

Chapter-I

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Bodo community:

The Bodo as one of the linguistic communities of the North East India belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Racially they belong to the Indo Mongoloid stock. The term 'Bodo' was first introduced by Brian Houghton Hodgson on his Monograph 'Essay the first: on the Kocch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes' in 1847¹. The term 'Bodo' refers to the language and linguistic community. In regards to the Bodo, in Linguistic survey of India, George A Grierson states that "Bodo or Bara is the name by which the Mech or Mes and the Kocharies call themselves. Like other tribal names in Assam, the name probably once meant a male member of the tribe. In then closely allied Tripura language bara(k), still means a 'man' and a Kachari or Mech will call himself a Bara-fisa, a son of Baras"²

According to the Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the presence of Mongoloid group of people in India was noted by 10th century B.C. when the Veda book was compiled.³ The researchers claimed that the Mongolians were initially inhabitants of the area called 'Bod' of Huang-Ho and Yang-tsze Kiang river bank of china. The meaning of 'Bod' (A Tibetan word) is the 'first dwelling place or homeland.'⁴ Suniti Kumar Chatterji states that "The area of characterization for the primitive Sino-Tibetan speech appears to have been North-Western China between the head-waters of the Huang Ho and Yang-tsze Kiang rivers."⁵ They emigrated across the North Eastern India, and

¹. Hodgson, B.H. *Essay the first: on the Kocch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1847

². Grierson, George A. *Linguistic Survey of India*. Vol.III-Part-II. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, Indian reprint in 2017, p.1

³. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. *Kirāta-Jana-Kṛti*. Kalkata: Professor Mihir Kumar Chakrabarti, 2011, Reprint, p.16

⁴. Brahma, Aleendra. *Modern Bodo Grammar*. Vol.-I, Guwahati: N.L. Publications, 2013, p.2

⁵. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. *Kirāta-Jana-Kṛti*. Kalkata: Professor Mihir Kumar Chakrabarti, 2011, Reprint, p.21

scattered in the Brahmaputra valley of old Assam and Bengal. In this regards in Kirāta-Jana-Kṛiti, Suniti Kumar Chatterji claimed that “The Mongoloid tribes speaking dialects of the Tibeto- Burman Branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family would appeared to have found a centre of dispersion in some tract to the east of Tibet and North East of Assam, from where they began to spread into India and Tibet; and the movement may have started as suggested before, prior to 1000 B.C. at least. The rout taken by the first arrivals into India is not known – whether it was from Tibet and then south by crossing the Himalayas, or whether it was from East Assam, along the Bharali, the Banga, the Subansiri, the Brahmaputa, the sesiri, The Dibang, the Luhit and the Noa Dihing and other rivers and down the Brahmaputra in Assam.”⁶

In the present context, The Bodos are mostly occupied in North Eastern part of India, particularly in Assam, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, some portion of the Bodo community is found in Bangladesh and Nepal. They are introduced by different name in different region. In Assam they introduced themselves as Bodo or Boro while other neighboring communities identified them as a Boro-kochari. In West Bengal, Nepal and Bangladesh they are addressed as a Mech and Meches. In Assam, Bodos are found being scattered all over the Northern and Southern Brahmaputra valley. But they are mostly concentrated in Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri, Kamrup, Nalbari, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji district.

1.2 Introduction to the Ethnobotany:

The relationship between one aboriginal group of the people and plant is studied in Ethnobotany. In general, Ethnobotany refers to the study of plants utilized by indigenous people and their traditional knowledge, beliefs about those plants. In 1895, this term was first introduced by the American Botanist John Hershberger to the study of plants used by the primitive and aboriginal people⁷. Earlier, in 1873, Stephen Powers introduced the term ‘Aboriginal botany’ for the study of all forms of

⁶. Ibid.,p.41

⁷. Jain, S.K. and Mudgal, V. *A Hand Book of Ethnobotany*. Dehra Dun: Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh,2019, Reprint,p.1

vegetation which are used by the aborigines for different purposes such as medicine, food, textiles and ornaments.⁸ But the term didn't get universal acceptance. Richard Evan Schultes is considered as the father of modern Ethnobotany. He studied the plants used by indigenous peoples of different geographical area. In India, S.K. Jain does pioneering work on Ethnobotany.

