



FOLK REMEDIES OF THE BODOS: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

Folk medicine is the traditional healing system. Before developing modern medical science, people of all society used folk medicine for health care and treatment in order to save their lives. Even today this kind of remedial system is not completely abolished. It mainly depends on the natural objects and beliefs relating to a community's religion. In this remedy system, practical healer is the main person who provides medicine to a sick people. Besides natural or herbal plants, they also use magico-religious practices for healing. In Bodo community *Oja* (practical healer) and *doudini* (prayer dancer) plays an important role in traditional healing system. For critical diseases, they performed *puja* and other rituals with the help of *Oja* or *doudini* by making prophecy. In this paper tried to explain both the natural (herbal) and magico-religious practices used in Bodo society for healing.

Key Words: - Folk medicine, treatment, belief and Bodo society.

1.0 Introduction:

Folk medicine is the important part of social folk custom. It has been playing an important role in health caring system of the people. By folk medicine, we mean traditionally used remedial system based on medicinal herbs or plants and other beliefs of society. It was found among all the communities in early society and completely not abolished even today. It was considered the only way of saving and protecting their life from different diseases as no modern medicine and health center were developed. Each community was used this folk medicine according to their own tradition and belief through the ages.

Folk remedy is directly not related with scientific investigation and certainty of cure. This is related with the culture of a community and transmitted succeeding generation from the prior experienced one. This is also known as indigenous medicine, folk medicine, traditional medicine, and natural medicine. It is different

from modern treatment system. It includes details medical of traditional knowledge which is developed over generation within various societies before appearing the age of modern medical facilities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as “*the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.*”

In this traditional treatment system Don Yoder mentioned about the two types of cure system i.e. 1. Natural folk medicine and 2. Magico-religious folk medicine.

“The first of these represents one of man’s earliest reactions to his natural environment and involves the seeking of cures for his ills in the herbs, plants, minerals, and animal substances of nature. Natural medicine, which is sometimes called “rational” folk medicine, and sometimes “herbal” folk medicine because of the predominance of herbs in its material medical, is shared with primitive cultures. The second branch of folk medicine is the magico-religious variety, sometimes called “occult” folk medicine, which attempts to use charms, holy words, and holy actions to cure diseases.”

1.1 Objective of the Study:

- The study aims to find out the traditional healing system of Bodo community. Try to analyzed how the village people cared their health before the development of modern medicine.
- Aims to find out how the old people used herbal plants in their daily life.
- Try to analyze related beliefs and rituals.
- Tried to document for the future generation in written form.

1.2 Methodology:

This paper is written using both the descriptive and analytical method. In this study, required data are collected both from the primary and secondary sources. For the primary source many remote villages are selected from the BTAD (present BTR) area of Assam. Observation and interview methods are adopted in collection of data. Aged people, practical healer ‘*Oja*’, and prayer dancer ‘*Doudini*’ are met in village and interact with them.

The secondary sources are collected from the book, journal and web pages. Collected documents are studied and only required data are used in this writing.

1.3 Bodo Folk Remedies:

Like other communities of the world, the Bodo also have their own folk remedial systems which are practicing since the long time basing on religious beliefs and tradition. In traditional folk remedy system of Bodo, the *oja* (medicine man) is the main person and provided treatment to the sick people. The *oja* used two types of therapy for the treatment. These are medicine without *mantra* and medicine with *mantra*. The former treatment system is tried using only with herbal medicine where does not use any *mantra* or magical power to cure the patient. On the other hand, the treatment with *mantra* includes use of both the herbal

medicine and magical power of *oja*. All *oja* are not expert in used of both the therapy. Some *oja* learn only about the use of herbal medicine. The medicines of *oja* are prepared from different parts of wild plant, parts of animals and mineral sources. Some medicines are used for eating/drinking, while some others are for massage and paste. Besides medicine and *mantra*, offering puja and performing religious rituals are also practiced by the common people of community as the way of treatment.

Observing the traditional healing method, the treatment system of Bodos' is also can be categories into two types e.g. used of wild or herbal plants as medicine and other is related to magico-religious practices which is based on religious belief and ritualistic function of *oja* (medicine man).

1.4 Use of Herbal Plants as Medicine:

The Bodo people love to live in the heart of nature. They are surviving in the villages surrounded by nature and learn many things from it. They learn practically about the curative power of wild plants and medicinal value of different herbs and gathers knowledge about it and its usage. Many herbs and plants are used as seasonal vegetables in their daily life which helps in healing minor physical problem. The women are expert in collecting and cooking of wild vegetables available in their surrounding premises and used seasonally through the years.

