

Traditional Systems of Bodos in the Context of Tribes of North-East India

Maneswar Baro

Assistant Prof., Gyanpeeth Degree College

ABSTRACT

Tribes In North East India

In the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, upward of 90 percent of the population is tribal. However, in the remaining northeast states of Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, and Tripura, tribal peoples form between 20 and 30 percent of the population.

Origin Of The Tribes

North East Indian tribes have originated from the ethnic groups of Tibeto-Burmese, proto Austrioloids and some groups of Indo Mongoloids. The trend can be seen in the looks, traditions that are visibly followed by these communities. They also show a cultural bridging with the neighbouring countries. And India has till now provided them with a safe haven, compared to living in neighbouring communist nations of China and Burma.

Types Of North-East Indian Tribes

North-East tribes constitute a major part of Indian tribal community. They are all scattered over all the states of North East. Arunachal Pradesh consists of around 25 types of tribes. Nagaland has around more than 16 major tribes even. Some examples of prominent tribes are Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Adi, Nyishi, Angami, Bhutia, Kuki, Rengma, Bodo and Deori. They are scattered throughout the region. Christian-ism is followed among many of the tribes and some also follow Hinduism and Buddhism. The rest still have their indigenous beliefs and practise animism.

The Thadou

The Thadou is a group related to Chin and Kuki that lived in the hill country of the northeastern Indian state of Manipur and northwest Myanmar. There are around 200,000 of them, with around 80 percent of them in India and 20 percent in Burma. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language and are believed to have originated from China or Tibet.

The Thadou have traditionally lived in fortified villages on the top of ridges in the jungle. In the old days villages raiding and head hunting were common. The taking of heads was closely linked with the cult of the dead. Heads taken in conflicts were placed on the graves of deceased relatives and were believed to work for them as servants in the afterlife. Heads were also collected for the burial of chiefs and as settlements for debts. The Thadou marriage ritual often includes a mock elopement with a feast featuring wrestling and throwing mud, dung and rotten eggs at friends of the groom. Premarital sex and divorce are common. Large feasts are held to honor men who killed all the dangerous animals of the forest.

The Tsanglas

The Tsanglas of Arunachal Pradesh are Buddhist who speak a Tibetan languages. They live near the Tibetan border and migrated from Bhutan many generations ago. They live in thatch roof huts and poles so their homes off their the ground in the monsoon season. They eat rice. To keep evil spirits away they hang the skins of jungle cats on the edges of their villages. The Mishing, the second largest tribe of Assam, inhabiting the Brahmaputra Valley, are a people of Mongol descent. They have Hindu beliefs.

The Riangs

The Riangs are a people that live Tripura. They perform a dance after a good harvest to thank the Goddess Hazagiri (an incarnation of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth). The ceremony begins with the worship of nine gods and culminates with the worship of Hazagiri. The dance begins with slow dancing, often with the dancers with pots on their heads, and concludes with ecstatic dancing to a fast tempo.

Abor

The Abor is the general name given to tribal groups that lives in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Some are also found in Tibet and China. Also known as the Abuit, Adi and Tani, they live largely outside Indian society and seem do quite well. The Abor name has been applied to 15 different groups: Padum, Minyong, Pangis, Shumong, Ashing, Pasi, Karo, Bokar, Bor, Ramo, Palibo, Milan, Tangam, Tangin and Gallong, of which the Padam, Minyong and Shimong are the most numerous. [Source: Encyclopedia of World Cultures: South Asia, edited by Paul Hockings, C.K. Hall & Company, 1992]

There are believed to be around 100,000 Abor. Most of their settlements are along the Siang and Yamne rivers. They speak Adi (also known as Miri, Abor, Arbor or Mishing), a Sino-Tibetan language. Some of them still live traditional lives. Other have been widely acculturated. Many live in the Dihang Valley near Tibet on the Brahmaputra River in Arunachal Pradesh. The Abors look more like Southeast Asians than Indians. They migrated to India from Tibet or China by crossing the Himalayas and then retreating back into the highlands. The reason for the migration is unknown. Between 1847 and 1862, the British government tried unsuccessfully to conquer all the Abor territory and a treaty was reached that gave the British some hegemony and promised unrestricted trade and communications and an uneasy peace was achieved. The British divided the area into four regions for administration purposes.

