

## Chapter- III

### Ethno-plants and Ethnic names: Linguistic and Cultural importance

#### 3.1 Linguistic importance:

Each language community has their own terminology for the plant species. The terminology used for the native plants are the treasure to the each language community as it contribute to language vitality. In Bodo community, most of the native name of the plants express the physical structure and its uses itself. In the article, '*Boro Hariya Bahainai Laiphang Arw Mwigong-Thgaigongni Mung: Rao Harimuni Sompod*' Phukan Ch. Basumatary says about how native names of the plants are related to the native names of the birds and insects. Moreover, he remarks that, the word structure of the plants name is related to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Wild edible plants like *dao p<sup>h</sup>enda*, *daogang zuula*, *haṅsui ap<sup>h</sup>a*, *laphasaik<sup>h</sup>ɔ*, *silā asigur* and cultivated plant *dao mewai* are the names related to the bird species. In addition, medicinal plants like *daok<sup>h</sup>a k<sup>h</sup>amp<sup>h</sup>lai*, *daok<sup>h</sup>i siliṅ* are the examples related to the bird species. Likewise, there are names related to the animals, insect, fish and mollusca as well namely, *gɔraj salai*, *musuu k<sup>h</sup>umun*, *maozi k<sup>h</sup>uma*, *gaṅzema t<sup>h</sup>aso*, *nabik<sup>h</sup>i*, *nasrai k<sup>h</sup>ɔɔɔ*, *samɔ laot<sup>h</sup>i*. The name is also given according to the physical structure of the plants. The plants names like *gɔraj salai* (*tongue of horse*), *musuu k<sup>h</sup>umun* (*cowhide*), *maozi k<sup>h</sup>uma* (*ears of cat*), *k<sup>h</sup>asi hat<sup>h</sup>ai* (*sickle of serrated edges*), *p<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ui laori* (*betel leaf with long in size*) are given by seeing the structure of their leaves. With regards to the plants *mat<sup>h</sup>i galdab* and *haṅsui ap<sup>h</sup>a* (*foot palm of duck*), as their most of the stems and leaves are lie upon or just above the ground and spread around rather than being vertical, is named as their structure of the stems. The meaning of these hybridized compound words defines the structure of these plants. The term *mat<sup>h</sup>i* means soil in the Assamese and *galdab* means flat in size in the Bodo. Likewise, *haṅsui* is a borrowed term via Assamese which means duck and *ap<sup>h</sup>a* is a native term

which means foot palm. The plant *haŋsu ap<sup>h</sup>a* seems like the foot palm of the duck as it is flat and fully lies upon the ground. There is a plant which is named in accordance with their structure of the flower. The name of this species is *uŋk<sup>h</sup>am p<sup>h</sup>urum/uŋk<sup>h</sup>am k<sup>h</sup>alai* which literal meaning is fallen rice/left out rice. Its flower blooms in a form of clusters. The cluster of tiny white flowers of this plant is resembled to the boiled rice. So, it is named in accordance with the structure of flower. Similarly, the plant called *muider sundai* also acquired its name by the structure of the flower. The literal meaning of this plant's name is 'elephant trunk'.

It is observed that some plants are acquired their name according to their uses. e.g. the plant called, *ɔrk<sup>h</sup>am/ɔr zumudui* is used to get relief from burning sensation. The term *ɔrk<sup>h</sup>am/ɔr zumudui* is compounds of two lexical words. e.g. *ɔr(fire)+k<sup>h</sup>am(burn)=ɔrk<sup>h</sup>am*, *ɔr(fire)+zumudui(saliva)=ɔr zumudui*. Here, the term used for this plant has been expressing the uses of it. The plants name like *lunt<sup>h</sup>i/lɔnt<sup>h</sup>i* and *aznaj/azinaj* is also derived with reference to their uses. In Bodo, the term *lunt<sup>h</sup>i/lɔnt<sup>h</sup>i* is utilized for the viral infection called, chicken pox. In Bodo community the plant *lunt<sup>h</sup>i/lɔnt<sup>h</sup>i* is consume to get rid of the chicken pox. So, its name is derived according to its uses. Likewise, the term *aznaj/azinaj* utilized for styne in Bodo. There is a belief among the Bodo community that making friendship with the plant *aznaj/azinaj* helps to get rid of the styne.

The used of specific knowledge regarding the native plants helps in preserving the native vocabulary of particular language community. The Bodos have been using many plants as vegetable, medicine and in rituals as well. It is observed that most of the terminology used for these plants is native to the Bodo language. In the plants name like, *dao mewai*, *dao p<sup>h</sup>enda*, *ɔrk<sup>h</sup>am*, *daok<sup>h</sup>a k<sup>h</sup>amp<sup>h</sup>lai*, *daok<sup>h</sup>isiliŋ*, *daogaŋzuula*, *ɔnt<sup>h</sup>ai bazab* etc. constituted the lexical of a Bodo vocabulary. It is worth to mention that, with regards to the vegetable name, /*mu*i/ bound morpheme is occupied in the beginning of the some vegetable name and cuisine of the Bodo community. e.g. *muigɔŋ(vegetable)*, *muith<sup>a</sup>(sorrel)*, *muip<sup>h</sup>rai(malabar spinach)*, *muirat<sup>h</sup>ik<sup>h</sup>i(sonchus*

*arvensis*), *muith<sup>ru</sup>*(papaya), *muik<sup>h</sup>ari*(a mixed vegetable prepared by giving *k<sup>h</sup>arui*), *muidru*(a mixed vegetable). In the same way, /*t<sup>h</sup>ai*/ bound morpheme is take place in beginning of the fruits name. e.g. *t<sup>h</sup>aizuu*, *t<sup>h</sup>aik<sup>h</sup>a*, *t<sup>h</sup>aisuri*, *t<sup>h</sup>aibeŋ* etc. These kinds of structures of the words are only found in the Bodo language.