The wild herbs are used in two ways, one is used individually as simple home remedies learned from the ancestor and another one is as medicine which is brought from the *oja* or practical healer. Home remedies are use in case of minor diseases and other accidental minor burn, cut, bleeding, cold, cough, illness, wounds, ulcer etc. In this case the leaves, bark, fruits, flower, stem, root etc. are used.

The practical healer prepares medicine for different diseases using the parts of different plants and herbs. The name of different herbal plants and their uses are given below-

1.4.1 Jenthokha (Lawsonia Inermis): The leaves of this plant are used by pasting to cure the urine infection. The leaves are ground and squeezed juice and drinks adding sugar in empty stomach early in the morning to cool down the bladder. Pasting leaves are applied to treat the fungal infection of hand and athletes' foot in rainy season to dry up the infection. The young girl and women use the paste leaf to colour their nails and palms. It is also applied to control the hair fall, scalp treatment and to slow down the immature graying of hair.

1.4.2 Daodwi Bibar (Tabernaemontana divaricata): This is a kind of flowering plant. The paste of fresh flower with little uncooked rice is applied on forehead to reduce and cool down the temperatures or heat caused by the illness. Drop of two to three ground flowers is put into the eye to get relief from eye irritation, inflammation and watery eye.

1.4.3 Dubri hagra (cynodon dactylon): The paste of green grass is applied on forehead to cool down the temperature of illness and headache, to stop the bleeding of minor cut and to treat the bleeding of nose. Juice of this grass is squeezed from leaf and drink with honey or sugar to relief the vomiting tendency and blood vomiting.

1.4.4 Bosi (Acorus calamus): The root of this plant is used as medicine to treat the cold and cough of children. New born baby is bathed mixing the leaves with water. To control asthma of baby, massage is done with the leaf of this plant on chest and back. Paste of root is allowed to drink mixing with water to cure the stomach pain. Cutting the roots into small pieces prepared a garland with garlic cloves and worn the baby to cure the cough and asthma.

1.4.5 Khera daphini (Preemna herbacea): The leaves and roots are used as vegetables and as medicine. The patient of *jaundice* is given to eat curry of the leaves and feed the paste of roots. To treat the cough of typhoid patient, cooks the leaves with chicken and allowed to eat.

1.4.6 Khaya (scirpus grassus): A kind of grass. The root is used to treat the diseases of stomach pain. The paste of root is drink with water to control the *dysentery*.

1.4.7 Manimuni phisa/ gidir (Hydrocotyl asiatica): Both the leaves and roots are used to keep the stomach healthy. Leaves extract is used to relief in constipation and indigestion. The juice of leaf extract is used to relief from illness.

1.4.8 Usumwi (Spitanthus acmella): The flower is chew to get relief from boil on tongue. The shoot and leaves are cooked for chicken juice adding other medicinal herbs and spices and drinks hotly to cure chronic illness. The normal people are also used leaves and shoot as vegetables in cooking curry with fish and chicken.

1.4.9 Khansisa eba Dhoromphul (Leucas aspera): The leaves are astringent. Infused juice of leaves is used as nose drops to get relief from sinusitis and bleeding. Drinks leaf extract to get relieve from tonsil. Used as fry vegetables, cooked curry with fish and chicken to relief from prolonged cold and cough diseases, pneumonia etc.

1.4.10 Khipi lewa (Paederia foetida): The taste of this plant is light bitter. Leaf of this plant is used to get relief from gastric, dysentery, cold and cough etc. Its leaves are also used as vegetables.

1.4.11 Maisundri (Houttuynia Cordata): The leaves and roots are used as vegetables by normal people. To treat the dysentery and other stomach diseases the leaves are roasted wrapping with banana leaves and consume. The roots are used pasting chutney and feed to patient to stop dysentery. Leaf extract is used in constipation.

1.4.12 Nwrsing (Murraya koenigii): Spicy smell leaves are used to relief from the cold, cough and digestive purposes. It also used as leafy vegetables.

1.4.13 Mwdwmp hul (Carica papaya): The fruits and flowers are used as vegetables. Eat the tender raw uncooked fruit to get relief from constipation. The regular consumption of fruits as curry cures the gastric, indigestion and other problems of stomach. The fry of male papaya flower is consumed to get relief from stomach disorder. The mothers of new born baby with low breast milk are allowed to consume the curry of its fruit to increase the milk.

1.4.14 Silikha (Terminalia chebula): The fruit is used for wide purposes. The powder of dried fruit is used to treat constipation, indigestion, gastric and ulcerative colitis. In earlier time ground fresh fruit was used to blacken the teeth and to stop decaying. Women applied ground fresh fruit mixing with Indian gooseberry on hair for growth and to stop hair graying.