Their Religion

The Abor have traditionally been animists who practiced animal sacrifice and believed in a pantheon of benevolent and malevolent spirits. They consider rivers as gods and fear river nippongs (water spirits associated with women who died pregnancy), Epom (offspring of Robo, the father of evil spirits) and souls the deceased people who died unnatural deaths or were not properly buried. Among the most prominent of the benevolent spirits is Benji Bama (controller of human destiny). There are two main religious practitioner: epak miri (diviners) and nyibo (medicine men). They use incantations and spiritual discernment to determine which spirits might be causing a particular illness or problem. Treatments involve herbal remedies, appeasement of spirits and using signs, dancing and special beads to exorcize the spirits.

Big events are the annual hunt and rice harvests. Most ceremonies are associated with life cycle events such as initiations into the boy's and girls houses and hunting ceremonies. Song, dance, and telling tribal myths, stories and histories are important fixtures of these events. The Abor have a rich oral literature of legends, folk tales, ballads and political narrations. In the afterlife, they believe, the dead live on in a world that is not much different from the world of the living. At funerals the dead are given possessions, food and drink to take with them to the afterlife.

Their Lifestyle

The Abor have traditionally built the villages on hills for defensive purposes, preferably with a gentle slope on one side that provides access to water and steep slopes on the other sides. The houses are built from bamboo, wood, and thatching grass on platforms and arranged in rows from the bottom to the top of the hill so that the rear side of the house faces the hill. Public buildings include the bachelors dormitory (moshup) and single women's dormitory (rasheng). In the old days, many villages were surrounded by stone walls with wooden reinforcements.

Nuclear families are the norm and the strongest social unit. Other important institutions include the agricultural system, the moshup, the rasheng, ritual cults and folklore groups. Social status is based on wealth. Villages are controlled by a council called a kebang. Groups of villages are governed by ibango councils. In the old days disputes between various groups often escalated into armed conflict.

Most marriage is monogamous, Premarital sex is common and encouraged. Divorce is fairly common. Absolute authority resides with the husband-father. All property descends through the male line. Young children are raised by their parents until they reach adolescence when they move to the boys and girls dormitories.

The Abor wear ornaments around their neck, ears, waist and wrists. Their dresses and aprons are similar to those of Tibetans. They sometimes greet outsiders by forming a line and chant, sway and dance. Chiefs known as gam dressed in ceremonial gear wear battle helmets made from cane rings, a bark loin cloth and a sword known as a dao. The Ponung is a dance of the Adis performed by teams of young girls in perfect rhythmic unison. It is performed mainly for entertainment and recreation.

The Adi eat wild boar, roasted pig, venison, monkey, grains, eggs, beans and fruit. For fun they drink apong, a mildly intoxicating drink made from fermented grain. It has a sweet-and-sour taste. Adi women pound rice chaff with their bare feet and use it to make apong.

When hunting men use breach-action rifles and bows and arrows with poison tips. One the eve of the hunt men climb into the mountains to collect poisonous roots while shouting, "Gogbat! Gogbat!—May the poison be most powerful!" They then

hold a big feast. Hunters go after birds, rats, wild boars, monkeys and deer. After the hunt a village elder wearing a red robe places a freshly killed monkey outside his home as a talisman.

Their Economics And Agriculture

The Abor have traditionally practiced hunting, fishing, gathering and agriculture and bartered or sold their surpluses for necessities and luxuries they couldn't produce for themselves. They had no currency of their own and placed a high value on metal items, particularly metal caldrons obtained from Tibet. They traditionally relied on slash-and-burn agriculture and used the land for one to three years before letting it return to jungle.

Primary crops include rice, five varieties of Job's tears maize, four types of finger millet, foxtail millet, maize, namdung (a kind of seed), beans, oil seeds, gourds, pumpkins, eggplants, soybeans, potatoes, tomatoes, spinach, mustard, chilies, jackfruit, bananas, papayas, oranges and pineapples. Cotton is raised for clothing and fiber. Gayals, dogs, pigs, goats and chickens are kept. The Adi keep mithu, a cross between a wild buffalo and a water buffalo.

Bamboo, wood, cane, clay, stone, glass, metal, cotton and wool are used to make a variety of products, including clothes, tool, weapons, furniture,, baskets, containers and utensils. Items associated with warfare include bows, arrows, swords, shields, helmets, spiked wristlets and bamboo spikes or panjis.

The Abor have traditionally used trade networks that extended into Tibet. Groups throughout Abor territory traded with groups like the Boris that lived along the Siang Frontier. They also traded raw hides and chilies for rock salt, woolen cloth, swords, vessels, ear ornaments and brass bangles from the Tibetans.