The term Ethnobotany is variously defined by the different Ethnobotanist as follows- According to Jones (1941), Ethnobotany is defined as “the study of the interrelations of primitive man and plants.”⁹

Faulks (1958) considered the subject of Ethnobotany as “the total relationship between man and vegetation which meant more than even the scope of Economic Botany.”¹⁰

Schultes (1962) elaborated Ethnobotany as “the study of relationships which exist between people of primitive society and their plant environment.”¹¹

According to Vartak & Gadgil (1980), “Ethnobotany is a branch of economic botany, a section of which deals with the role of plants in section of which deals with the role of plants in the life and culture of aborigines and tribal people.”¹²

According to Mudgal & Jain (1983), “Ethnobotany deals with studies among the tribals and rural people for recording their unique knowledge about plant wealth and for search of new resources ofherbal drugs, edible plants and other aspects of plants.”¹³

Jain (1986) states that, “Ethnobotany deals with the direct relationship of plants and man.”¹⁴

Manilal (1989) states that, “the term today has come to denote the entire realm of direct relationship between plants and man.”¹⁵

⁸. Ibid.,p.2

⁹. Ibid.,p.1

¹⁰. Ibid.

¹¹. Ibid.

¹². Ibid.,p.3

¹³. Ibid.

¹⁴. Ibid., p.3

¹⁵. Ibid.

According to Arora (1997) “Ethnobotany in wider context denotes the entire realm of useful relationship between plants and the man.”¹⁶

With this regard to the definition of the term Ethnobotany, it is seen that, the concept has changed through the ages. In the present context, it is an interdisciplinary study which is relevance to the Botany, Anthropology, Phytochemistry, Archeology, Agriculture, Medicine, Veterinary medicine, Linguistics, Folklore, Mythology, Literature, Economics, Ecology etc.

1.3 Area of the study:

The study is conducted within the state of Assam with special reference to the district of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Sonitpur and Dhemaji. The area of the proposed study is associated with the ethno-botanical terms of ethno-plants as used in the Bodo language. The terms used in the Bodo language is also closely associated with the cultural aspects. It may be said that it is most important elements of linguistic and cultural terminology. This has been taken in to account as area of the study.

1.4 Aims and Objectives of the study:

From the linguistic and cultural point of view the study has been taken into account to a great extant. Chiefly the study is concerned to the linguistic and cultural analysis of the ethno-botanical terms of ethno-plants used in this language. This aspect has been attempted to reflect in this analysis. This is not an ethno-botanical analysis of the ethno-plants. In this study, societal value and cultural beliefs as concerned to the Bodo community, cultural terms associated with the ethno-plants names and its lexical structure which has been taken into account from the point of linguistic analysis. This aspect is the major point of analysis.

¹⁶. Ibid.

1.5 Significance of the study:

Ethno-botanical terms are closely related to the language and culture. Linguistic terminology for ethno-plants used by an aboriginal group of people is most important linguistic and cultural property of this linguistic community. Use of ethno-plants preserves the native vocabulary as well as helps in validating the culture of the community. It is observed that the ethno-plants used among the Bodos are associated to the language as well as to the culture. The ethno-plants are being used among the Bodos for different purposes since time immemorial. Moreover, there are many beliefs regarding the ethno-plants among the Bodo society. So, it is important to study about the Ethno-botanical terms used in the Bodo language.

