOLK MEDICINE

Traditional healing has played a crucial role in ancient times before the advent of modern medicine. Every society developed their own version of healing, be it spiritual healing that was governed by their indigenous religion or herbal healing. Although there has been variation in the concept of health, disease and treatment, every society has a set of cultural values and belief system attached to it. Traditional healing does not just reveal about the healing during the early times but it also discloses about the culture of the particular society. It imparts an idea about the early society, beliefs, practices and social norms and also the cultural and religious aspects associated with the traditional healing practice. The traditional healing was more or less governed by their respective cultural and religious ideologies. The traditional knowledge of healing of the Bodos has been evident in the rituals and practices that are still practiced today. The song sung and the *mwntwr* (mantra) chanted during the ritual practice disclosed about the belief of the healing practice. The healing practice included diagnosis, prevention and elimination of mental or physical afflictions. The diagnosis and treatment could be done by the means of ritualistic practices or by the herbal medicine provided by the *Oja*. The traditional healing practice is still evident in the Bodo society where large number of people still goes to *Oja* for healing purpose despite having the advantage of modern medicine. The cultural and religious aspect of healing seems to work as a mechanism in driving people towards them. Socially established belief became responsible in influencing people towards *Oja*.

Types of Healing among the Bodos

There were three kinds of healing viz., one that dealt with spiritual healing which was basically governed by the traditional religion *Bathou*. The rituals and offerings were also dedicated to *mw dai* (spirits) like *jolonga*, *dwi ni mw dai* etc.¹ The healing comprised of the rituals, offerings and sacrifices where *Oja* acted as an inter-mediator between the

God and the human. After the ritual, the *Oja* would then guide the patient according to the problem, which could be physical ailment, psychological issue or any kind of personal trouble. The second kind of healing was the one that dealt with spiritual healing as well as providing herbal medicines. In such kind of healing the *Oja* treated the patient by organizing rituals followed by counseling and provided the medicines which were made of various herbs. The *Oja* would travel to forest in search of herbs and collected different varieties of leaves required to make medicines. The third kind was the ones that provided herbal medicines only.² They were expert in making specialized medicine of particular illness like malaria, jaundice, flu, fever etc. Medicines prepared with the herbs were prescribed and provided according to the symptoms of the patient. It has been mentioned in Tibetan literature of medicine that two broad laws were kept in mind while collecting herbs, i.e., Doctrine of contraries and Doctrine of signature.³ The Doctrine of contraries sought to balance by countering one quality that it opposes like; usage of herbs with cooling properties in order to treat fever. The Doctrine of signatures stated that plants resembling various parts of the body could be used to treat the ailment of that particular part like; pilewort plant which resembled piles was believed to treat them effectively.⁴ Although, during the ritualistic performance, there were some *Ojas* who went to the state of trance and instruct the patient or his family member to get particular kind of herbs with particular shape, size or colour to treat the ailment.⁵ The Tibetan healing also mentions about such shamanistic nature of treating the disease where the shamans during mystical trance is believed to be instructed by the spirit of forest on the herbs that are supposed to be used to treat the disease.⁶ However, there were some *Oja* who discovered the medicinal herbs by observing the sick animals and keeping a track on what they ate to heal themselves.

Medicinal Knowledge of the Bodos

The medicines provided by the *Oja* were tablets, juice and some medicines had to be applied on skin especially in case of wounds or skin disease. Some *Ojas* also provided medicines that contained aromatic properties which were filled in the silk cocoon and were supposed to be worn around neck or wrist.⁷ The medicines were made from various plant

and animal sources like skin of certain animal, their nails, bird feather, plant stem, its leaves, bark of a tree, roots, variety of grass, animal excreta, insect larvae etc. These materials were collected from their neighborhood and the forest around them. The *Oja* were expert in recognizing the materials, i.e. the plants and herbs that were required for making particular medicine. They were also very certain about the parts that went into making medicines like using different parts from various plants or herbs. The common people were also aware about the medicinal benefits of various herbs and plant sources. In fact, the Bodos have the knowledge of the foods and diets to be consumed during illness.

In ancient times the Bodos had managed to treat themselves from various kinds of ailments and diseases. It has been mentioned in *Sushruta Samhita* that cowherds, hunters and forest dwellers are considered as the resource persons regarding the medicinal plant as they gather a lot of information while collecting foods from the forest.⁸ The *Charaka Samhita* recorded that “Goatherds, Shepherds, cowherds and other forest dwellers know medicinal plants by their name and form. No one can know the principles governing the right way to use medicinal plants merely by knowing the names and morphology of plants. Even though a physician is ignorant of their form, if he is acquainted with the principles of the correct use of medicinal plants, he is a real master of the true principles of medicine; obviously, the one who knows all aspects of medicinal substances is even better. One who knows the principles of their correct application in consonance with the place, time and individual variation, should be regarded as the best among physicians.”⁹ Each and every Bodos were aware about the medicinal properties contained in plants available to them. The foods they consumed were mostly collected from the forest around them where they gathered various plant sources like roots, herbs, leaves, flowers etc. The section of Ayurveda also mentioned about the influence of the plants and food sources, on the human body and metabolism.¹⁰ The local people were all aware of the herbs, plants and their different parts, taste and properties. It could be possible that they got the idea from the animals of selecting plants for food and medicinal purpose. The history of medicine in Egypt suggest that the process of venesection was learnt from Hippopotamus where it gets its leg stricken on a pointed reed in order to control the stroke against the vein.¹¹ The cure

for snake bite was discovered by observing the plants consumed by lizards to heal the wounds they got after fighting with each other.¹² The Vedic text like Atharva Veda also considers animal as the teacher who is believed to have taught about the usage of medicinal plants.¹³ It also mentions about a prayer which reveals about the wild bear finding a cure for *takman*.¹⁴

Bodos were mostly scattered around forest, relying on it for their everyday requirements like food, fire-woods and wood to build shelter, etc. It basically shows their adaptation to the climatic conditions as well as the consequences of the seasonal changes. There are many factors that cause disease. Geographical settlement is also sometimes responsible for causing disease. The community who settled in tropical climate face the sudden rise and fall in temperature which cause diseases like malaria, typhoid, dengue etc. The Vedas also mention about the types of *takman* (fever)- one is seasonal and another is continual which lasted for the whole year.¹⁵ In the Bodo household, the minor ailments like fever would be treated by following the basic home remedies and taking care of their diet. In case, the ailment does not get treated, the patient would be taken to *Oja*, where he would provide him medicine looking at the symptom and perform rituals if necessary. If the fever continues further, the *Oja* would advice for ritual and offering to *mwdai* (spirit) as it was suspected to be caused by the maleficent spirit. During the Vedic period it was believed that tropical disease like malaria, high fever etc. were caused by demon *takman*, who took in the form of thundering, lightning and monsoon rain to attack the person.¹⁶ Such believe are still prevalent among the community especially in the villages where the belief and socially established norms govern them. Besides, the *Oja* were also depended for other physical issues like broken bones, joint displacement and for mental affliction as well. The healing also includes counseling where the *Oja* counsels the people rather than just focusing on particular treatment. The Sanskrit word “*Swastha*” which connotes healthy state of body and mind, i.e., one is believed to be healthy when he is on his natural state without any deprivation on nutrition, physical and material factors.¹⁷ Thus, the healers emphasized on healing the person working on his physical, mental and spiritual well-being based on cultural determination of health.

The *Oja* was available in every village who claimed that they could treat any kind of problem of people belonging to any age group. They had remedies for every problems starting from minor ailments like cold and cough to fixing broken bones. However, the methods of treating the problem varied to certain extent from one *Oja* to another but its nature remained the same. The nature of the healing practice was almost similar in all the spiritual healers. However, the methods varied to some extent especially, the formulas and the mantras recited by the *Ojas*. The ingredients used by the herbal practitioners to make medicines, tablets and ointments have been found common. However, besides depending on the forest for medicinal purpose, the Bodos also relied on forest resources for their day to day life starting from firewood to food for consumption. Their foods consisted of herbs, roots, stem of wild plants etc., which have been collected and gathered from the forest. The forest products are still consumed by the Bodos as a food item and for medicinal purposes. However, some plants are not in available because of the encroachment of the forest as well as populated in forest area which leads to deforestation as well as unavailable of the herbs and plants that were used as food and medicines in the past.¹⁸ In fact, everyone in the Bodo household is aware about the medicinal value of the local herbs and vegetables.

The *Oja* almost used every part of the plant like the roots, leaves, stem, bark etc. depending on its medicinal value. Various parts from single plant are used by the *Oja* for the preparation of different medicines. The herbs, grass, the required plant and tree sources are pounded together and mixed with liquids like oil, *endi thou*, sometimes the lava of the insects or even their excreta.¹⁹ The medicines are also prepared in advanced and kept in hand to meet at a time of the emergency but generally medicines are made only when it is required. The tablets for cold and cough and the extracted juice for jaundice from different herbs and roots are made for the treatment of the concerned diseases. The *Kasini*, a thread which are worn on the wrist has also practices with the belief to ward off the evil spirit. The *Astanga Samgraha* of Vagbhata talks about two kinds of medicines- one that gives strength and the other that removes disease.²⁰ The medicine provided by the *Oja* have similar traits where some medicines improved the immunity and metabolism of the patient and some completely helped in treating the ailments and wounds. The *Susruta Samhita*

mentioned about the six important *rasa* (taste) to make medicine viz., bitter, sour, sweet, salt, pungent and astringent.²¹ The Tibetan medicine also emphasizes to enhance power, effect and taste which is categorized as sweet, sour, bitter, salty, spicy and astringent.²² These qualities attributed special effects to the medicines in treating various kinds of diseases.

Malaria, dengue, flu etc. are the common diseases to the people. One of the reasons being the tropical climate can lead to such seasonal diseases. The Vedic literature pointed out two kind of fever- *prakrta* (natural) which has been caused by seasonal *dosas* and *vaikrta* (unnatural) which is unseasonal and that comes at other time.²³ It is stated in Atharva Veda that *takman* which is identified as *jvara* (fever) is one of the most dreadful disease.²⁴ *Ojas* would be consulted by the patient to treat the fever. One of the most common remedy for fever was the tablet pounded by *Oja*, which was a mixture of *neem bilai* (*azedarachta indica*), *sirta* (*andrograp hispaniculata*), *gilo* (*tinospora cordifolia*), *nisinda bilai* (*Vitexnigundo*) and *bhel bilai* (*aeglemarmelos*).The *Oja* measured the quantity of the ingredients for making the medicines. The quantity of the ingredients for making the medicines was based according to the requirement and conditions of the patients. The dosage of the tablets was mainly depended on the intensity of the disease. If the patient was not serious generally two tablets were prescribed to consume in a day. Sometimes the *Ojas* advised to take more dosage or increase dosage of the medicine based on the severe condition of the patient.