1.4.15 Gogondo eba Agwn Atha (Calotropis gigantea): The leaf, bark and root are used as medicine. The area of joint pain and swelling is massaged with leaf and mustard oil to get relief from it. The juice extraction of flower is drink with water to cure the wound of piles. Applied the gum of this plant to remove the skin diseases, irritation, boil on skin etc. Gum is applied on teeth to cure the pain. Dried flower is used to relief from cold, cough and indigestion.

1.4.16 Thaso (Alocasia acuminata schott herb): Tender shoot, tuber, flowers and stem are consumed as vegetables for blood purification, liver problem, dysentery and indigestion.

1.4.17 Bangrilewa eba zarman bilai (Chromolaena odorata): The part of leaf is used. Ground leaf of shrub is applied on the wound and cut to stop bleeding and dry up soon. To cure the sudden stomach pain used the new bud. Juice of leaf extract is given two times to a dysentery patient.

1.4.18 Daola Khungur eba Buri Thokhon (Cheilocostus speciosus): It is a kind of flowering plants. The root of the plant is used as medicine. The paste of root is used to relief from urine infection or urine burn.

1.4.19 Thaikha (Garcinia Morella desr): This is a very sour taste fruit. The ripe fruits are sliced and dried in sun to preserve. Its soaked water is drink in dysentery. Sometime prepared curry with its dried fruit slice.

1.4.20 Patgaja (Bryophyllum Pinnutum): Leaf extract juice is used in empty stomach early in the morning with sugar or palm candy to relief from urine burn and in kidney diseases. The paste of leaf is applied on forehead to cool down the extreme temperature due to illness and headache.

1.4.21 Arjun Biphang (Terminalia Arjuna): Its bark, leaf and root are used. To join the broken bone, paste of bark and garlic is used as bandage. In blood dysentery, bark paste is given to drink mixing with goat milk. The juice of bark is drink to continue the stoppage of urine, to control blood vomiting, to treat low blood pressure and heart beating.

1.4.22 Phanthao goglang (Wild solanum torvam swartz): The leaf, fruit and stem are used as medicine. Boiled root is used to drink for remedy of typhoid. The root is boiled with hot spices and drinks to cure small pox. The burning smoke of dried fruit is used to remove the dental worm and pain. The grounded leaf is used for massage with mustard oil to relief from pain the of rheumatism. Its grounded root is drunk with cold water to relief from urine burn and nephritis.

1.4.23 Sijou (Euphorbia neriifolia): Its leaf, stem and gums are used. The gum is applied on the affected area to dry up and to stop the fungus infection (ringworm) on skin. Stem is worn like a ring on the finger to dry up the whitlow and to remove the pain. Squeezed juice from roasted leaves are drunk to get relief from asthma.

1.4.24 Lemon (citrus limon): Citrus lemon's fruit, root and leaf is also used as medicine. The crushed root and seed is used to remove the worm of stomach. Leaf and fruit is used to smell to control the vomiting tendency. Juice of fruit is used as energetic drink to hydrate the body.

1.4.25 Emao (yeast): This is a kind of dried rice cake used in preparation of rice beer. This rice cake is also used to treat the stomach flatulence and loose bowel movements of baby. If a baby suffers with this disease, allows to lick a pinch of rice cake. Sometimes crushed a little amount of it and mixed with gourd flower and given to drink.

1.4.26 Zwu/zumai (rice beer): In earlier society rice beer was cooked and used commonly by people as energetic drink in working time. They used it as powerful drink to rehydrate their health from the overtired after doing hard work in the field. They belief that drinking of it cool down the urine burn.

1.5 Preparation of medicine by Practical Healer:

The practical healer prepares medicine with different plants and other accessories. The medicine of pneumonia, jaundice, typhoid, gastric etc. are prepared mixing various ingredients of plants and others. Small pill (*bwri muli*), boiled juice (*phudungnai muli*) with various herbs and spices are the main medicine prepared by them and applying from the early period for treatment.

1.6 Magico-Religious Treatment and Oja:

This type of treatment is based on chanting (*mantra*), holiness activity related to religion and other magical power of *oja* (witch doctor). The *oja* was the important person in earlier Bodo society. The term *oja* is used to denote the person who provides treatment to the patient practicing magico-religious. He learns these practices from another senior person called *guru*.