A Few More Prominent Tribes

Apatani

The Apatani are tribe of Chinese-Tibetan descent that lives around the Talle Wildlife Sanctuary in central Arunachal Pradesh. There are around 20,000 of them. They are farmers who like to hunt in the forest and catch small game with traps, bows and slingshots, but don't spend the night in the forest because they are afraid of spirits called bhoots. [Source: Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, National Geographic, September 2000]

Apatani are especially fond of eating rats and squirrels and drinking rice beer. The rats are skewered on bamboo slivers and cooked over an open fire. The hair burns and the skin bubbles. The skin is carved off and served. The meat reportedly has a gamely flavor that taste somewhat like squirrel but varies depending on what the rats eat. One man told National Geographic, "When the old people eat rats they leave nothing. Rats like these are not found outside Talle. People walk for days just to eat them. For me, I prefer not to eat the skull, but its brain I do take."

The Apatani used to hunt tigers and leopards with spears made of poisonous bamboo but stopped doing so in 1975 out of respect to the cats. One Apatani told National Geographic, "The tiger is the brother of the human being. To kill a tiger is equal to murder...to kill any cats is a serious offense. The Apatani always cut the head off a snake they kill and bury it. If they don't they believe the snake will come back and get them."

Adi Tribe

Adi Tribe (have two divisions namely Bogums and Bomis) are found in Arunachal Pradesh. They live on the hills and have their own village council. This group is again divided into various small sub tribes. The dress for women and men are naturally weaved by the women folk of the tribes. Men wear helmets made from cane, bear and deer skin, depending on the region. Older women wear yellow necklaces and spiral earrings. Beyop is worn by unmarried girls (ornament consisting of five to six brass plates fixed under their petticoats). Tattooing of hands, arms and face is very popular among the older women of the neighboring Apatani Tribe.

Nishi Tribe

Nyishi or Nishi Tribe has originated from the Indo-Mongoloid stock. They are mainly inhabited in the lower region of the Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh. They are considered a large tribe according to the area and population in Arunachal Pradesh. Their spoken language is different from the other tribes, which is a part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The hairstyles of the tribe's are unique. They plait their hair and tie it neatly at the forehead using a Tibetan thread. Skewer made up of brass is passed horizontally through the tied hair. Rings made up of cane are worn around the waist, arms and legs. Additional decorations vary from a person to person.

Men wear sleeveless shirts made from thick cotton cloth. Striped gaily with blue and red together with a mantle of cotton or wool are worn around the throat and shoulders. Strings made of beads are also worn, mainly for decoration purpose. The

Nyishi women generally wear a sleeveless mantle of striped or plain cloth. The upper part is tucked tightly over the breast. It allows the body to envelop from the armpits to the center of the calves. A ribbon is tied at the waist. A girdle and cane garters are worn at the waist. Hair is parted in the middle, plaited and tied. The ornaments for the females include colorful bead necklaces, brass chains, metal bells, silver earrings and heavy bracelets of various metals.

Bodos

Bodos are hill tribals of Mongol extraction who inhabit the northern plains region of Assam. Bodos are fervently proud of their heritage and culture and have increasingly felt that their own culture and language is threatened by Assamese dominance. The Bodos are known to be the earliest settlers of Assam, and the first to cultivate rice and rear silkworms. The Bodos are considered to be the largest ethnic and linguistic group of the Brahmaputra valley and they reside in the north-western parts of Assam. Udalguri and Kokrajhar of Assam are considered the centre of the Bodo area.

The Bodos are the largest among the Bodo - Kachari Clan. The word 'Bodo' has been derived from the word 'Bod' which means Tibet. The Bodos speak Tibeto - Burmese language or the Bodo language. Bodos also have a language of their own called Deodahi. They are considered to have reached the Brahmaputra valley via Tibet and settled in the foothills of the eastern Himalayan range which includes the whole of Assam, Tripura, North Bengal and parts of Bangladesh. Historically the great Bodos were known as the Mech. Even today the Bodos living in West Bengal, Nagaland and Nepal are called Mech. The Bodos use the term Bodosa (meaning son of Bodo) to describe themselves. Even though Bodos are demographically separated they follow the same culture, tradition, language and religion.

Apart from farming, weaving is another integral part of Bodo culture. Many families rear their own silkworms, the cocoons of which are then spun into silk. Bodo girls learn to weave from a young age, and no Bodo courtyard is complete without a loom. The Bodos are also expert craftsmen in bamboo products. For most of the Bodo tribes, rice is the main food which is generally accompanied by mouth watering dishes made from pork or fish. Bodos are also fond of the conventional drink called Zu Mai. Zu means wine and Mai means rice.