It is noticed that, some Ethnobotanical terms of Bodo are borrowed from the Indo-Aryan languages. Most of these are borrowed via Assamese language, which is neighbouring language community of the Bodo. It is mostly found in compounding terms.

e.g.

*burma*(Bodo)+*dari*(urdu)=*burma dari*

*t<sup>h</sup>iŋk<sup>h</sup>li*(Assamese)+*k<sup>h</sup>alai*(Bodo)=*t<sup>h</sup>iŋk<sup>h</sup>li k<sup>h</sup>alai*

*guma*(Bodo)+*at<sup>h</sup>a*(Assamese)=*guma at<sup>h</sup>a*

*silā*(Assamese)+*asigur*(Bodo)=*silā asigur*

*gɔraj*(via Assamese)+*salai*(Bodo)=*gɔraj salaj* etc.

Here, in some of borrowed terms, phonemic changes are taking place and some are used as it is.

### 3.2 Cultural importance:

Since pre-historic time, human culture has been profoundly influenced by the plant kingdom. Mostly, it plays a vital role in the culture of indigenous people. It is associated with religious practices, folk songs, mythological stories festivals and day to day life of particular indigenous community. With regard to the religious practice, the Bodos have been associated with many native plants. These plants are considered as sacred plant among the Bodos. ‘*sizuu*’ is one of the plants which is deeply associated with the traditional religion ‘*bat<sup>h</sup>uu*’ of the Bodo community. This plant is regarded as a symbol of the supreme God ‘*burai bat<sup>h</sup>uu*’. Moreover, the plants *zatra-si*, *t<sup>h</sup>alir bip<sup>h</sup>aŋ*, *uuā mak<sup>h</sup>al*, *uuā t<sup>h</sup>ere*, *k<sup>h</sup>aŋkla* have a values and beliefs in *bat<sup>h</sup>uu*

religion. These plants have been preserving the religious culture of the Bodo community.

In the spring festival *buisagu*, the Bodos performed many rituals where plants play a vital role. The day before *buisagu*, there is a tradition of collecting one hundred and one types of edible plants either wild or cultivated among the Bodos. These plants are used to prepare a ritual dish which is known as *guk<sup>ha</sup> guk<sup>h</sup>ui* where a plant called *k<sup>h</sup>uŋk<sup>h</sup>a* is must. It is belief that consuming this mixed vegetable helps to get rid of several diseases. Again, on this same day, *musuo buisagu*, a *buisagu* for the cattle is celebrated. On this day cattle are worshiped and garlanded with the garlands made of *lao* (*bottle guard*), *p<sup>h</sup>ant<sup>h</sup>ao* (*brinjal*), *haldui* (*turmeric*) and *t<sup>h</sup>aik<sup>h</sup>a* (*garcinia cowa*). While cattle are brought to the river for bathing the cowherd beat the cattle lightly with the plant called, *dig<sup>h</sup>ɔlɔti* (*litsea salicifolia*). After washing the cattle, the branches of *dig<sup>h</sup>ɔlɔti*, *t<sup>h</sup>amp<sup>h</sup>uik<sup>h</sup>rob* (*flemingia strobilifera*), leaf of *raidung/raideŋ* (*calamus latifolius*) and the garland made of *lao*, *p<sup>h</sup>ant<sup>h</sup>ao*, *haldui* and *t<sup>h</sup>aik<sup>h</sup>a* are hung on the roof of cattle shed, granary, tubewell/well and in the entrance gate of the house. In some geographical area, a twig of flowers of *muk<sup>h</sup>una/luk<sup>h</sup>una* (*clerodendrum infortunatum*) and *k<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ri bibar* (*cucuma caesia*) are also added in the bunch. The plant *t<sup>h</sup>amp<sup>h</sup>uik<sup>h</sup>rob* supposed to be a mosquito repellent among the Bodos.

In the Bodo society, some healing system is associated with folk beliefs. For the treatment of stye the Bodos make the friendship with the plant *azinaj/azinaj*. Moreover, the Bodos are believed that consuming *lunt<sup>h</sup>i/lɔnt<sup>h</sup>i* plant helps in curing the chicken pox. Further, it is supposed that, in treating a kind of health issue of infants' called *muk<sup>h</sup>ra k<sup>h</sup>aya naŋnaj*, an infant is put to the *k<sup>h</sup>ɔp<sup>h</sup>ri* to sleep for a while. *k<sup>h</sup>ɔp<sup>h</sup>ri* is a kind of traditional umbrella made of *woa* (*bamboo*) and *laihulai* plant which is basically used during the cultivation.

Further in the Bodo soceity, there is a ritual called *narzi ɔrgarnaj* which has been performed in the funeral. Chewing of *narzi guran* (*dried jute leaves*) is a symbol of

giving farewell to the departed soul. Thus, divorce is given just by splitting a betel leaf mutually by the couple in Bodo community. This act is called *p<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ui lai bisinaj* in Bodo.

In the above discussion it reveals that, the plants associated with the culture of the Bodo community is preserving the vocabulary of the language as well as helping in validating the culture of the community. Most of the terminology used for the ethno-plant is inherently native to Bodo language. Some terms are acquired in accordance with the physical structure of the plants and its uses. The societal value for the plant is helping to preserve the native plants too.