Different *Oja* has different methods and techniques on medicinal compositions while making medicines. Some used *bhel bilai* (*aeglemarmelos*), *tulsi bilai* (*ocimumtenui florum*) and *beremwdwi* (honey) as a composition of the medicine to treat the certain diseases. *Gilo* (*tinosporacordifolia*) is believed to be very effective for treating the viral disease. The stem of the *Gilo* was extracted into juice and mixed up the juice with honey which has been prescribed as a medicine for the management and curing of the certain diseases especially for the viral disease. Another kind of illness is flu, a common viral infection with persistent sneeze, cold and cough which could be risky sometimes. However, every people in the past and even today in the remote area has the remedies for

counteract those diseases. Sometimes they could even cure some diseases without taking medicines only with the change of food habits, diets and lifestyles. *Sambramgufur* or garlic (*Allium Satium*) is believed to be very effective for common flu. They are the most active ingredient and put almost in every curry prepared by Bodos. According to the Tibetan healing, garlic helped to contract energy channels which are beneficial for *tripa* (lung) and *bekan* (phlegm) conditions.²⁵ Further, mustard oil is heated with two or three cloves of garlic added on it and applied on the chest. The infants are sometimes even made to wear cloves of garlic around their neck with the belief that the aroma of the garlic contained therapeutic power to treat common cold, flu and cough. *Haiseng* or ginger (*Zinziber Officinale*) is another important spice which also used to treat flu and cough. Ginger would be cut to slices, mixed with honey, heat it and put three or four *tulsi bilai* (holy basil) into it and have it twice during the day. These practices treat as a legacy to today's generation, when they suffer from common cold and cough, they often make use such home remedies. They basically made the remedies with the materials that were available to them while they maintained certain rules to intake it like, facing towards East while consuming it. The Atharva Veda also mentions that the patient suffering from cough was made to take a step forward facing to the East, worship the sun and drink the medicinal concoction given by the healer.²⁶

People complaint of suffering from *Amai Mwnai* (drowsiness) is also often referred to as Jaundice. The symptoms consisted of drowsiness, excessive tiredness, abnormal function of liver resulting to yellow urine and yellow eyes. Jaundice could be caused due to several reasons like liver cancer.²⁷ Another important reason could be excessive intake of alcohol. Social ceremonies and functions of the Bodos incorporate enjoyment which involved drinking. This practice somewhere encourages people to drinking extensively without considering about the health which led to health deterioration in the health affecting their digestive system even suffering from serious diseases like cancer. However, the *Oja* provided the remedies and treated such diseases with the performance of rituals and spells. Putting *bori* on the head shaving off a little part of the hair from it and placing it on the scalp are also included in course of treatment. *Oja* chanted some spells and tied

kashini on the wrist, left hand in case of woman and on the right in case of man to drive away the evil spirit. Wearing of *endi pitwb* (silk cocoon) around the neck of the patient is also another way for treating the jaundice patient.²⁸ Besides, herbal healing is also given importance and emphasis also laid on consuming healthy foods for certain illness. *Oja* often advised to consume foods cooked with *Kamrenga* (*Averrhoa Carambola* Linn) and *Karokandai bibar* (*Oroxylum indicum*). The roots of *laigangsw* (*ophioglossum gramineum*) *Atiathalir* (*musasapentium*) and *gongarthaisib* (*rubus fruticosus*) are collected and tied them together and wear it either on neck or wrist of the patient to cure the jaundice. A string of *Fenel khuga*, a climber is also made to wear it, either on the wrist or waist.²⁹ It is believed that as in when the string dried up the nauseous feeling disappeared and the patients became normal.

Treatment for anxiety and mental insanity

It is general conception of the people that ill-healthy caused disorder in sleep which often leads to nightmares. However, in the olden days people believed that dreams were indicative to something that was going to take place. The people during the ancient time believed that dream was a medium of communication between the reality and mystic powers where the soul leaves for the other world to meet the spirits.³⁰ The *Oja* would prepare amulets or *kashini* for such situations as it was believed to be caused by malignant spirit. The amulet or *kashini* was believed to drive away the evil spirits and protect from them. The *Oja* gave the patient the root of *gogondo gufur* which were made to wear either in the wrist or around the neck. The amulet were prepared by making a paste out of several herbs, roots, barks and leaves and filled in the *endi pitwb* (Silk cocoon). The bark of the *sirish* tree along with its leaves and flower, the flower and leaf of *kipibendwng*, *mwiprai* leaf, were mixed together and put some drops of mustard oil and heated. The released vapor had some therapeutic effect for the treatment of those persons who have the sleeping disorders and nightmares.

Mental instability or insanity was another affliction that affected the family along with the patient. The patient was often trouble the family with his activities creating havoc in the family. Such problems were often believed to be result of the practice of sorcery

which was caused by the evil spirit under the influence of witch or wizard. The Atharvaveda mentioned about insanity and madness of two types i.e., *Unmadita and unmatta*. *Unmadita* has caused by breaking certain socially constructed religious law or taboos and *Unmatta*, caused by demonic possession.³¹In such situation the healer made offerings to the god in order to appease them. They also prepared medicines for the patients and did some rituals to drive away the evil spirits.³² The Bodos also have similar belief with regard to mental illness. They performed rituals in order to drive away the evil spirit which believed to cause the illness. Anxiety and hysteria are common signs of mental illness where the patient turned into abnormal. The remedies for it included aroma therapy, herbal healing, proper diet and performance of certain related rituals. The patient has given bath with the holy water (*dwi gwithar*) and prepared for the rituals by the *Oja* where he chants mantra (*mwntwr*) and strokes the patient with wild fern (*sal daukhumwi*) to ward off the evil spirit. In certain cases sacrificial rituals are also made where the *Oja*, offers castrated cock and chicken of particular colour.. Atharvaveda mentioned about sacrifice and religious rituals where the *bhisaj* prays to *Agni* to cure the ailing person from insanity while assuring him to make offerings when the patient is cured. Aroma therapy is also another important kind of treatment where the patient is made to inhale mustard oil or sometime sesame oil heated with garlic. It is for the improvement of the mental function. The *Oja* also encouraged the importance of diet where the patients are often prescribed to take lighter foods and discouraged them from having the kind of food that triggered anxiety. The *Oja* advised to take green vegetables, honey (*bere mwdwi*) mixed with the seeds of wax guard (*khumbra begor*), the juice of gooseberry (*amlai*) with the honey (*bere mwdwi*) for two months.

Diseases caused by God; *Bad Bis*

Another serious illness that affected the people is *Jalandar* or Ascites which is referred as *Udara* in the ancient Indian medical literature.³³ The symptom included

abnormal body condition like enlargement of abdomen, swollen hands and legs. The hymn in the Rig Veda and the Atharva Veda mentioned about a prayer to God Varuna which indicated that such diseases has caused by him as a result of sin and moral order committed against him.³⁴ The hymn to Varuna is mentioned in the two verses in the Rig Veda:

“Verse 2: If I go, as it were, quivering like an inflated leather water- bag, O lord of the mountains, forgive, good ruler, be gracious.

Verse 4: Thirst found the singer who stood in the midst of the waters; forgive, good ruler, be gracious.”³⁵

Thus, the Varuna is believed to be responsible for such condition and in order to cure the patient the God Varuna was propitiated.³⁶ The Charaka Samhita and Susruta Samhita suggests of surgery to remove the water to stop the further risk of complications.³⁷ The Bodos were not aware about the process of surgery or they were not skilled enough to practice it however they had an alternative way of healing it. Their treatment included intake of medicines and foods as prescribed by the *Oja* which included the juice made out of bitter guard and the juice extracted from garlic to be mixed with water to be taken once day. It is also prescribed to intake the water of the soaked gram early in the morning in empty stomach. Dried amla, *simpri gundra* and water of soaked *bel* (*Aegle Marmalos*) leaves, mixed either with *gur methai* (jaggery) or honey is also advised to be taken once in a day.³⁸ The process of treatment took time but it certainly showed the sign of improvements. The Bodos certainly emphasized on diet to prevent and cure diseases as their daily diet consisted of herbs and vegetables which contained medicinal properties and value.³⁹

The belief that diseases were caused by god and goddesses prevailed among the Bodo community as well. It is a common belief among the people that if anyone committed any sin or violated any rules against the socially established norms that person is put through pain and suffering which is often referred as *bad bis*. The Atharva Veda talks about similar skin disease which is referred as *kustha* which arose from within the body caused due to curse.⁴⁰ The person goes through problems like skin irritation, redness

of skin, discoloration, nerve problems and severe pain in joints. People suffering from such disease had to consult an Oja where he treated the patient by applying various traditional methods. There were several methods of treating the patient like *kasini ganhwnai*, *jharinai* and *thau nanai*. *Kasini*, a small piece of thread while reciting the incantation was tied around the wrist or the neck of the patient in order to ward off the negativity towards him. Another process was *Jharinai*, in which the Oja removed the disease by reciting *mwntwr* and slightly stroking off the patient with *sal daukhumwi* (wild fern). The other process included *thau nanai*, where the Oja massaged the patient with oils in the affected part. *Endi thau* (castor oil) was believed to be the most effective oil that healed joint problems. There were other alternative ways as well to treat the disease which was recommended by Oja like changes in food habits and practicing certain diets recommended by him. *Haldwi gwithang ni ros*, the juice extracted from raw turmeric was advised to take early in the morning in empty stomach. The curry made with *khipi bendwng* (skunk vine) was advised to be eaten often and the paste made out of it could also be applied in the affected part. In case of severe pain in the joint the juice of *kerela* (bitter guard) was also used to massage it. The bark of the banyan tree was boiled along with hot water and the patient was made to bath with it. The paste of neem leaves and raw turmeric were also used to apply on the patient's body. The Atharva Veda highlighted how the healer collected the herbs that contained pigmenting substance decocted it and applied it on skin reciting the following spell:

“You, o dim, black and dark herb, are born at night. O you colorer, color him who is *kilasa* and pale.

Make the spotted one, both the *kilasa* and the pale one, vanish from here. Let your own colour enter you. Make the white ones fly away.

Your bed is dark; your site is dark and you, O herb, are dark.

Make the spotted one vanish from here.