The Bodo Tribe is a vast tribe and shares a good number of populations in Assam. The tribal people have also migrated to other parts of India as well as to neighboring countries.

It's said that Bodo tribes have introduced rice cultivation, tea plantation, poultry farming, and silkworm rearing in the North Eastern parts of India. Bodos are non vegetarians and rice is considered a staple food, and the traditional favourite drink of the Bodos is Zu Mai (rice wine). Rice is usually accompanied by a non vegetarian dish such as fish, meat or pork.

Weaving and silkworm rearing is another part of Bodo culture. Many families rear their own silkworms. The cocoons of the silkworms are spun into silk. Bodo women teach their girls the art of weaving from a young age. One can always find a Bodo courtyard with a loom. Women weave and wear their own Dokhnas, which is the traditional dress of the Bodo women with shawls. The Bodos are also expert in making beautiful crafts from bamboo.

Garos

The Garos are a group that lives in the East and West Gar Hills in Meghalaya in northeast India. Also known as the Achik, they are well known because of their matrilineal customs. There are around a half million of them and more than half are Christians and others follow a traditional religion focuses on spirits that have no form but act like humans. The Garo have rain-making rituals. [Source: Encyclopedia of World Cultures: South Asia, edited by Paul Hockings, C.K. Hall & Company, 1992]

The Garo have traditionally been slash-and-burn agriculturalists who raised rice and a variety of crops on cleared forested slopes. They traded with people in the plains and were famous for being headhunters. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language related to Naga and are believed to originated from Tibet.

Kinship is determined through the mother and property is handed down through the female line. There are strict rules about marriage with young men preferably marrying their mother's brother's daughter in an arranged marriage. After marriage the man moves into the residence of his wife. Even so men are regarded as the heads of the households and decision-makers about property. Women do most of the domestic chores, field work and make beer and men do the heavy work like clearing fields and constructing houses.

The Garos were once self sufficient but no longer are. They sell coal and wood for cash and have switched to high yield strains of rice and risk losing rare strains they have used for centuries. Crop yields are lower than they once because soil

fertility has been compromised by collecting wood for timber rather than letting it rot and not letting field lie fallow as long as before during crop rotations. The Garo suffer from high rates of some diseases, particularly tuberculosis.

Lakher

The Lakher are a Kuki tribe that lives in the Lushai Hills of Mizoram. Also known as the Magha, Mara, Shendu and Arakanese, they live in mountainous, forested areas and are related to the Chin, Mizos and Naga. There are around 20,000 of them. Many are Christians. The Lakher were headhunters and continue to hunt wild animals. They have traditionally eaten rats, elephants, bears and snakes but eschew tigers and leopards. Dogs are eaten by men but not women. Gayals are used in festival sacrifices and marriage settlements and to pay off debts. [Source: Encyclopedia of World Cultures: South Asia, edited by Paul Hockings, C.K. Hall & Company, 1992]

Most marriage are monogamous although some concubinage is practiced. Premarital sex is common. Courting often begins with a young man and woman working together in the fields and the male spending the night in the female house. If a young woman is interested in a young man she places her bed near his. Similar arrangements are made after young people sing and does a knee dance together at festivals.

Tattooing is practiced and people drink nicotine-water created by smoking through a water pipe. Music is produced with gong, flutes, violins and zithers and special songs are performed over the carcasses of dead animals. Sickness is believed to be caused when a soul leaves a body and has difficulty returning because of spirits known as leurahripas. Sacrifices are performed to appease the spirits and help the soul become reunited with the body. Death occurs when the soul is not united with body.

Mizo

The Mizo are a group that lives mainly in the small northeastern states of Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. Also known as the Lushai and Zomi, they are a colorful tribe with a code of ethics that requires them to be hospitable, kind, unselfish and courageous. They are closely related to the Chin. Their name means "people of the high land." [Source: Encyclopedia of World Cultures: South Asia, edited by Paul Hockings, C.K. Hall & Company, 1992]

The Mizo have traditionally been slash-and-burn agriculturists who hunted birds with catapults. Their main cash crop is ginger. Their language belongs to the Kuki-Chin Subgroup of the Kuki-Naga Group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. These languages are all tonal and monosyllabic and had no written form until missionaries gave them the Roman alphabets in the 1800s.

The Mizo and Chin share a similar history (See Chin). The Mizos have been in rebellion against Indian rule since 1966. They are allied with the Nagas and the Razakars, a non-Bengali Muslim group from Bangladesh."

The Mizo claim to be one of the lost tribes of Israel. They have a tradition of songs with stories that are similar to those found in the Bible.