1.6 Methodology:

Both the descriptive and analytical method has been adopted for the research. As a native to the Bodo community, related data has been collected as the first hand information. For necessary information field survey was carried out in some villages under Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Dhemaji district where the Bodos are found densely populated. For further information some local markets located in Kokrajhar district was visited by the researcher. Moreover, the information regarding the medicinal and various edible plant names have been gathered through the interview. Thus data have been collected from published materials such as thesis, books, journal and periodicals etc. After review of the related literatures observation has also been documented for further analysis. This is basically an analysis on the use of ethno-botanical plants names and cultural significance in the social context of the Bodo folk-society. From this point of view the method of study is confined with the view point of linguistic and folk-life studies.

1.7 Hypothesis:

For this study following hypothesis has been taken into consideration:

1. The ethno-plants used among the Bodos are closely associated with the linguistic and culture.

2. Use of native ethno-plant species preserved linguistic terminology as well as helps in validating the culture in the society.
3. Ethno-botany is closely related to ecology of the region.
4. Loss of ethno-plant leads to loss of lexis and culture.

1.8 Problem statement:

Bodos have been depending upon the plants for many purposes since remote past. It is observed that the ethno-plant used by the Bodo society is closely related in terms of linguistics and culture. The native name of the ethno-plant species are the linguistic property for the community. It is also seen that there is a sociological value and beliefs among the community regarding the native ethno-plants.

1.9 Review of Literature:

The scientific discipline closely associated to the Botany has been done remarkable work on ethno-plants of the Bodo community. There is many research work has been done regarding the topic of medicinal plants used by the Bodo community. Bipul Saikia, S.K. Borthakur, N. Saikia from the dept. of Botany of the institutions Chaiduar College, Gohpur, Gauhati University, Arya Vidyapeeth College Gauhati, have written research paper on the topic “Medico-Ethnobotany of Bodo tribals in Gohpur of Sonitpur district, Assam.” (January, 2010)¹⁷ S.K. Basumatary, M. Ahmad from the dept. of Botany and S.P. Deka from the dept. of Geography of Goalpara College have written research paper on the topic “Some medicinal plant leaves used by Boro (Tribal) people of Goalpara district, Assam.”(March-April, 2004)¹⁸ Selim Mehmud from Indira Gandhi National Open University, Gauhati and Amit Swarnakar, Medicinal Officer (Ayubedic) of Bodoland University, Kokrajhar have written a research paper on the topic “A review on medicinal plants for joint diseases from

¹⁷. Saikia, Bipul, Borthakur, S.K and Saikia, N. “Medico-Ethnobotany of Bodo tribals in Gohpur of Sonitpur district, Assam.”*Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge* 9.1(2010): 52-54

¹⁸. Basumatary, S.K., Ahmad, M. and Deka S.P. “Some medicinal plant leaves used by Boro (Tribal) people of Goalpara district, Assam.” *Natural Product Radianc* 3.2(2004):88-90

Assam, India.”(March, 2017)¹⁹ Anil Bora, Chittaranjan Bora from the Department of Botany of North Lakhimpur College and Chayanika Datta from Biotech Hub of North Lakhimpur College have written research paper on the topic “Ethno-medicinal plants used for the treatment of common diseases by the people of Lakhimpur district”(2020)²⁰

With regards to the edible fruits, Sanjib Brahma from the department of Botany, Science College, Hwiyang Narzary from the department of Biotechnology, Bodoland University, Sanjay Basumatary from the department of Chemistry, Bineswar Brahma Engineering College have written on the topic “Wild edible fruits of Kokrajhar district of Assam, North-East India” (2013)²¹ Again they have written on the topic “Wild vegetables consumed by Bodo Tribe of Kokrajhar District (Assam) North East India.”(2013)²²

Thus, Phukan Ch. Basumatary presented a research paper in the International Conference on Arts & Humanities held in Colombo, Srilanka in July 2015 regarding the ethno-plants used among the Bodo society. The title of the research paper is “Linguistic property in connection with ethno-plants used in the Boro society: A survey from linguistic view point”²³ In this paper, the significance of documentation and collection of ethno-plants and its native name as used in Bodo society are thoroughly discussed. The author highlighted how the traditionally used Ethno-plants help in preserving the native vocabulary as well as validate the culture of the community.