By means of the spell, I have destroyed the cutaneous white mark of *kilasa* born of the bone, of the body and caused by curse.”⁴¹

The Rig Veda and Atharva Veda also mentioned about the female *raksas* (demon) named *amiva* who is responsible for the cause of disease.⁴² It has been mentioned that *amiva* mostly attacked a person from within leading a person to lose his nourishment or eating the unborn child, causing its death.⁴³ During the ancient times in New Zealand, similar concept of a flesh eater demon called *Atua* prevailed that caused the person to fall sick.⁴⁴ The Bodo society also witnessed similar belief where the malevolent gods attacked to person which was known as *Khetra Hamnai*.⁴⁵ It is believed that the malevolent gods mostly attacked the pregnant women or the babies, where the victim became bloodless, eventually leading to their death. The victim approached to the *Oja* and the *Oja* arranged a ritual in order to remove the *khetra* by the way of propitiating. In some cases, the new born child also cries without rest and cease to take mother's milk which is referred as *suthi nangnai*. The *Oja* removed the evil by chanting *mwntwr* and tied a *kasini* around his wrist with *cowrie* (shell) with the believed to ward off the evil spirit.⁴⁶ The Vedic treatment was also of same nature where the healer provided *sankha* (shell) and amulet made with the claws and teeth of the tiger to dispell the *amiva*.⁴⁷ Besides, the child is also fed holy water every morning i.e., water mixed with pasteurized milk and a bud of *tulsi* (holy basil) put on it.⁴⁸

The belief persisted among the people that nature has played an influential role in causing the disease as well as treating them. It has been indicated in several instances that various diseases were caused by nature when they were provoked by certain human activities. The reference of appeasement to *dwini mwdai*, *gamini mwdai* and *hagrani mwdai* gives an idea on how nature were shown respect and acknowledged for treating the people.⁴⁹ This could be concluded that in order to safeguard oneself from the natural calamities and problems caused by the nature, one should remain in harmony without creating any trouble to nature. A belief is existed among the people that when people suffered from *stye*, an eye disease which is called *ajinai* in Bodo, the person is supposed to do a ritual call *bilw gw khanai*. It is a ritual where the person suffering from *ajinai* is knotted in the relation of friendship, where the person is made friends with the *ajinai piping* (monochoria hastata).⁵⁰ The *ajinai* is then believed to disappear after the ritual is

done. The Vedas also mentioned about *Utsangapitaka*, an eye disease for pustules or styne which was treated by putting moistened cloth dipped in warm water and scratching it with a leaf or knife.⁵¹ The alternative method of treating pustules is by rubbing the rough side of the leaf of *bwigri* (Indian Jujube) on the pustules facing towards the east early in the morning during sun rise.⁵²

The elderly women of the village were expert midwives who looked after pregnant woman and children. Along with diet the midwives suggested the expecting mother with things they are supposed to follow during pregnancy and warn them about restrictions as well. Foods cooked of various kinds of plant and animal sources in order to strengthen the reproductive health like *thalir mwikhun* (banana flower), *dudali mwigong*, *adumbra piphang ni bijou*, *pharoukhia* etc. Fish and meat usually chicken, especially the flesh are boiled with the vegetables and herbs, and served to the mother. After the delivery, the mother is usually given boiled food without putting any spices on it. However, there is some kind of restriction on the pregnant women like going to cremation ground with the belief that the spirits cause harms the fetus.⁵³

There was no proper facility for sanitation planned for their house which led to health problems which most often affected women and children. They preferred to use open field and paddy field which resulted to ill health because of improper sanitation which was caused by the bacterial infections. Children and women were mostly prone to the bacterial infections due to lack of sanitation, it led to diseases like diarrhea, cholera and dysentery but they certainly had curative measures for such diseases. The Oja advised the patient mostly the foods that is sour in taste and juice extracted from garlic and honey periodically until cured. In the Tibetan medicine garlic was believed to cure all kinds of problem related to bile.⁵⁴ Besides, for the treatment of cholera a generous amount of *long* (cloves) crushed and mixed with water was advised to be taken once in a day. In such case, medicinal plants played a primary role in healing the diseases and ailments. With the passage of time, people had also developed knowledge on the usage of plants and its products to cure diseases. So, people relied exclusively on herbal treatment to treat themselves from malaria, cholera and dysentery.

As the Bodos have been intermingling with other communities, they tend to learn some curative measures for certain diseases from others in addition to their ancestors. Interaction with the immigrant healers like *baid*, *hakims* etc led to development of new innovative medicines and the circulation of medicinal knowledge. They have learnt to cure piles from the *hakims* who visited their places.⁵⁵ The Bodos were fortunate enough with the natural resources which used for the treatment of piles. Some of the important materials consisted of *mani muni*, *jaba bibar*, *askhok bibar*, *swima lundun pitay*, *lwkhwna topinay bilay gurlwi*, *sal daukhumwi*, *daosa makreb*, *kanchinsa bijou*, *pad gOja bilay*.⁵⁶ For the treatment of piles the medicine which consisted of the ingredient of jelly texture for applying in the wound has been prescribed.⁵⁷ They basically used the ingredient with similar properties in case the recommended ingredient was not found and managed to treat themselves with the resource available to them.

The traditional healing played a dynamic role among the Bodo community, it is not just emphasized on healing the person from specific illness or disease but it also aimed at counseling the person as a whole. They have learned various means of controlling and curing diseases with the materials available around them. The traditional healing practice is still relevant in today's time especially in the rural areas. One of the reason being, the cultural bound therapy which emphasizes on treating the patient on the basis of their indigenous religion which is responsible for drawing people towards them. Belief plays an important role in such healing as the effect of health and its treatment are intertwined with the cultural thoughts. Another reason for their relevance in today's time is that they are cost effective and easily accessible. Many people cannot afford the cost of modern medicine and their treatment so people tend to rely on the *Oja*. Many villages still lack of primary healthcare facilities so they prefer *Oja* over traveling miles for hospitals. Also, many people still believe in the deep-rooted cultural beliefs and practices so they choose to it over modern medication. Although the traditional method adopted by the *Oja* has some limitations, the knowledge carried by the *Oja* is the legacy to the community. Protection and promotion of this indigenous healing could help the people with an alternative medicine facility. However, there needs to be check on the preservation of certain herbs as

they are its way to extinction. This environmental degradation led to challenges on the indigenous medicinal practice as some of the medicinal plants are very difficult to be found in the present days. It could be concluded that environmental resources, socio-religious practices and belief play an important part in traditional healing. Further, the methods and techniques used by the *Oja* could be scientifically tested for wider practice as it could be used as an approach to alternative medicine. It will not just benefit the scientific medicine but it will also develop a sustainable approach to tribal economy as it could develop cost effective medicine and even play a major role in conservation of resources. The traditional healing and folk medicine have given a depth insight on the health care system of the Bodo as well as on the harmonious relation between man and environment. In fact the traditional healing has completely relied on the natural resources which serve as the main source of the healing. Some of the resources even act as a unique identity to the tribe. *Sal Daukhumwi* for instance is used by the *Oja* for the purpose of stroking the patient during the ritual practices. It is also used widely by the community as insecticide and pesticide. It is generally kept in the chicken coop to repel pest from the place.

Endnotes:

¹ Personal interview with Bankho Basumatary, Age- 80, S/o- Merga basumatary, Vill- Batabari, P.O. – Choraikola & Dist- Kokrajhar, Date of interview- 21.05.2020

² *Ibid*

³ Forde, Quinlan, Ralph, *The Book of Tibetan Medicine*, Sterling Publishing Co. Inc., p. 102

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.102

⁵ Bankho Basumatary, *op.cit.*

⁶ Forde, *op.cit.*, p.104

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.104

⁸ Menon, Indudharan, *Hereditary Physicians of Kerala Traditional Medicine and Ayurveda in Modern India*, Routledge India Ltd, p.72

⁹*Ibid*, pp. 72-73

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.73

¹¹ Mukhopadhyaya, Girindranath, *History of Indian Medicine: Containing Notices, Biographical and Bibliographical of the Ayurvedic Physicians and Their Work on Medicine from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time*, 3 vols., Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1994, p.68

¹² *Ibid*, p.70

¹³ *Ibid.*,p.72

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.72

¹⁵ Zysk, G. Kenneth, *Religious Medicine The History and Evolution of Indian Medicine*, Routledge, Park Square, Oxon, New York, 2017, p.34

¹⁶ Zysk, *op.cit.*, p.34

¹⁷ Dalal, K., Ajit, *Cultural Psychology of Health in India Well-being Medicine and Healthcare*, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., p.14

¹⁸ Personal interview with Amar singh, Age- 64, S/o- Borgoyary, Vill-Sudempuri, P.O. & Dist- Kokrajhar, Date of interview- 12.06.2020

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- ¹⁹ Personal interview with Bankho Basumatary, Age- 76, S/o- Basumatary, Vill- Batabari, P.O. Choraikola, Dist- Kokrajhar, Date of interview- 12.10.2018
- ²⁰ Jolly, Julius, Indian Medicine, C. G. Kashikar., 196/27, Sadashiv Peth, Poona, India, 1951, p.36
- ²¹ *Ibid*, p.38
- ²² Forde, *op.cit.*, p.105
- ²³ Jolly, *op.cit.*, p.107
- ²⁴ *Ibid*, p.104
- ²⁵ Forde, *op.cit.*, p.94
- ²⁶ Zysk, *op.cit.*, p.45
- ²⁷ Personal interview with Angelene Brahma, PGT, Jorhat Medical College Hospital, Jorhat, Assam, India, Date of Interview- 07. 06.2020
- ²⁸ Personal interview with Amar Singh Borgoyary, S/o- Rupa Ram Borgoyary, Aflagaon, Kokrajhar, Date of Interview- 12.06.2020
- ²⁹ Personal interview with Oransi Basumatary, D/o- Jatindra Hazoary, Age- 53, Vill- Borobadha, Kokrajhar, Date of Interview- 14.04.2019
- ³⁰ Bruhl, L., Lucien, Primitive Mentality, p.98
- ³¹ Zysk, Kenneth, *op.cit.*, p.62
- ³² *Ibid*, p.62
- ³³ Zysk, *op.cit.*, p.59
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.59
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.59
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.59
- ³⁸ Oronshi Basumatary, *op.cit.*
- ³⁹ Personal interview with Udangshri Borgoyary, D/o- Brahma, Ramfalbil, Kokrajhar, Date of Interview- 12.06.2020
- ⁴⁰ Zysk, *op.cit.*, p.81
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.82

⁴² Zysk, *op.cit.*, p.49

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.49

⁴⁴ Bruhl, *op.cit.*, p.35-36

⁴⁵ Brahma, Kameshwar, *A Study of Socio- Religious Beliefs, Practices And Ceremonies of The Bodos*, Punthi Pustak, Calcutta, 2015, p.153

⁴⁶ Udangshri Borgoyary, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ Zysk, *op.cit.*, p.50

⁴⁸ Amar Singh Borgayary, *op.cit.*

⁴⁹ Oronshi Basumatary, *op.cit.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹ Jolly, Julius, *Indian Medicine*, C. G. Kashikar., 196/27, Sadashiv Peth, Poona, India, 1951, p.166

⁵² Oronshi Basumatary, *op.cit*

⁵³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁴ Forde, *op.cit.*, p.94

⁵⁵ Personal interview with Bharati Basumatary, age 56, W/o- Konteswar Basumatary, Vill-Odalguri, Antaibil, Bhalukmari, Date of interview-12.05.2020

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

Chapter: IV

The Role of the *Oja* and Their Significance in the Society

The traditional healers played a significant role and contributed a lot for the development in terms of health and medicine since the ancient days. The healers deal with spiritual healing and provide herbal medicines as well. They act as an inter mediator between the spirit and patients and convey the message to the people from the unseen world.¹ Basically the traditional healing practice was based on the traditions in which the healer's advice is pursued and interpreted.² It is a mixture of folk practices and belief that went through variety of exposures and experiences in individual's life.³ This knowledge then got transferred to the next generation which evolved with time. The traditional knowledge is therefore dynamic, flexible, readily incorporating new content and adapting to changing conditions while preserving many traditional elements, including some ideas and practices. The healers treat all kinds of sickness and they usually regard the patient more than just as a body. They believe that the mind, body and spirit are all connected to other people and things that have life.⁴ It is evident that the healers around the world comprised an elaborate system of healing in order to restore harmony and balance in health.⁵ The concept of healthy body according to them is to bring balance in the mind, body and spirit. Traditional healers are commonly referred to as *Oja* in Bodo who have claimed to learn the technique and method of making medicines from their ancestors. The *Ojas* are found in every village and are believed to have miraculous power to heal people suffering from various kinds of diseases. They have learned the therapeutic technique for treating different kinds of ailments by observing their predecessors. However, the techniques varied from one *Oja* to another *Oja* based on place, time, availability of materials etc. The *Ojas* specialized in different treatments some treated flu and fever while some are expert in fixing broken bones. There are *Ojas* who looked after mental afflictions as well. Women specialized in midwifery; the elderly women of the village took care of the pregnant woman and guided during the time of delivery. They took care of both the child

and the mother and guided them with their foods and diet. The *Ojas* rely on the plants, animals and mineral substances available around them. They often resort the problems by appeasing the spirits who are believed to be cause of the diseases.