Nearly all the Mizos in northeastern India converted to Christianity due to the pioneering efforts of an obscure Welsh mission. Most are Protestants and belong to the Welsh Presbyterian, United Pentecostal, Salvation Army or Seventh-Day Adventist sects.

Mizo villages are usually set up around churches. Pre-marital sex is common even though it is discouraged. The bride-price process is complicated and often includes the ritual sharing of a killed animal. Mizo women produce lovely textiles with geometric designs. They like Western-style music and use guitars and big Mizo drums and traditional bamboo dances to accompany church hymns.

The Cheraw is a colorful and distinctive dance performed in Mizoram and also known as the bamboo dance. Similar to bamboo dances in the Philippines; it features dancers doing quick steps in and out of moving staves of bamboo.

Santhals

The Santhals are a group that lives in Assam. They migrated there from the Jharkhand region during the mid 19th century to work in Assam's tea plantation. They claim they are being harassed and driven out of the area by Bodo separatists who want to lay claim to the areas where they live. Attacks on Santhal villages began in 1993. As of the early 2000s, 20,000 Santhals lived in refugee camps and 1,000 people had been killed in fighting between them and Bodo separatists. Santhals have threatened to take up arms unless the government does more to help them out.

Kuki

Kuki Tribe or the migrant ones can be found all over the northeastern states. The language of the tribe varies but is all similar in a way, and can broadly be termed as the Kuki Language. They prefer to live on hilltops. The villages of Kuki tribes are a cluster of closely constructed houses. The tribe cultivates dwarf cotton and spun yarns.

Using vegetable dye, beautiful and intricate designs are woven which are mostly geometric in nature. Kuki men wear colorful Sangkhol, a jacket and a 'Pheichawm' (short dhoti). Sometimes a Chaddar or a wrap is used. They also wear Tuhpah (head cover). Women wear anih-san underneath a pon've or a wraparound. The dress is worn from above the chest. Ornaments include earrings, bracelets, bangles, necklace and a typical ring shaped earring to stretch the ear lobe.

Smoking is enjoyed among these people. Extensively crafted pipes are used for this purpose and are made up of stone and brass-metal. They prefer cross-cousin marriage. Mimkuut Festival is the major festival celebrated by Kukis and falls in the month of January.

Angami

One of the major tribal communities of Nagaland is the Angami Tribe. This community is also found in Manipur and has a total population of 12 million. The tribal community follows Christianity and speaks Tenyidie. They cultivate rice and grains on the hilly areas.

The pattern and design of the clothes worn by the Angami men and women are almost different from each other. Men wear shawls and women wear Mechala. It's a wrap around skirt and shawls with unique designs and patterns. Both men and women enjoy wearing beautiful ornaments which comprise of beads, pendants, bangles and bracelets.

Angamis are popular for their woodcraft and artwork and are famous among Indian people as producer of bamboo work, cane furniture, beds and shawls. Music is a part of this group and is played with the help of drum and flute. This art is passed on from one generation to the other. Music plays the important role in their rituals and festivals. Traditional dancing is also performed by the tribe during festivals and occasions. Angami women also practice pottery and basket making. Pork with bamboo shoot is considered one of the common dishes among the Angamis.

Christianity is the major religion followed among the Angami tribal people. Their religious system revolves around several supernatural forces of life associated with the life cycles. They regard several objects as embodied spirits and have sharply drawn the distinction between the Gods and the soul of the human bodies. They are the firm followers of Ayepi (who bring peace and prosperity in their lives).

Sekrenyi is the main festival celebrated among the Angamis in Nagaland. The festival falls in the month of February and marks the beginning of the lunar year. This ten day festival is also known as the Phousnyi among the local people. The foremost ritual of the festival is Kizie, in which the few drops of the rice water taken from Zumho (top of the Jug), are carefully put into the leaves and placed at three main points of the post of the house by women. Next morning all the young men of the village get up early in the morning and take a bath in the village well. They adorn themselves with the new shawls (white Mhoushu and the black Lohe). This ceremony is known as Dzuseva. The main attraction of the festival is the Thekra Hie, where the young ones of the village gather all together to sing and dance to the tunes of the traditional music. The participants make fun and enjoy themselves with the rice bear and plates of meat. Hunting is an important excitement of the festival. The major part of the ceremony falls on the eighth day when the gate pulling or the bride pulling is performed.