In this type of treatment, the medicine of *oja* includes *dwi jarinai*, *thao jarinai*, *bwndwng* or *khasisni* and *tabish* or amulet. '*Dwi jarinai*' is making water holy by chanting mantra and given it to drink the patient or sometime to bath to cut down the evil eye and practices on him. '*Thao jarinai*' means chanting mantra on mustard oil which is given to rub down on the affected area or sometimes whole body. '*Bwndwng* or *khasini*' is the cord of red, white or black yarn where *oja* chant mantra with typical knot and given to wear on wrist or waist or neck of patient. '*Tabish*' (amulet) is the small copper box, where puts medicine and given to wear the patient to protect from the evil eye and bad spirit.

1.7 Diseases and Belief:

Like other tribe of Assam, the Bodo also beliefs on unseen supernatural power. They belief that the wrath of God and spirit is terrible and could bring illness or sick to them at any time if not satisfied by ceremonial worship. In many cases, deity and spirit are regarded the causes of sickness. The deities are not visible by human beings. Hence people can meet them accidentally at any time unknowingly by which they got angry and attack on man. The examples of such types of deities are *khuber*, *khetro*, *chakar* etc. Such belief involved them strongly in magico-religious treatment of *oja* and enthuse the people in performing religious rituals and holy works (Offering puja) and *mantra* to recover the patients.

Sudden or immediate stomach pain of a healthy person is thought that the *khuber* (a kind of evil deity) is bite on him. The *oja* tries to drive away the deity by owing a red cock or an egg in the name of it. Then provides herbal medicine to patient to eat or drink.

Khetro is another deity. Accidentally meeting with it can cause sickness of a person. The people belief that the person who meet *khetro* deity gets sickness and slowly moves to death. The shocking of children, getting bad ferocious dreams or nightmares, excessive crying of new born baby in evening or at night without stopping is thought as *Khetro* or *matria nangnai* which can be treated only with the help of *oja*. The *oja* chant *mantra* to the baby and owe a cock (small young cock) in the name of *matria* and given to wear *bwndwng* or *khasini* (a typical knot given on red, black or white thread with mantra) to rescue the child from the *khetro*. The Bodos belief that the *khetro* deity mostly attack the children and pregnant women.

Chokor is also regarded as a kind of evil deity stepping on which can cause immediate pain on leg, hand, waist and other part of the body. Sometimes the deity can cause sudden headache, illness, vomiting and loose bowel movements too. The *oja* tries to cure the patient by chanting *mantra* with fern and given herbal medicine for massage on the pain area. *Bwndwng* or *Khasini* (a kind of typical knot is given on the red, white or black thread chanting mantra) is worn to the patient and give to drink holy water (*dwi jharinai*) where chants mantra.

1.8 Divination practice:

In any serious cases the family consulted with *oja*. The *oja* come to the house of patient and tried to make prophesy about the causes of sickness by throwing *khaori* (a kind of sea shell) then performs puja and other rituals related to religion. This system of treatment is familiar with Bodos for a long time. Still today, people of the community follow this ritual.

Another way of knowing the causes is through the practices of *Doudini*. The *Doudini* performs puja and make prophecy. About the making prophecy of diseases in Bodo society Haffdan Siigar mentioned-

“In case of serious diseases, the family may call the *dwuri*, the *doudini* and the *maday raynw gwrwng*..... This is done in order to find out which god is unsatisfied and has caused the disease. When the *doudini* in her enumeration comes to the unsatisfied god, she will start shivering and later on trembling, and at last falling into ecstasy. During this performance it is supposed that the unsatisfied god has entered her body and speak through her mouth. She will tell what has caused the sickness, i.e. in which way the sick person has insulted the god. During a sacrifice to the gods, he may have forgotten to mention the name of one of the gods, or he may have neglected to worship the gods at some or other occasion, or he may have had a ‘jungle wife’, or may have done something wrong against some or other persons, etc. Then she will tell what must be done in order to satisfy the god again. As a rule, he must perform some or other ceremony, i.e. sacrificing a pig or the like.”

They also have belief on the witch. The diseases of patient if not recover after treating with doctor, beliefs that the witch tried to harm on them using unseen power or with bad magic. To cure such type of disease they take help of stronger *oja* who is powerful then him and can destroyed his (witch) evil or unseen power.

1.9 Conclusion:

The traditional systems are beginning of human culture for each and every society. It is the base or root of modern and present society. The human society of today also cannot totally ignore the traditional practices and every modern system is coming out from the earlier one. So, it can be regarded as source of modern system. The Bodos folk remedies were widely practiced in early period to save the lives and some of it is still continuing in the society. Before arrival of modern medicine and treatment facilities, people were totally dependent on folk remedial and tried to survived. The use of herbal plants has a remedial quality and value which cannot be ignored by scientific study. Of course, magico-religious practices and rituals based on beliefs relating to health issues are decreasing in the society.

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