Types of *Ojas* and their process of treatment

The ritual healing works on the phenomenon of the faith and belief where the *Oja* acts as the mediator between the god and the patient for curing the disease and to solve all kinds of physical and mental problems of the patients. This practice also gives an idea about the theory of Cultural Bound Syndrome where cultural explanations attribute to the cause of diseases.⁶ The *Oja* casually explained the cause of the disease ascribed to the gods and goddesses because of the human misconduct. In medicine and medical anthropology, cultural bound syndrome, cultural specific syndrome or folk illness is a combination of psychiatric and somatic symptoms that are considered to be a recognizable disease only within a specific society or culture.⁷ The Cultural Bound Syndrome is basically a cluster or group of co-occurring, relatively invariant symptoms found in a specific cultural group or community.⁸ The syndrome may or may not be recognized as an illness within the member of the same community but on the other hand such cultural patterns of distress and features of illness may be recognizable by an outside observer. It is referred to a situation or suffering of an individual of a cultural group like same ethnicity, community, religion etc who shares common concept of pathology, cause of disease and ways of expressing their concern etc.⁹ In addition, it may be used to convey a wide range of discomfort including everyday experience, subclinical conditions or suffering from social circumstances rather than mental disorders which are basically socially established believes. However, the culturally conceived explanation may be salient feature of folk classifications of disease used by laypersons or healers and the cultural ways of understanding and describing illness experiences that can be elicited in the clinical encounter.¹⁰ Customarily, the healers act as clinician where they use active listening skills to help the patient to identify their perspective of illness thus helping the patient to distress and deal with disempowering the bad thoughts.¹¹

The *Oja* performs a ritual that is governed by *Bathou* the indigenous religion of the Bodos where prayers were dedicated to different *mwdai* (gods and goddesses) like *jolonga*, *dwi ni mwdai*, *gami ni mwdai*, *hagra ni mwdai* etc. to appease them. It is a pre dominant belief among the Bodos that disease is being caused by supernatural being so the performance of the related rituals are compelled to pacify those are supposed to be responsible for the cause of the diseases.¹² The healing basically emphasized on psychological treatment where the *Oja* executed the ritual in order to drive away the fear and anxiety from the patient. Primarily, the *Oja* created an ambience which convinces the people to believe that he has the authority to control the nature and spirits. The healer focused on comforting the patient of their emotional distress, anxiety, withdrawal and dissociation which sought to develop a sense of belonging and situate their problem in the society.¹³ The *Ojas* learned the healing procedures from their predecessors by observing them and some *Ojas* claimed that they are blessed with the miraculous power to heal.¹⁴ The process to cure disease caused by evil spirit becomes more fervent as the deity is believed to enter in the *Oja's* body and the *Oja* speaks in the voice of god and communicates with the patient.¹⁵ The faith in the patient makes him convinced about his well-being and thus gets off his anxiety and fear. Faith healing tends to bring positivity among the patient by changing the unhealthy pattern of thought, feeling and behavior.¹⁶ It might not necessarily heal the patient completely but as a consequence of the therapy people learn to live positively.

The herbalist on the other hand collected plants and herbs from the forest to make medicines and those are pounded to turn into tablets or ointments according to the requirement. The juice extracted from various parts is also used as a medicine. The *Oja* possesses a wide knowledge about the properties of plant and animal sources for making the medicines. The ancient Indian texts like *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* mentioned about cowherds and shepherds as the ones with the knowledge of medicinal plants and their properties.¹⁷ In fact, almost all the Bodos were aware about the medicinal plants and their properties in the past days. They were also aware about the knowledge of foods and diets to keep themselves healthy. The curiosity and the determination of the *Oja* about herbs and medicinal plants led to exploration thus making medicine for different

diseases in various form. It is possible that they discovered about it through empirical observations. They relied principally on the medicinal plants and substances that were locally available to them. Basically, the primitive society, be it the hunter- gatherer or the agrarian society of the past were well known for their knowledge to identify and gather medicinal plants from the forest and their local environment.¹⁸ They were aware about their medicinal benefits and they had the knowledge to procure them. Forest plays a very significant role in providing medicinal compounds. It is also one of the most important factors in shaping the traditional knowledge. It has a strong influence in formation of culture's medicinal knowledge.

The *Oja* used various methods to treat the patient depending on the type of disease and the intensity of the sickness. The spiritual healing showed the magico-religious nature in healing where the *Oja* performed ritual which includes sacrificial ceremonies, chanting *mwntwr* (mantra) and administering local herbs. Various *mwntwr* chanted by the *Oja* revealed that local deities had been worshipped to ward off the evil spirits or to bring an end to the mishaps from family or personal life. Even today the *Ojas* are believed to have the ability to bring back the person to normalcy by driving away the evil spirits.¹⁹ The *Ojas* besides having the knowledge of medicinal plants recited *mwntwr* while being in a state of trance and communicated with the divine being. The *bhisaj* in the Vedas are described with same healing traits that possess knowledge of medicinal plants, recite incantations and enter in a state of trance, tremble and dance.²⁰ The other kinds of *Oja* who provide medicines also follow different ways of healing process according to the severity of disease. In some cases the *Ojas* made tablets by pounding of several herbs in the form of mixture. The process of the making the medicines by the *Ojas* is a long run traditions with applications of the knowledge on producing the medicines for remedies and curing different types of the diseases inflicted to the human body. They made medicines from natural resources available in all kinds of habitats on the basis of universally practiced empirical science. The *Ojas* have the comprehensive detail about the best time as well as season to collect certain herbs or plant products.²¹ The *Ojas* therefore collected the products according to its availability while some products are sundried and stored for the rest of the year. However, the *Ojas* unlike *bhisaj* or other Ayurvedic healers do not have to

attend any formal training but they mastered the art of making medicines through years of experience. They have made the medicines through the process of trial and error, in which the successful remedies have been passed down from one generation to the next. The *Ashtavaidya* tradition mentioned that one has to spend five years in forest to learn the traditional Ayurvedic healing and identify and understand the medicinal use of plants.²² The practitioner of Sowa Rigpa or traditional Tibetan Healing also takes ten years to train as a healer as they commit themselves to memorize the ancient texts.²³ Tibetan medicine is one of the oldest medicinal practices that follow the healing tradition based on the principle of *Panchamabhutas* and *Tridosas*, i.e., the living and non living objects of the universe that emphasizes on understanding both the nature and cause of the disease.²⁴ Although, the traditional healing practices of the Bodos have not been documented, the tradition has been transmitted orally. The rituals performed and the *mwntwr* chanted to the deities gives an idea and information about the healing practices of the Bodos. The *Ojas* do not acquire any kind of formal training but they learn the art of healing from their predecessors who have passed the successful method of treatment through the process of trial and error. They learned it by observing their family members or from the preceptors while making medicines and applying them to treat various kinds of ailments. There is no restriction to practice the traditional healing system but the spiritual *Ojas* claim that they are blessed with the healing abilities and that it is their responsibility to look after the ailing people. They are trained in different skills and their healing techniques vary based on the problem and affliction.

The *Ojas* acquire all the information regarding the amount of ingredients that goes into the preparation of medicine. The *Oja* kept in mind for preparing the medicine about the combination of some ingredients whether it will be harmful or beneficial when mixed together. Most often ingredients with sour and bitter properties are not mixed together. It was advised to avoid milk in case the medicine was sour or bitter. Milk is usually avoided in case the person suffered from cold and cough. The Ancient Indian medicinal practice also informed about strict administration while preparation of drugs.²⁵ It threw a light on practices where the meat of domesticated animals belonging to marshy region and the aquatics were restricted to be taken together with honey, sesame oil, milk

etc.²⁶ It was evident that substances suitable in themselves to the body were found to grow unsuitable under the consideration of this place, time, mixture etc.²⁷

The idea of preparation of medicine grew with time as it is open to learning and exploration. The socialization with other neighboring communities gave an idea of experimentation which has played a potential role in the evolution of medicinal knowledge. The *vaidis*, *hakims* and other kinds of immigrant healers had opportunities to exchange their information with the *Ojas*. The *Ojas* especially had no idea for the treatment of piles which they later learnt from the *hakims*.²⁸ Though there were some *Ojas* who stuck to the traditional healing methods, some went ahead to experiment new methods from the healers of other community. These audacious *Ojas* stepped out to test new techniques by interacting with other healers which showed the inclination and efforts of *Oja* to learn and experiment new healing techniques. The *Dhanvantari Nighantu* an ancient text on medicine also gave an idea about the experimentation of healers.²⁹ It mentioned that the healers interacted with the forest dwellers and local folks to obtain information about the plants which contributed in the evolution of medicine in ancient India.³⁰ During the Vedic times, the heterodox knowledge-seeking ascetics also wandered around the country side performing cures and acquired new medicines, treatments and medical information developing efficacious medical data.³¹ Furthermore, the *Ashtavaidyan* lore informed about the *Ayurveda* which had originated in the northern India had assimilated and evolved in Kerala.³²

The primary duty of the *Oja* in the olden days was to remove the psychological fear from the patient by appeasing the local deity as disease was believed to be caused by the spirit.³³ The ritual practices consisted of chanting different types of *mwntwr* (incantation) dedicated to the local deity like *jolonga* (god of medicine), *dwi ni mwdai* (river deity), *hagra ni mwdai* (forest deity) etc. who was held responsible for causing the disease. The belief that if anyone stepped on the path of the deities or the humans provoked them with their action, the deities would be disturbed, causing problem in people's life. So, the *Oja* in order to pacify the deity performed a ritual based on the tradition of *Bathou*, the indigenous religion. The folk healing primarily worked on the medium of faith, which was significant in health and healing of all the traditional societies for ages.³⁴ It is evident that the ethno

medicine of any ancient communities worked on the basis of the social and environmental integration.³⁵

Besides treating the patients and providing them with medicines, the Oja also helped the patient and his family to ease their tensions by counseling them. The Ojas often included the family of the patients in the process of treatment, where they all sat together and performed the ritual. This process provided a sense of security to the family of the patient from the evil spirits, who were believed to be the main cause of problem in people's life. In order to ward off the evil spirit the *Ojas* even provided amulets, *kasini* (holy thread), *endi pitwb* (sik cocoon) etc. to be worn in the particular part of the body as prescribed by the *Oja*. It was usually believed that imbalance in body, mind and spirit is the main factor that leads to problem in a person affecting him physically or mentally; so the *Ojas* basically worked on bringing balance in mind, body and spirit. In the ancient healing practices, this balance was believed to be part of bodily humors or regulatory substances which innate properties such as heat and cold.³⁶ It is asserted that the forces and motions inside the body are also responsible for the nourishment and cleansing inside the body.³⁷ Also the disharmony with external factors such as social, environment and spiritual elements were considered as important factors that affected the health. The *Ojas* therefore helped with therapeutic rituals in order to maintain and restore health by bringing balance in mind, body and spirit.