The entire area of northeast India is full of lush green valleys, mountains, springs and green vegetation. The land with its natural beauty and cultural heritage has always topped the list of an ideal destination for travellers from India and World. Vast research and studies are also done by scholars and research groups who wish to learn about the life, food habits, culture, tradition, language and source of living among the tribes. The Indian Government has also started taking keen interest in developing the living standards and tourism among these tribal occupied states.

Different ethnic groups and tribal groups inhabit the region of northeast India. They all have their own culture and tribal tradition and all speak their own tribal languages. This has made Northeast India one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. The cuisines and attires also vary among the tribes. Each tribal community has their unique way of living. Tribal people mostly live and earn through the hills and forest areas.

Traditional Knowledge (TK), variously referred to as traditional knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge, local knowledge, folk knowledge is knowledge developed by local and indigenous communities over time in response to the

needs of their specific local environment. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) defines traditional knowledge as —indigenous cultural and intellectual property, indigenous heritage,^l and customary heritage rights.

The need to protect the traditional knowledge captured the attention of the international community only recently but the standard setting was left to the national governments. It tends to be collectively owned and takes the form of stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language, and agricultural practices, including the development of plant species and animal breeds. Traditional knowledge is mainly of a practical nature, particularly in such fields as agriculture, fisheries, health, horticulture, and forestry (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2006). In North-East India customary laws and practices often define how these tribes develop, hold and transmit traditional knowledge.

Most of these tribes consider their traditional knowledge as sacred or secret. Some of their customary laws and practices also define custodial rights and obligations, including obligations to guard it against misuse or improper disclosure and also sometimes determine how traditional knowledge is to be used, how benefits should be shared, and how disputes are to be settled, as well as many other aspects of the preservation, use and exercise of knowledge.

This requires respect for customary laws and practices of the North East Indian tribes within existing legal mechanisms, including within conventional intellectual property systems – which may require thorough understanding of the relevant provisions of The Constitution of India (Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948),

It is important to note that the Convention on Biological Diversity requires each contracting party ‘as far as possible’ and ‘as appropriate’ to identify the economic component of biodiversity for conservation and sustainable use and to adopt ‘socially and environmentally sound measures to achieve conservation and sustainable development’. It also ensures the protection of sovereign rights of each country over its biological wealth and associated local knowledge systems. Traditional knowledge holders are subject to both customary and modern legal systems, since their knowledge constitutes subject matter to which both may apply. The interfaces, similarities and differences between customary and modern legal systems require understanding and management. All these aspects are to be looked into when considering a legislation of the protection of traditional knowledge of these tribes.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The research work entitled “A STUDY ON FOOD HABITS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS OF THE BODOS” is the major area of research which is extensively discussed and analyzed from the perspective folkloristic point of view. This is a part of folklore and folk-life studies. The study aims to discuss about the food habits and traditional knowledge systems of the Bodos. The community has traditional system of food preparation, cookery and preservation which is taken for discussion in the chapters as given herewith. Bodo people consume varieties of wild vegetables as food items available in the context of natural ecology. Preparation of food in different occasions i.e. in rites, rituals, ceremonies etc. are taken into account. Importance has also been paid on the folkloristic identification and classification of foods for the study.

Before going for an extensive analysis here a conceptual discussion regarding traditional knowledge and its nature has been made minutely. The topic itself is closely related with culture as well as folklore as a whole.

Area Of The Study

The study has been done based on the food habits and traditional knowledge of the Bodos. Concentration of this linguistic community is found throughout the state of Assam and adjoining states viz. Meghalaya, West Bengal and in the nation of Nepal. The study specially explores the food habits of the community and traditional knowledge relating to the food collection, preservation, preparation in the natural context of the community. The traditional knowledge pertaining to food of the community such as technology of food preparation preservation is peculiar in comparison to other community. The community has varieties of lore (knowledge) relating to food.

Importance Of The Study

The food habits and traditional systems of the Bodos have highly significant for the area has not further studied. It will enable to know the food culture as well the Bodo traditional food. Bodo food habit is part and parcel of Bodo culture. Different types of traditional cuisine with varieties of food items are consumed in social contexts. The community has numbers of food preservation methods, cuisine and cultural as well as recreational discourses. It has cultural as well as

academic values. If the traditional food of the community is analyzed in scientific manner it will lead the community socio-economically rich in the global context.

Hypothesis

- (1) Food commodities consumed by the Bodo people are mostly natural available in ecosystem.
- (2) Food consumed by them is simply cooked with less spice and oil.
- (3) Tradition of preservation methods in regards of food is skillful and scientifically modifiable.
- (4) The traditional knowledge in regards of food collection, preparation, preservation and presentation all are culture based.
- (5) Drinks like jou or rice beer is a kind of unique ethnic drink.