¹⁹. Mehmud, Selim and Swarnakar, Amit. “A review on medicinal plants for joint diseases from Assam, India.” *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Science and Research* 2.2(2017):39-46

²⁰. Bora, Anil, Bora, Chittaranjan and Datta, Chayanika. “Ethno-medicinal plants used for the treatment of common diseases by the people of Lakhimpur district.” *Universal Journal of plant Science* 8.3(2020): 39-46

²¹. Narzary, Hwiyang, Brahma, Sanjib and Basumatary, Sanjay. “Wild edible fruits of Kokrajhar district of Assam, North-East India.” *Asian Journal of Plant Science and Research* 3.6 (2013):95-100

²². Narzary, Hwiyang, Brahma, Sanjib and Basumatary, Sanjay. “Wild vegetables consumed by Bodo Tribe of Kokrajhar District (Assam) North East India.” *Archives of Applied Science Research* 5.5(2013):182-190

²³. <http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/TIHKMConferences-2555087-phukan-chandra-basumatary/>

In the research paper “Somaj Santhwoni Nwjwrrwng Katindra Swargiary ni Sanmwkhangari Lamajwng”²⁴ Phukan Ch. Basumatary has discussed the correlation between Ethnobotany and Language with reference to the novel of Katindra Swargiary “Sanmwkhangari Lamajwng”.

Moreover, Phukan Ch. Basumatary discussed about the vegetable used by the Bodo community in the article “Boro Hariya Bahainai Laiphang Arw Mwigong-Thaigongni Mung: Rao Harimuni Sompod.”²⁵ In this article the author again highlighted how the terms of the vegetable used by the Bodos helps in preserving the linguistic and cultural property. Further, the relationship between plants and the folklore in terms of the Bodo community are thoroughly discussed. From an observation it is noted that none of the researcher has been done linguistic and cultural aspects of the ethno-botanical terms as used among the Bodos. Of course, Phukan Ch. Basumatary has thrown into light some aspects on the linguistic and cultural significance of the ethno-botanical terms used in Bodo society. It has been noticed in two articles of the researcher. This view point has been borrowed and proposed for further study in this dissertation.

1.10 Limitation of the research:

The first challenge for this research work is to identify the species with their specific native name. In this field work, it is noticed that, in different geographical area plants have identified with different native names. e.g. *Euphorbia hirta*, an medicinal plant have been identified with many native names like *raṇa daduli*, *hat^habagri*, *gumaat^ha*, *nasrai k^hɔrɔ*. It is to be mentioned that, in the same place this plant is identified with different names. On the other hand, one terminology is utilized for many plants. The term *nasraik^hɔrɔ* is utilized for the plant *Euphorbia hirta*, *Euphorbia tithymaloides*, *Boeria articularis*, *Alternanthera sessilis*.

²⁴. Basumatary, Phukan Ch. “Somaj Santhwoni Nwjwrrwng Katindra Swargiary ni Sanmwkhangari Lamajwng” *Journal of the Department of Bodo* Vol.: I(2014): 9-13

²⁵. Basumatary, Phukan Ch. “Boro Hariya Bahainai Laiphang Arw Mwigong-Thaigongni Mung: Rao Harimuni Sompod.” *Research Journal of the Department of Bodo* Vol. :II(2015):131-135

Secondly, researcher struggled to identify some rare wild edible plants. During of the field study, it is observed that, the new generations of this community are not familiar to many wild plants. The reason behind is the forest area, jungle, wetlands are gradually decreasing due to the ecological and social impacts which is threat to biodiversity. In the present context, some of wild plants are gradually becoming extinct. *lunt^{hi}* is one of the examples of them. Most of the older generation only can recall it. However, some of the plants are also occupying in folk songs which helps to know the terminology used for plants associated with this community.