Role of Religion in Traditional Healing

It is evident among all the primitive society that religion played an important role in governing the traditional healing so, the rituals were laid on the basis of their respective religious practice. The prayers and the *mwntwr* (mantra) chanted in course of the healing practice clearly show the role of the religion in the traditional healing. This system throws a light on the belief that existed among the community that disease was caused by an external factor. Therefore in order to heal the person it is necessary to appease the spirits that caused the disease. It was widely believed in ancient times that the human body was influenced and sustained by some forces, energy or essence which was necessary and

essential for life and health.³⁸ Disease was believed to be caused by an abstraction of vital essence, where external forces and spirits affected the human health.³⁹ There is a relation of spiritual and metaphysical interpretation of individual's vital force with the universe and cosmos; so the disturbance or damage to the vital force that lead to illness.⁴⁰ Therefore, restoration is required for the proper embodiment and functioning of the body which is acquired through ritualistic healing techniques.

Identifying Herbs and Medicinal Plants

The healing techniques of the *Oja* varied depending on the availability of the materials used in the treatment. The *Ojas* specialized in treating certain diseases like jaundice, flues, fevers, fixing broken bones etc. Another important job of the *Oja* is to identify which medicinal plants are more effective and use them to make medicines for treatment. In order to make medicines the *Oja* made sure that the properties of the medicinal herbs are checked carefully. The knowledge about the medicinal properties is learned from their ancestors on the basis of their experience.⁴¹ Once the plant having specific medicinal property was discovered to be therapeutic, the knowledge was passed on to others. In this way the healers learned the art of making medicines from their ancestors. Every village had *Oja* although there was variation in their healing process. Besides treating and curing the people from diseases, the *Oja* also counseled and healed them from mental breakdown or psychological related problems. In such cases the process are followed where the patient are made to intake a tablet that made him vomit. This process is believed to have washed the patient internally.⁴² After that the patient is given bathed with holy water and then prepared for the ritual. The ritual is done on the basis of *Bathou*, where the *Oja* chanted the *mwntwr* and stroked the patient with *sal daukhumwi* (wild fern). The ritual included sacrifices and offerings where the *Oja* assured to pay something in return when the patient is healed.⁴³ After the ritual the *Oja* chanted some incantation and let the patient to intake the medicine.⁴⁴ Similar traits are seen in other folk healing practices as well where the healers treated the patient by contacting with the unseen forces.⁴⁵ The incantation chanted by the healer is believed to produce psychological effect in the person that helped him to convince and bring calmness to the patient.⁴⁶ It is evident that

throughout the folk healing practices, the institution of belief governed the mind of the people which showed the parallelism that existed in the cultural practices of the world.⁴⁷

Ojas and traditional medicines had played a major role in the lives of the people during the absence of the advance medical system. Although some of their approaches were believed to be holistic which served relief to the mind and soul of the people, there was certain kind of irrationality as well. Other tribal societies also showed the same approaches in the healing system.⁴⁸ There was a strong influence of religion and customs which were seen influencing and was seen reflected in the tradition they followed while performing the ritual. They were believed to have acquired the power where they were blessed with the gift of vision and spoke in the voice of god.⁴⁹ They considered themselves as the mediator between the god and human where they communicated with god seeking for help to remove the miseries from people's life.

People visited traditional healer for other problems as well. Besides healing ailments, the *Oja* also served as a counselor where the people sought for advice in case of misery in their life. The *Oja* counseled the people and advised them to make offering to god to overcome from the uncertainty and miseries. The *Oja* performed the ritual for the family praying to appease the god for their well being and security from the evil forces.⁵⁰ The performance of the rituals also found for conducting in the community level for the village overcome the shortcomings like disease and for the security from evil influences. The *Oja* basically emphasized to drive away the negativity from the mind of the person by establishing psychological therapy. The *Ojas* took an effort to alleviate the pain and suffering from people's life. They relied on the available resources around them and are immersed in the local cultural and religious ideologies. The *Ojas* used various diagnostic methods to treat the patient depending on their ailments and problems. Traditional healers are still prevalent in the society and they are popular with their treatment for tropical diseases such as malaria, jaundice etc. Even though the healers lacked in explaining scientifically about their traits and techniques their methods seem to be effective and people still rely on them. They do not just treat the patients from sickness but they also act

as counselor and psychiatrist and deals with their mental afflictions and psychological disorders.

Self treatment is believed to be instinctual and rudimentary. It existed among the animals as well where they inherited the knowledge from their ancestors which makes everyone roughly a physician.⁵¹ The home remedies and home-based first aid account also serve as an important ancestral legacy in the Bodo households. Besides medicinal plants and herbs, staples such as rice, eggs and other foodstuffs like *kharwi* (alkaline) etc. are also used for preventive and therapeutic purpose by the community. *Kharwi* was generally used as a substitute for salt in Assam in olden days as salt was very rarely found. In fact, previously salt was only a part of aristocratic diet in Assam.⁵² It was a matter of general knowledge that people knew about its proper usage and application. Although in the previous times, people collected the herbs and medicinal plants from the forest around them but as the time passed by they decided to plant them around their houses for their convenience. Though this dietary and behavioral pattern may not be considered as the part of traditional medicinal system but it constitutes a significant part in the health care system in the community. They were also aware about the medicine that helped in removing pain, the medicines that contain analgesic components that help in reducing pain for headache, backache etc. Most of the people were also aware about the home remedial solution for the primary health care services and its prevention. They used wide variety of home remedial solution for the treatment of common cold, flu and fever. It was used either in the form of food or tablets of certain herbs and spices that were kept ready and used as an ingredient in their food. They were conscious about the diet that was follow during the time of illness. Most often the Bodos opted for home remedial solution for primary health care but it was only when they found out that the illness or affliction was severe, they decided to go to *Oja*.

The techniques used by the *Oja* are categorized into preventive and therapeutic process which includes tablets which are made using medicinal herbs and other naturally derived substances, ointments which are provided to apply on physical wounds. The *Oja* also provided sacramental objects like *kashini*, *endi pitwb* in the form of amulets which are

made by reciting prayers and sprinkling holy water on it. The spiritual healing which includes holy bath and application of medicine on the body for the purpose of spiritual purification includes recitation of prayers facing towards particular direction. This kind of healing ritual is specially done during the morning hours so the rituals and prayers are chanted facing towards the east. As the direction, east is associated with sunrise, it is considered to be propitious for such ritual. Though there is no standard form of practicing the ritual as found variation in techniques from *Oja* to *Oja*. The variation depended on factors like region, availability of materials and beliefs that varied from region to region.⁵³ Most of the healing is based on spiritual and magico-religious rituals which included chanting *mwntwr*, stroking the patient with *sal dakhumwi* to ward off the evil influence. It helped in convincing the patient and his family and helped the patient to relief from the fear of misfortunes and evil influences. The *Oja* used several other techniques as well like laying his hands on the head of the patient or the afflicted part and reciting *mwntwr* in order to remove the illness and heal the person. There are ceremonies like soul calling where *Oja* went to the state of trance and conversed with spirits⁵⁴ which throws a light on the belief of the community where they contacted and connected with the metaphysical being. The herbs and other natural sources as medicine improved the person physically but spiritual healing helped the person to cleanse his mind and was associated with feelings like purity, patience and calmness. It impacted the person positively by bringing changes in his actions, quality and body's vital energy driving away the negative influences from the person. The herbal healing consisted of tablets which are prescribed for taking orally primarily as a medicine while there are some which are put as an ingredient in the food. The medicines intended to provide the gustatory and salutary benefits in the person like the Ayurvedic medicinal system.⁵⁵ The properties of the medicine included building metabolism, comprehending the process of digestion and improve coloration of blood and formation of various recreations and excretions.⁵⁶ There are also medicines in the forms of amulets and anklets that had to be worn either on hand or neck depending on the situation as prescribed by the *Oja*. The amulets and anklets contained medicines filled in *endi pitwb* which are tied around with a thread with a belief to have certain kind of aromatic properties that healed certain kind of stress and brought calmness in the person. Amulets

are also believed to drive away the evil influences from the person. In order to drive away the evil forces the *Oja* gently stroked the person with the help of *sal daukhumwi* as a ritual to sweep away the evil forces or the malignant spirit from the body. The *Oja* also used certain substances like egg, and chicks for such kind of ritual. These substances are used as an offering to the malignant spirit that is responsible for causing trouble in person's life. This practice is seen among the other ancient communities as well where the eggs and small animals were used to sweep the body in ritual cleansings in order to drive away the malignant forces that caused the disease.⁵⁷ It was a common belief among the ancient communities that eggs and small animals were considered as a substitute for the vital essence of the person to target the evil spirits or the malignant forces responsible for causing ill-health.⁵⁸ The *Oja* sometimes offered the person medicine to be taken immediately right after the ritual as well. This kind of healing however was intended to bring balance in physical, mental and spiritual elements. The medicine taken internally along with the ritual is believed to bring changes in the state or motion of vital energy that affected the state of mind of the person and enhanced the bodily function. This kind of healing seemed to alleviate the physical suffering of the person. The person suffering from mental breakdown went through herbal rubdown where the *Oja* applied the paste made of various herbs. These seemed to draw out the distress that caused the mental breakdown and bring calmness in the person. Besides, there was other kind of physical therapies as well which includes *nanai* (massage), *phuslimnai* (rubbing) and *jharinai* (stroking). The *Oja* massaged the patient with the ointment that has been made with the natural substances depending on the nature of physical affliction. In case the patient is suffering from bone injury the *Oja* applied the ointment on the surface of the wound and tie a bamboo stretcher around it called *seren*.⁵⁹ The ointment is filled inside the stretcher and changed in particular time period depending on the advise of the *Oja*. The process was continued until the wound was healed and the bone was fixed. The mental breakdown is dealt by a ritual called *phuslimnai/bilidnai* (rubbing) and *jharinai* (stroking) where the *Oja* rubbed the patient on the head with special ointment prepared by him.⁶⁰ This ritual tended to cool down the patient and brought calmness in him. The *Oja* recited *mwntwr* while applying the ointment on the patient's head. After that, *jharinai* (stroking) is followed where the *Oja*

stroked the patient with *sal daukhumwi* which intended to drive away the evil forces that is responsible for causing mental breakdown to the person.⁶¹ This kind of healing is seen in the other folk medical tradition as well in order to deal with spiritual or metaphysical aspects of illness although there was variation in the herbs they used and methods they applied. The ritual in this process seems to provide a sense of relief from the physical pain that the person is going through. Some of the folk healing believed that these kind of healing activities alleviated intestinal gas, muscle pain and cramping as well.⁶² The physical manipulation in the body is aimed to bring calmness and relaxation in the mind and enhance the vital energy of the person. Similar kind of folk healing is followed by some folk Southeast-Asian countries like *dermabrasive* technique where a lubricated metal or coin is rubbed against the skin which is believed to release the wind or negative forces.⁶³ The techniques are called cupping and coining which are considered important and also convinced the patients to release the evil forces away from the body.⁶⁴