METHODOLOGY

The study solely relates with folkloristic study. The topic basically relates with field materials based on primary data. So, empirical data collection method is most important in the field. The research approach adopts to apply the folkloristic methods for identification of food consuming habits acquired by the Bodo people.

Data Collection

Data is the main source to analyze a research problem. Data have been collected in two forms viz. primary and secondary. The proposed topic is related with the folkloristic study. The researcher has to collect primary data from different Bodo dominated area by empirical observation method, interview methods, from the cultural context. Informants of folklore bearers are interviewed for primary data necessary for the study. Secondary data from, magazines, news paper, books, journals, periodicals, magazines, souvenirs, news paper and documents are explored.

Research Problem

The study entitled “Food habits and traditional knowledge of the Bodos” has analytical problem in it. The study area relates with the material culture of the vast folkloristic theory. On the other hand traditional knowledge has vast area itself. So the researcher has to proceed tactfully carrying the topic on the track of folkloristic viewpoint. Besides the research approach entangled with the Cultural Anthropology which is to be explored for its evolution of food tradition and cultural behavior of the community in regards of food habits. The division and classification of food items is the puzzles when it is approached in explanation of the data. It needs to group and class the food items observing their common feature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A few numbers of works have been done by the writers and scholars in the field are reviewed. Those books will be helpful to overcome the scheme of research work. Those are mentioned as follows.

“**Folklore and folk life an introduction**” is an edited book by American renowned folklorist Richard M. Dorson and published by The University of Chicago, 1972 the book has good number of renowned folklorists who have contributed detail description on folklore materials. Don Yoder in this book Folk cookery discussed regarding the traditional knowledge on food. In his writing the scholar discloses the folk cookery and its regional variation with traditional domestic cuisine. Traditional food in his term does not mean commercial, institutional, and scientific nutritional version. Description of food, their morphology, preparation, preservation, social and psychological and ramifications into all other aspects of folk culture are studied in the topic.

“**Folklore in Modern India**” is an edited book by an Indian Folklorist Jawaharlal Handoo and published by Central Institute of Indian Languages Mysore, India in the year “Lokosonskriti *Bijnan: Tattva paddhati o prayog*” a book written by Dr. Sk. Makbul Islam published at Kolkata by Debasis Bhattacharjee of Bangiya Sahitya Samsad

“BORO KOCHARIR JANA SAHITYA” WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED BY BHABENDRA NARZY

The writer Bhabendra Narzy who hailed from Dotoma and settled in Guwahati Kharghuli has a good intimacy with the Indian as well as foreign scholars wrote the book “Boro Kacharir Jana Sahitya” in 1957. The book is a collection of Boro folk literature in the decades of the community. The book is introduced by folklorist Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami in English version. The creation is informative and deals with the traditional Bodo customs, religion, faith and habits of the decade. Writer has vast knowledge on folk songs prevalent among the community.

Bhaben Narzi’s another book entitled “**BORO KACHARIR SAMAJ ARU SANSKRITI**” and same book is translated in to Bodo version by Hari Narayan Khakhlari and Gabinda Basumatary renaming as “Boro Kocharini Somaj arw Harimu.” The book studies the various aspects of Bodo culture and society. The book has the rich information about the society and

culture. Customs, rites, rituals in accordance to material culture included food preparation, preservation are also the folkloristic behavior of the community. Offerings of food to gods and deities in different cultural contexts are dealt with the book. The book shows very helpful for the secondary data in comparison to present tradition after sixty decades of the society. Sacrifices offerings of ritualistic food to the 16 God and Goddesses are (1) Bathou Bwrai,(2) Aileng, (3) Karji, (4) Abra khungur, (5) Agrang, (6) Khwila, (7) Rajphuthar, (8) Raj Khandra, (9) Sali Jwmwn, (10)Mwsa Raja, (11) Ai Manasw, (12)Ai Bauli, (13)Khubir, (14) Mao Thangsri, (15) Song Raja, (16) Buli Buri (Bhorli Buli). They receive different food items from the human being is belief by the Community people. The Bodo are agriculturist families and they celebrate agricultural festivals and those are related with food habits and traditional knowledges determination of climatic condition.