The *Ojas* are the ordinary people with respectable position in the society. Besides health practices they also take important social responsibilities. Their advice is sought while taking important decision for the welfare of the society. They are also solicited for advice while taking important decisions like marriage, naming child, solving family issues, marital issues etc. In the traditional healing system of the Bodo society, the *Ojas* are the backbone of the society. The *Ojas* are not charged for their service instead they accepted whatever is given to them as remuneration on honorarium basis. However, the healers of most of the culture believed that it is a sin to charge for their services. The *Ojas* therefore accept whatever has been given to them by the patient or by the family of the patient. Some of the *Ojas* claimed that their healing ability is a divine gifted.⁶⁵ It is their responsibility to look after the people and their problems. The prayers, rituals and *mwntwrs* are believed to have an effective role in providing both therapeutic and preventive health care systems. Certain kind of similarities in the healing traditions throughout the world which involves belief system that shapes the manner of healing tradition are well known. The theory of hot and cold is adherent among most of the folk healing systems.⁶⁶ The healer provided the medicines based on the symptoms of the patient. The folk medicine which is considered as

cold was prescribed for the disease symptom classified as hot and the medicine that is considered hot was prescribed for disease with hot symptom.⁶⁷ In the Ayurvedic healing system, the lemon juice and different kind of citrus fruits are considered cooling, refrigerant stomachic and useful in indigestion, dyspepsia, vomiting, thirst, burning sensation in the body, intoxication etc.⁶⁸ The similar technique is also evident in the traditional healing practice of the Bodos where the foods with sour properties are used for acidic problems and indigestions. The community acquire wide knowledge about the food and its effects. They restricted the patient from taking certain foods during the course of medicinal period. Especially sour and bitter foods are restricted as they believe that it cuts the effect of medicine.⁶⁹

The fundamental duty of the *Oja* is to cure and prevent diseases and illness. They played a significant role in taking care of the health and well-being of the people. The *Ojas* are still relevant at present time due to several reasons. One of the most important reason being the cost-efficiency and availability of their services in the every corner of the villages. In fact, the *Ojas* are more significant in rural areas where there is scarce public health facility. In such places, the patients seek help from them as they are more accessible. Since *Ojas* are more familiar with cultural bound health issues and traditions, their relationship with patients and their families places them in a position prior to the mainstream healthcare system. The *Ojas* are important part of the Bodo health care services whose legacies still serve as an essence in the primary health care services. Women are also not lacking behind in the field of healing. They specialized in midwifery and health issues related to women took care of the traditions set by the ancestors. They advised the expecting mother with the rules that are supposed to be followed during the pregnancy. The women are also expert at identifying herbs and medicinal products.

Threats concerning Traditional Healing Practices

Although, there are no authorities regulating the traditional medicinal practices it has both positive as well as negative consequences. It opened a scope for exploration and further development. It gave opportunities to the *Oja* to learn from other healers and a scope for further experimentation as well but on the other hand it led to question on the

quality of medicines which became strange and dangerous. This resulted to negative impact on the folk medicinal practice leading to quackery. As the medicines are made on the basis of trial and error method there are chances on the declining quality although there is no side effect seen. Also, as there is no restriction regarding the practice of traditional healing anybody could go ahead and practice it. Apparently, the younger generations are showing less interest towards learning the ancestral knowledge of the medicinal plants due to which they are losing the ability to identify the plants. Some two or three decades ago, the medicinal plants or grass used for making medicines were found in every home garden or neighboring habitat but that has now become impossible to find them in the locality.⁷⁰

The traditional healing practice needs to be protected and promoted in order to compensate the healthcare services. Besides, initiatives have been taken by governmental organizations to revive the traditional healing practices. The organizations like World Health Organization, AYUSH and other Non Governmental Organizations have been taken potential role in encouraging the traditional healers. In fact World Health has been organizing certain program which advocates the national policies, regulations and measures to safeguard the traditional knowledge of healing.⁷¹ This can lead to creation of global markets for traditional medicines as it has the basis for modern pharmaceuticals. AYUSH (Ayurveda Yoga and Naturopathy Unani Siddha and Homeopathy) is a medical organization in India that works under Ministry of Health that advocates the traditional medicinal system. In the year 2006 AYUSH introduced the concept of revitalization of local health traditions which helped in strengthening of public health services and management of health problems at different levels.⁷² It also aimed at promoting cost-effective services and grant universal access through the upgrading hospitals and dispensaries. The World Health organization is also playing a potential role in order to safeguard the traditional knowledge of medicine. They have taken certain measures to integrate the traditional medicine with the modern scientific medicine.⁷³ Various organizations in the national and international level have been taken keen initiatives for the promotion of both the traditional healers and the traditional medicine. With these

initiatives traditional medicines can get global recognition which lead to beneficial for the pharmaceutical industries as well.

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CHAPTER: V

CONCLUSION

Every culture has established set of beliefs and traditions which governed the mind of the people and society. Grossinger asserted that the medical establishment established the customs of belief just as politics and economics imposed the law and determined the basis of exchange.¹ The medical system of the ancient communities is described as a body of knowledge, beliefs and practices relating to health that promotes optimum functioning of the society.² The traditional healing system is also influenced by this belief and the principles set by the people of the community. The traditional healing practice has actually been practiced since ages as a rudimentary action against the disease. The knowledge has been transmitted orally which is still being practiced today. This process of healing has also been referred as “Alternative Medicine” since the 1970s.³ Alternative medicine generally describes the general and continuous emergence of systems of treatment in opposition to universal technological medicine which includes various ancient and folk medicine which are distinctive from the scientific model of medicine.⁴ The Traditional Healing System is defined by World Health Organization as the health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs that include medicines made of plants, animals and mineral including spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or sometimes in combination to treat, diagnose, prevent illness or maintain well-being.⁵ The term Traditional Medicine is associated to a particular geographical area or ethnic group which may have been adopted.⁶ The ancient communities practiced the traditional healing and folk medicinal practice through oral tradition which are learned and maintained primarily through oral channels.⁷ The oral traditions basically involved communication among individuals with common values and belief system which makes it easy to interpret. The traditional healing showed regional variation and shared among the people of closely tied groups or population with common ethnicity, cultural heritage or

regional influences.⁸ This medical knowledge stored by the ancestors of the communities seemed to be enormous. They claimed to have the cure for every disease known to them. Thus, the knowledge has been hand down to the next generation in the form of folklore and practices. The traditional healers are referred as *Oja* among the Bodos.

The term *Oja* of the Bodo usually signified the physicians as well as the spiritual healers. They have immense idea about the medicinal herbs and plants that are used to treat the people from sickness. Although there is variation in the kind of treatment of different communities, the healing treatment is influenced by the beliefs and values and administered the respective community. The traditional healers are an integral part of people and society before the advent of modern medicine. It is evident that every society had their particular way to deal with health and disease. Traditional healing is also often referred as folk healing, which represents a body of belief and cultural practices of healing of the particular culture or community. These healing practice inherited from the previous generation has been conceptualized within a hierarchical model of knowledge and sophistication of thought and placed between scientific medicine and primitive medicine.⁹ However, the modern scientific medicine is believed to have developed from the crudest and the most primitive form of healing which is a result of cultural development.¹⁰

The traditional healing is practiced even today and most of the people especially from the rural area depend on the traditional healing system as a primary health care practice. However, the traditional healing practices has most often been labeled as outdated, uninformed and called superstitious. In recent times, it has been gaining popularity and legitimacy as an alternative source of medicine. It is common among the folk healing practice of all the communities that the healers tried to maintain harmony between the metaphysical and physical world. The treatment included rituals like offerings and sacrifices in order to appease the gods and goddesses. The treatment also focused on holistic healing that aimed to provide overall well-being. Among the Bodos, the afflicted person is only considered normal when he or she behaved or thought like the rest of the people of the community. The concept of ill-health to the ancient communities was basically when a person acted abnormally or differently from the other people of the

community.¹¹ In tribal societies, the medical language is social and mythological language addressed to specific healing rituals.¹² The *Oja*, therefore, organized a ritual and counseled the patient and brought him back to the state of normalcy. The whole process basically tried to bring balance between the mind and the body of the patient. The *Oja* acted as the mediators who contacted with the metaphysical world. The environment, forest, rivers etc. are worshipped in the form of deities. The rituals, prayers and chants are dedicated to the local deities. The traditional healing mainly served psychological relief from ailments and helped in reducing anxiety. The *Oja* is believed to be provide a holistic healing which heals mind, body and soul of the patient. Technically, a host of neurological endocrine and immune pathways are said to connect the mind, body and spirit intimately.¹³ Thus, the *Oja* provided a sense of comfort to the patient through the process of healing.

The geographical locations inhabited by the Bodos are rich reserves of biodiversity which is responsible for availability of flora and fauna. The community made use of the resources from the forest for their subsistence. Besides sustenance they have been using the plants and herbs for medicinal purpose as well. People living in the fringes of the forest are well aware about the medicinal benefit of the plants and herbs. Their knowledge about the medicinal values are contributing significantly to the community for ages and it helped the people to deal with medicinal necessities before the advent of modern scientific medicine.

In addition to the medicinal herbal practice the healing practice also incorporated practices like rituals, chanting *mwntwrs*, prayers etc which are considered sacred and emphasized on the overall well being of the person. The healing practice dealing with rituals are basically governed by religious beliefs which may be referred as magico-religious healings as there is certain feature of superstition in the healing tradition. The disease and fevers are considered to be caused by the maleficent spirits when they are agitated or disturbed by the human actions. The *Oja* headed the healing ritual and he dealt with almost all kinds of diseases and fevers, digestive complaints, mental afflictions, broken bones etc. and prepared the medicine himself. The oral traditions reveal about the belief attached to the traditional healing system. The folklores, prayers and *mwntwrs* chanted by the *Oja* discloses about the community's faith towards the traditional healing.

Such traditional system which is inherited from the ancestors and served as an important legacy to the community. The practices also informed about the community's belief and practices regarding health and healthcare and their relationship with the environment.

Traditional healing is still very popular among the community and many reasons contribute to its popularity. One of the most important reasons is that the community is governed by religious beliefs. The causation of the disease is therefore expounded on the basis of religious grounds. It is the general conception of the Bodos that diseases are caused when gods were angry with the people. The misdeeds and misconducts of the people provoked the spirits. Therefore, to treat and cure themselves from the disease the person concerned needed to appease the spirit. The Bodos believed that disease originated from the imbalance of basic elements of life. So, the *Ojas* helped in restoration of life through ritualistic performances. They helped in building and re-establishing the harmony between the man and nature. There is essence of superstition in the traditional healing where they expected the metaphysical force to cure the patients. Religion is a quintessential part of the tribal affair and it is the concern of the community rather than of the individual.¹⁴ Religious beliefs and practices have been associated with health and healing practices throughout the history.¹⁵ The festive celebration and religious ceremonies took place in congregation where many people belonging to the same community participated in it. The spiritual healing also saw participation of many people where they prayed together for the well-being of the person. This public character of gathering, worship and ritualistic performance in group basically made them believe that it affected the tribe or the community as a whole so it was necessary that they absorb some positive energy for change and purification.¹⁶ The rituals are often done on the periodical basis on certain auspicious occasion which lead the community to live merrily and in harmony. The believe and practices of the Bodos postulated an idea of the people who are optimistic and obliging and infusing the difficulty or traumatic life events with purpose and meaning. This provision of support from the community bolstered by religious belief system emphasized the responsibility to care and support one another during the times of requirement. Theoretically the psychosocial functioning and neuroendocrine, immune and

cardiovascular process provide another possible mechanism by which religion could affect physical health.¹⁷ The immune system and cardiovascular status are adversely affected by the psychological stress, depression and social isolation.¹⁸ Moreover, this characteristic of traditional healing raised several questions on its accuracy. Some of the western science characterizes natural materials under the care of indigenous people as wild or primitive.¹⁹ The Anglo-European theory of cultural evolution draws a conclusion about the traditional healing system that they are outdated and uninformed.²⁰ Further, they presume that they are likely to be replaced by conventional biomedicine.²¹ The traditional healing practice is moreover believed to have survived as cultural custom which is believed to be efficient based on the observation and experience. Modern medicines are available and people are pragmatic in approaching and evaluating any form of treatment or remedy.²² People depended on the medicinal system based on the matter of experience. If the product is found unpleasant it tended to be rejected and it is retained in case the product seemed to work. However, W.H.R. Rivers argued that the indigenous medical practices irrational to Westerners might have been relevant in context of local beliefs and culture of the particular community.²³ The traditional medicinal system worked on the basis of its reputation for efficacy achieved through observation and experience and as a result of practice of cultural custom.

The Bodos are in the belief that the diseases are caused by the metaphysical forces. Sometimes disease is also believed to be the result of sorcery. Jealousy and revenge leads to practice of activities like witchcraft, casting spell against their enemy. This phenomenon is referred as Cultural Bound Syndrome where the culture or community is responsible for shading psychopathology of different psychiatric disorders and psychological problems. These affected the psychiatric and somatic manifestation of the people that are thought to be a recognizable ailment just inside a particular society or culture.²⁴ The biomedical medicines do not seem to work in such cases and the other societies are not aware about such situations.²⁵ The cultural concept arose from the folklore and the cultural diagnostic system of illness. They are sometimes referred as folk-illness or ethnic psychoses as well.²⁶ The culture, ethnic and racial identities was basically the source of strength and group

support which enhanced the spirit of the person but at the same time it led to psychological, interpersonal and intergenerational conflict or difficulties in adaptation that required diagnostic assessment.²⁷ Evil eye and jealousy over another person leads to witchery where the person loses his sense or comes under various kinds of trouble in life. The person practicing witchcraft tries to affect the other person's life by creating havoc. In case the scientific medicinal provider fails in treatment, it is generally presumed that the affliction is produced by the witchcraft. The Cultural Bound Syndrome is basically the reaction of social environment and the stigma associated with the disorder.

The Bodos assumed that the pain and suffering are caused by the gods and goddesses as a form of punishment for misdeeds. This belief prompted a perception of guilt among the people causing anxiety and imbalance in their mind and body. In such case, the *Oja* played a role of the counselor and treated the patient from such fear and anxiety. It is a common belief among the Bodos that everything that has life are interconnected and intertwined and that everything can affect each other. The oral traditions clearly indicated about the appeasement of the various deities with a view to remove all the pain and sufferings.²⁸ They therefore choose to live in harmony and strive to restore and maintain their health and live in accordance with the proscribed life set as per their cultural and religious values. The traditional healing practices of the Bodos highlighted the psychological involvement in the process of treatment like the other ancient medicinal practice.²⁹ The practices of the Bodos showed the existence of relationship between religion and spirituality. Religious practices involve beliefs, customs and rituals and emphasized on the causation of the diseases as the diseases are caused by the wrath of the spirits. Their healing activities included appeasement of the spirits which are benevolent or malevolent depending on the situation. The prehistoric artifacts in the Egypt indicated that the mental illness and physical illness were considered same and both were understood in religious terms like possession of demons or evil spirits.³⁰ Spirituality, on the other hand, is constructed by the community whose meaning have been changing over the years in order to be inclusive not only of religious but of non religious person as well. It has further expanded to include positive experience, traits and characteristics that

reflect good mental and social health.³¹ The traditional healing system of the Bodos indicated varying degree of religiosity and spirituality. It involves an active struggle to connect with the spirits or transcendent usually within a religious framework. The medical practitioners of the holistic systems go about attempting to cure people, challenging the medical establishment they raise a question concerning the law of nature and the meaning and goal of human life. This system incites validation which becomes a mere matter of faith.³² Religious and spiritual involvement might be related to the particular health condition. The indicators of good mental health are related to better physical health whereas poor mental health has the opposite effect.³³ The religious belief and behavior not only foster positive psychological traits but also represent powerful coping behaviors for dealing with life stress and adversity, imbuing negative experiences with meaning, purpose and hope.³⁴ The magico-rituals include a healing process which is hypnotic. The rituals consist of activities like repetitive chanting of *mwntwrs*, dance and musical rhythms. These ceremonies are believed to be magical and powerful which contain spiritual intensity and energy which is used as a treatment plan.³⁵ The *ojas* provided *khasini* and *endi pitwb* to the patients with the belief to facilitate the pain and suffering of the patient. These articles provided a sense of relief to the person going through pain. It also helped to vitalize the person by keeping the evil spirits away from the person. In the belief system of the Bodo the children are attacked by the malicious spirits and the baby is crying because of the affect of the malicious disturbance. In such cases, the *Ojas* provide *kashini*, amulets and cowries to the child to keep away the evil spirits from him. However, the clinicians regard the incidence as Colic Syndrome which is normal and explains the role of nutrients in exacerbating cry.³⁶

The Bodos besides healing emphasized on prevention of the diseases as well. They took protective steps in order to prevent seasonal flues and fevers and they are aware about the food to be taken and avoided. Home remedial solution is also an important initiative taken by the community as a health care service. The home remedies consisted of ingredients that are found around the house in an emergency. Generally it is collected from *bari khona* (kitchen garden). Some of the common spices like lemon, ginger and garlic are

used widely in the foods they cooked. *Bori* (tablet) made of various herbs and spices are prepared and kept ready for an hour of emergency. The ancient Indian medicinal practice also mentioned about medicines and mixtures of herbs in dried form or more usually mixed with *anupana* (suitable vehicle) to facilitate absorption.³⁷ Water, milk, honey, aloe vera and ghee are mostly used to mix the medicines. They are also put in the food they cooked especially, *dao bidwi* (chicken stew), *na gwran bidwi* (dry fish stew). These concoctions seemed to work and decrease the symptoms of flues and fever. People practiced to take appropriate food to their constitution and maintain balance in their diet. The community as a whole is aware of the medicinal benefits of the herbs and plants available to them. They are expertise in the field of self treating themselves by consumption and application of foods and herbal remedies. The food and spices are collected from the forest. They used the local herbs like *Khangsingsa*, *Manimuni*, *Usumwi* etc. in the preparation of herbal stew.³⁸ They are familiar with the properties of most of the herbs and plant sources so they used it against the physical afflictions and diseases.³⁹ Almost all the people had knowledge on the treatment of the flues, fever or any kind of afflictions they suffered from in the past.⁴⁰ These practices show the rudimentary knowledge and wisdom of the people.

The traditional healing practices of the ancient communities are based on the principle of animism, where the spirits and maleficent forces are believed to be connected to the material world. It is evident that most of the traditional healing practices around the world believed on the shared notion of cyclic and cosmic balance that can affect the person. So, in order to heal the person the healer had to restore the patient's physical and metaphysical state to normalcy by correcting the imbalance that caused the patient to suffer. They believed in living with harmony with other living beings as they thought social, environment and spiritual elements could affect their health.⁴¹ This theory of vital essence was believed by the Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Hindu Ayurveda as well which considered vital principles or life forces as the core of cosmologies.⁴² The Ayurveda mentions about *Prana* as the universal life force and the Chinese Philosophy believed in *yin-yang*, a life power that flowed through the cosmos.⁴³

Bar mwdai/ bar garji (evil forces) is one of the cause which affected the life of the person. In such situation rituals are conducted in order to appease the deities like *dwi ni mwdai* (river deity), *gami ni mwdai* (village deity) etc to overcome the situation and bring back the person to normal functioning. Different cultures have different ideas that lead to variation in the belief regarding the etiology of diseases. It was common belief among the ancient communities that disease was caused by an external force rather than a result of pathological effects. The Bodos mainly held *mwdai* responsible for causing affliction in person's life so in order to get away from the problems the *mwdai* is appeased with the help of rituals which included sacrifices.⁴⁴ The pervasive cultural idea also held concerned person's morality responsible for his own ill-health like his misdeeds, misbehavior and actions against the societal norms.⁴⁵ The cultural basis of cure in any community, established customs of belief which governed almost all the aspects of life of the people. Health and disease are determined on the basis of culturally established norms and values. In the primitive tribal societies the people were divided into categories not on the basis of professions but in a pantheon of customs, ideas and artifacts which made it almost impossible to apply medicine cross-culturally.⁴⁶ Moreover, there is parallelism in the theories regarding the belief system of ill-health and diseases. The common belief that sickness occurred because of the following reason like imbalance in mind and body, natural process and as a punishment by the maleficent spirits existed among all the ancient societies.⁴⁷ Disease is considered as unnatural and people generally made their own conclusion from the proposition and cultural theories related to ill-health. As the Bodos believed that life is controlled and manipulated by the divine beings it is important to live in harmony with nature as the imbalance disrupted the life of the people. The society thus set certain laws to bring the situation under their control.

The main aim of the *oja* is to restore balance in mind, body and spirit. The healing process is basically holistic and not fragmented like any other primitive healing. The characteristic of an archetypal native medicine man is dynamic in nature, he emphasizes on bringing back the dysfunctional man back into harmony by performing rituals and sacrifices to god.⁴⁸ It is very clear that the traditional healing worked on the idea that health

and disease are manipulated by gods and goddesses. The disease is regarded as a consequence of his personal and social misconduct. The ethno medicine of any communities of the primitive times worked on the basis of social and environmental integration. The herbal healers made the medicines from natural resources available in all kinds of habitats on the basis of universally practiced empirical science. This has been mentioned in *Sushruta Samhita* and *Charaka Samhita* as well where the knowledge of the ordinary folks like cowherds, hermits, hunters and forest dwellers have been acknowledged and are further considered as the resource person who gathers information regarding medicinal plants.⁴⁹ Besides plant sources, animal sources and mineral substances are also used in making medicines. The medicines are prepared by the healers in special way by reciting hymns to their respective local deities.⁵⁰ It is also mentioned in the Vedic healing that the healing plants play a great role along with recitation of magic incantations.⁵¹ Although, the indigenous healers should not be disparaged instinctively as most of the medicines have therapeutic value which have been made by the process of trial and error in which the successful remedies have been passed down from one generation to the next.⁵² These methods are considered as true remedies and tried by the folks.⁵³ Medicine is ambivalent, basically a substance or object with the capacity to change things. It may be herb, pharmaceutical, injections and sorcery objects etc.⁵⁴ The medicines retain the power to control the bodily capacity of the person. It has the power to heal and it can save life but it can be used otherwise as well which cannot be entirely harnessed.⁵⁵

The Bodos considered disease is the product of imbalance in body and mind so they sought for natural treatment. This phenomenon is referred as naturopathy where the remedial practice as a matter of course deals with nature and natural things almost as instinct.⁵⁶ Fasting to relieve the symptom of an upset stomach, maintaining good health, avoiding certain foods like meats and dairy products etc. are all examples of naturopathy. The medicinal use of herbs is as old as mankind itself and food and medicines are linked. Herbs and plant sources are consumed for health gaining properties.⁵⁷ In ancient Egypt garlic was given as a daily ration to build strong immunity to fight fever and infection.⁵⁸ The naturopaths also believed in the spiritual and vital healing power of nature claiming

absolute reliance upon the cosmic forces of man's nature. The plants and animals sources are not only considered as a source of remedy but they are also linked to spiritual health of the planet as well. For example the native Hawaiian traditions treat plants as relative in order to heal from certain diseases.⁵⁹ The Bodos in order to treat *ajinai* (stye), an eye disease performed, a ritual is performed to make friends with *ajinai pipang* (Monochoria Hastata) and remain in harmony. The Bodos are very much concerned about the preservation of the environment to safeguard themselves from the natural calamities and problems caused by nature.