Rev, Sidney Endle the pioneer of research work on Boro Kochari society and culture was an embedded English saint scholar who came to India from Totnes in Devon for the propagation of Christianity popularly known as Gamini Brai or “old man of the village”¹ among the Bodos of the region for his work and social touch specially in undivided Darrang district wrote a book entitled “The Kacharis” (1911). Saint Endle in his monograph said that they were migrated from Mongolian from Tibet and China having their traditional kings who had “engaged in a prolonged struggle with the Ahoms a section of great Shan (Tai) race about A.D.1228.”² Later on the Ahoms succeeded their kingdom in the middle of the sixteenth century capturing Dimapur and shifted their kingdom from Dimapur to Maibong then Maibong to Khaspur in attack of Jayantia Raja in 1750 A.D. Whatever the Kacharis performed their religion the king Krishna Chandra along with Gavinda Chandra in 1790 the royal family converted to Hindu by public profession of Brahmanism. The reign of Kachari kingdom was attacked constantly by the Burmese and reinstated by East India Company in 1826. The Kachari kingdom after Gavinda Chandra has been murdered ended with the treaty of doctrine of lapse except the North Kachar portion was in possession of Tularam Commander -in- Chief in 1830. After the death of Tularam Senapati remaining portion was joined to the Nowgong district in 1854.

Endle in the book mentions the recipe of food and fish preservation traditional technology of the period. Besides the Use of varieties of food items, the great delicacy of pork and its commercial use are discussed in the book. Local tobacco and Burmese tobacco in the community is cultivated. The delicacy food made of nagran or Na gwan which is called the dry fish is one of the frequently used foods. The principal food of the community is rice and this is also used for preparing beverage from broken rice used in their daily life. Preservation of *emao* making from the rice mixing ingredients available in the nature is a unique traditional method Preparation of country liquor the *jumay*³ from this medicine *emao* is mentioned. Use this drink has social values and cultural tradition run through the generations. Marriage and other community work have been associated with feasting. Description of traditional preparation methods innovated by the community people in respect of rice beer is broadly discussed. The knowledge flourished among the community is age old and they have immense knowledge at present to make the liquor intoxicating.

Tradition of hunting, gathering, equipments *Jekhai⁴ khobai, pholo, senfandw* etc. are related with ecology; besides seating on loom, carrying appetizing food to her good man and sons are the good sign of a good wife among the community people all those are related to ecology.

Bodo sub tribes are divided into as many different nomenclatures adding suffixes like *swargo aroi*, *Bosumati-aroi*, *Mosa-aroi*, *Khangkhlo-aroi*, *Sibing-aroi*, *Gantlet-aroi*, *Narza-aroi*, *Doima-aroi*, *Bibiy-aroi* , *Bingbing -aroi*, *Ramcha-aroi*, *Mohila-roi* etc.

Tradition of storytelling, customary laws, preservation tradition like each household having granary in their homesteads, preparation technologies are the sources for the research project explored.

Dr. Kameswar Brahma has carried out his research work entitled “A socio Religious Beliefs Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos”. In his work he mentioned about the food habits of the Bodo community. Traditional knowledge on agricultural land, selection of land for building house, homestead, and type of house are disclosed in the book. Bodo traditional religion has habit of offering food to the god and deities. Rites rituals of the Bodos have food offering and feasting ceremonies communally. *Haba, Kherai marai, gwthwi garnai* all are the examples and have food discourses.

CONCLUSION

1 . Endle, S. *Kacharis*. Delhi: Low priced Editions, reprint, 1990.p.xiii.

2 *ibid*.p.6.

3 . *jumay/zwu* is a term used for the *jou* or local liquor in the Bodo community

4 *.Jekhai* is a triangular shaped bamboo made fishing equipment

The food habit of a community relates with the religious believe practices that are handed down from the generation of the ancestors. Local knowledge or folk knowledge are developed by the local people freely and exposed to the contemporary society where they endure. It is scattered in religion, traditional belief systems of a community. The chapter also discusses some other writers definitions and their views on the topic. Traditional knowledge has been accepted by the tribal communities as sacred and secrete.

The traditional medicines used by the community people is not codified like other codified herbal medicines i.e., Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani etc. the traditional Bodo villagers use herbal medicines and the knowledge of using transferred to their disciples whom they call them Bej. The community people protect the knowledge through transfer of knowledge from one person to one another in the society. So also, from one generation to another generation in course of time. Food collection, gathering and consumption are traditionally conveyed from the medicinal herbs they used. Food consumed by the community people are of medicinal values first of all they were in use of medicines then to food after domestication. The assumption of Bodo food habit is organic less spiced and oiled, ecosystem based, culture based, unique and scientifically modifiable inheritance of community-based knowledge. It is hoped and expected that the food habit and its related traditional knowledge in connection with collection, preparation and preservation with remain as significant feature of Bodo materials culture and folk customs.