The *ojas* played a significant role in taking care of the health and well-being of the people. They have put emphasis on religious devotion in order to maintain good health like the health professionals of the ancient communities.⁶⁰ According to the Bodos, Disease is a social phenomenon and not simply biological one. Social and cultural factors contributed to the causation of disease. The *Oja* defines the sickness and interprets the symptoms of the patient. Then he performs the ritual to treat the patient. The *Ojas* considered themselves as inter-mediator between the human and the metaphysical forces. They believed that they are chosen as an attendant by their progenitors or the divine being to look after the people and their sufferings.⁶¹ They diagnose the problems that people are suffering from especially the unexplainable situations. They analyze the cause of the events and interpret the message the spirits indicate. They also provide herbal medicines along with the ritualistic healing activity. The *Oja* counseled the people and encouraged to devout to religious belief and practices in order to maintain well-being, happiness and fulfillment in all aspects of life. They also try to resolve other problems which include emotional, marital problem and other problems. This type of counseling helped to promote religious teachings and mental health benefits. It helped to change negative thoughts and self-destructive behavior. The *Oja* also helped to relieve anxiety, depression and other mental problems.

The treatment of the Bodo consisted of various kinds which included natural, supernatural, mental and physical healing. The supernatural healing involved appeasement of the spirits through rituals and sacrifices. The *oja* also chanted *mwntwr* in order to remove diseases in the belief that appeasement of deities would restore the person's health

to normalcy. There were elements of magic and religion in the form of spiritual healing which discloses about the belief system of the community. They thought that the external factors were responsible for the cause of disease hence they organized rituals to appease the spirits. The reference of various *mwdais* (local deities) in their *mwntwrs* and prayers informs about the process of pacification. It also conveys important information through this process i.e., about their relationship with the environment. The *mwdai* referred in their prayers *dwi ni mwdai* (river deity), *hagra ni mwdai* (forest deity), *gami ni mwdai* (village deity) etc. suggest that they looked upon the nature and environment around them as their protector and provider. Therefore it is their duty to safeguard the nature and environment around them and if they failed to do so they had to go through unfavorable and unpleasant consequences.

The *Ojas* are accessible to populations especially in the places which do not have Primary Health Care Services. Also, they are comparatively more affordable especially for the poorer sections of the community. That's why they are prominent among the people. The *Ojas* also do not charge for their service like the healers of most of the communities. They accept whatever has been given to them by the patient or by the family of the patient as a donation. Most of the healer considers that healing ability is a divine gift that God has gifted them and that it is their sole responsibility to look after their folks. The oja accepts castrated cock, hen and *jumai* (traditional rice beer) as a customary charge in return of the treatment from the patients. However, in present times there are many cases of quackery. Some people claim themselves as *oja*, herbal medicine practitioners and sell their medicines and tablets at unreasonable rates. The case of serious crisis of health care system has led people to shift their focus towards the alternatives. Although modern scientific medicines come up with innovations and miracles, sometimes it lacks in covering up the crisis it has precipitated for itself. Therefore, the healthcare system requires new approaches, comprehensive and radical new paradigm shift towards alternative medicines. The advancement in modern science and development in the medical healthcare systems have penetrated to every part of the country. But this advancement does not diminish the traditional systems and practice that are deeply rooted to the culture and indigenous

identity of the Bodos. The modern medicine and traditional healthcare system co-exist and people still depend on *Oja* to cure themselves from disease like jaundice. However the *Ojas* even take help from medical science the *Ojas* who are specialized in fixing broken bones seek help from the laboratories for X-ray reports so that it becomes easier for them to treat the patient.⁶²

The environmental change due to globalization is capable of bringing challenges to the indigenous culture. The indigenous cultures around the globe used traditional medicines derived from the natural environment. This has led to loss of certain medicinal remedies as there is sudden disappearance of the plants, animals and mineral sources that goes into making medicines. The traditional healers derive their sources from the environment around them. Unfortunately deforestation has been a great concern as the forest are being cleared and encroached. The slash and burn agriculture is also another important factor responsible for the destruction of forest.⁶³ Another factor is climate change that humans have created through their actions at the cost of environment which has created threat to the natural resources. The environment plays a huge role in shaping traditional knowledge as it has strong influence in constituting community's medicinal resources. The ongoing environmental change ushered to lose of several plant and animal species due to changes in the ecosystem. Therefore, the concern needs to be created in order to save the fate of the traditional knowledge of the community.

The traditional medicine has been gaining popularity in the recent times. There has been rapid growth in the demand of Traditional medicine both codified and non-codified. However, in order to encourage the traditional healing system organizations like WHO (World Health Organization) and AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) play an important role in assuring the future of traditional medicine. The WHO has facilitated integration of traditional medicine into the national healthcare system by assisting member states to develop their own national policies on traditional medicine. It has also taken initiative in order to promote the proper use of traditional medicine by developing them in order to provide international standards with certain technical guidelines and methodologies.⁶⁴ World Health Organization has also

taken up initiative by implementing a strategy on 56th World Health Assembly in 2003 that advocates the national policies and regulations, drug safety monitoring systems, measures to protect knowledge of traditional medicine and plant resources and to safeguard the intellectual property rights of traditional practitioners.⁶⁵ In India the studies carried out by FRLHT (Foundation of Revitalization of Local Health Traditions) and CCD (Continuity of Care Document) have been instrumental in organizing programs to encourage the sector of medicinal plants in order to enhance local livelihoods through the constitution of a community based enterprise.⁶⁶ These organizations basically dealt with documentation, research and conservation of medicinal plants and animals. They also disseminate and create awareness among the villagers in order to consolidate and strengthen the traditional knowledge. The studies carried out by FRLHT and CCD showed that in poor households, health expenses were extremely high. Therefore, the program emphasized on establishing garden with commonly used medicinal plants in the backyards of their own homes and trained them in local health traditions. The program addressed the issue of medicinal plant conservations as well as the health concerns and its economic aspect in rural communities.⁶⁷ AYUSH also plays a significant role in promotion of traditional medicine. It started as ISM&H (Indian System of Medicine and Homeopathy) which was created in March, 1995 and it was renamed as Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) in November 2003. It aims to provide focused attention for the development of Education and Research in Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy, the traditional Indian medicinal system.⁶⁸ The main objective of AYUSH was to upgrade the educational standards of Indian Systems of Medicines and Homoeopathy colleges in the country. Thus they formed its Ministry on 9th November' 2014 in order to emphasize and strengthen the existing research institutions. It also ensured a time-bound research program on identified diseases for which these systems have an effective treatment. The organization also drew schemes for promotion, cultivation and regeneration of medicinal plants used in these systems and to evolve the Pharmacopoeial standards for Indian Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy drugs. The traditional healing system of the Bodos has a prospect with certain herbal remedies as well.

Although the globalization has promoted global market for traditional medicines it needs quality control of medicines and proper training and competence of the healers. Therefore, there should be proper investigation and control on it as the lack of regulation could lead to misuse of the medicines by unqualified practitioners and loss of credibility of the system.⁶⁹ Some *Ojas* however do not agree with the idea of strengthening regulation by the health administration as they do not belong to same system. Traditional medicine has the basis for modern pharmaceuticals so collaborating with the health administration and patenting it could be helpful.⁷⁰ One-fourth of pharmaceutical products is based on or derived from plants, so the traditional medicine is being viewed by the pharmaceutical industry as a source of qualified leads.⁷¹ Aspirin, Morphine, Quinine, Atropine and Digitalis are some examples of drugs that have been derived from natural substance.⁷² The quinine and quindine obtained from Quina (Cinchona), Andean forest have been used against malaria.⁷³ The latest treatment of malaria has been developed from the traditional Chinese pharmacopeia derived from the plant Artemisia.⁷⁴ Aspirin is actually a drug which is a result of the medicine produced by Extracting juice from the bark of white willow recommended by Hippocrates.⁷⁵ In fact the white willow leaves were used by the Egyptians as an analgesic and anti-inflammatory drug.⁷⁶ Forest is an important source to medicinal compounds which provides wild organisms including foods and drinks. The natural products have been a source of new drugs over the past 25 years. It has been found that out of 1,010 new chemical entities, 124 were biological, 41 were natural products and 232 were derived from natural products.⁷⁷ The herbal drugs are used throughout the world as a part of traditional medicinal practice. The modern scientific medicine has corroborated the proper use of diverse traditional ethnomedicinal plants like ginko (ginko biloba), ginseng (panax ginseng) and cantella (cantella asiatica) as a part of modern therapies through proper investigation that establishes their quality, scrutiny and safety.⁷⁸ While many of the bioactive compounds are highly toxic if used in high doses,⁷⁹ one should be very careful while using it. The locals living around the forest are also aware of the fact that not all the parts of every plant are effective and instead it could be harmful.⁸⁰ Though the process to make herbal medicine is simpler than the process of developing synthetic drug, it gives advantage to the people living in the geographical area where such herbs are

available. It is also available at reasonable price and easily accessible. *Manimuni* (Cantella Asiatica) has been used by the Bodos to treat various diseases like stomach problems and skin diseases. It has been introduced to the European medicine as an effective wound healing agent as well as a remedy to skin problems.⁸¹ The medicinal plants could therefore be cultivated for future ethnopharmacology. The problem is once the traditional medicine becomes a commercial entity, wildcrafting could eliminate it if agriculture techniques for crop development are not introduced. The WHO has therefore issued a set of guidelines for good agricultural and collection practices (GACP) for medicinal plants.⁸² It is an initiative to protect the medicinal plant and the promotion of their cultivation, collection and use in a sustainable manner which conserves both the medicinal plant and the environment. But if there is no proper knowledge about its usage and properties it could be dangerous. De Silva therefore warns of the dangers of powerful chemicals in unknown quantities and quality while recognizing the important role of medicinal plants.⁸³

Traditional medicine could be protected in the form of Intellectual Property Right in case there is a violation against the traditional knowledge holder.⁸⁴ The traditional and indigenous knowledge are inventive and intellectual so it important to protect them on legal, ethical and professional framework. The local administration and organizations can also take an initiative to protect them. In such way the healer or the traditional knowledge holder could be credited and make its way to global market. It is very important to preserve and safeguard the traditional knowledge of medicine as it is of great significance. Although it is not possible to document non-codified knowledge because of several issues involved, the preservation of oral tradition is necessary as it has greater vulnerability to loss and misappropriation.

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Photo Gallery



Endi pipang (Castor plant)



Endi pitwb (silk cocoon)



pitwb ready to be worn



Woman making paste to prepare *bori*



Paste for *bori*



Bori ready for consumption



Dudani (Euphorbia Hirta)



Paraokia, herb consumed by
lactating mothers



Khangsingsa (Leucas Aspera)



Saldaukhumwi used during ritual by the *Oja* to stroke the patient.



Usumai, *Acemella paniculata*

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