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Food Heritage Of The Bodo: An Ecological Perspective

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Abstract: The indigenous Bodo people of Northeast India have developed a distinctive culinary tradition that is firmly anchored in sustainable living and ecological harmony. This study examines how Bodo food practices closely align with their natural environment, utilizing local biodiversity and traditional ecological knowledge. Their cuisine, rich with indigenous rice varieties, wild vegetables, freshwater fish, and fermented foods, reflects a deep understanding of seasonal cycles and environmental stewardship. The agricultural practices of the Bodo community highlight both the cultural values and ecological importance embedded in their way of life. However, environmental degradation, globalization, and changing lifestyles are placing immense pressure on the survival of these precious traditions. By exploring the ecological roots of Bodo food culture, this paper emphasizes the urgent need to protect and celebrate indigenous food systems not merely as memories of the past, but as living, breathing expressions of cultural identity and deep, enduring connection to nature.

Index Terms - Bodo, ecology, agriculture, biodiversity, food, heritage, and preservation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bodos are considered a Mongoloid race, and their language is part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Bodos are regarded to be inhabitants of a country north of the Himalayas and the western belt of China, a country known as Bod, meaning homeland (Brahma,1998). The Bodos predominantly inhabit the plains of western Assam, particularly in the Bodoland Territorial Region, where the landscape is characterized by a mix of riverine floodplains, semi-forested hills, and fertile agricultural lands. This diverse ecological backdrop supports a rich array of flora and fauna and allows the Bodo community to engage in varied subsistence strategies. The Bodos have historically been farmers in an agrarian community with a rich tradition of fisheries, poultry, piggery with rice and jute farming, betel nut plantation, and the collection of forest produce. These activities are inherently seasonal and natural cycles, and demonstrate a sustainable interaction with the environment. The Bodo culture is very rich and diverse. It is a part and parcel of the Kirata

culture (Boro, 2021). The culture gives identity to the people. The cultural life of the Bodo is different to any other Assamese Caste Hindus in terms of food habits, dress, rituals, customs, living standards, social set-up, and general lifestyle. Their religion is known as Bathou.

Food heritage refers to the traditional food practices, ingredients, recipes, and culinary knowledge passed down through generations within a community, region, or culture. It encompasses not just what people eat, but how food is grown, harvested, prepared, preserved, and shared. Food heritage is an important part of intangible cultural heritage because it reflects the history, values, environment, and identity of a community.

There is a strong relationship between food heritage and ecology, as traditional food systems are directly influenced by local biodiversity, climate, soil, water availability, and seasonal patterns. Food heritage often evolves in harmony with the natural environment, making it a reflection of how communities interact sustainably with their ecosystems. This ecological foundation ensures not only food security and nutrition but also the conservation of biodiversity and traditional knowledge.

The Bodo community also has its own dietary legacy, shaped by its natural environment, cultural practices, and traditional knowledge systems. The food heritage of the Bodo community of Assam is a rich example of traditional knowledge and ecological harmony. Bodo food is closely tied to their environment, using locally available ingredients like rice, bamboo shoots, fermented fish, and a variety of green leafy vegetables and wild herbs. Their culinary practices reflect sustainable living, deep cultural roots, and a close relationship with nature. The Bodo community's food habits are closely linked to their rituals and customs; therefore, their food is not forgotten and stands as an important form of intangible cultural heritage. Bodo food tradition stands out for its simplicity, nutrition, and cultural symbolism. Such foods reflect cultural identity, honour the past, and connect generations. They play a vital role in preserving heritage and expressing gratitude to ancestors. However, the growing preference for fast food threatens these rich culinary traditions. The shift from nutritious, traditional diets to modern junk food has contributed to the rise of lifestyle-related health issues. Preserving traditional food heritage like that of the Bodos is essential for cultural continuity and community well-being. This paper aims to explore the ecological dimensions of the Bodo community food heritage, highlighting how traditional culinary practices contribute to sustainable living and cultural resilience.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

i. To explore the food heritage of the Bodo.
ii. To explore the ecological dimensions of Bodo food heritage.
iii. To explore the indigenous traditional knowledge of the Bodo.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Mai/Mairong (rice):

Rice is the staple food of the Bodo community, holding immense nutritional, cultural, and ecological importance in their daily life. It is consumed in all three meals, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, accompanied by a variety of dishes such as dal, ondla (a rice-flour-based curry), sobai (black lentils), seasonal vegetables, and non-vegetarian items. The food habits of the Bodos are deeply rooted in their natural environment, with rice

cultivation reflecting a harmonious relationship between agriculture and ecology. According to Gait (1906), the Bodos were among the first ethnic groups to introduce rice cultivation in Assam, showcasing their longstanding connection with the land. As noted by Bhupen Narzi (2003), the Bodo community primarily cultivates three traditional rice varieties- Asu (Ahu), Bawa, and Maisali (Sali), each adapted to distinct ecological conditions.

1.1 Asu or Ahu rice is the first rice crop of the agricultural calendar, sown between Phagun-Satra and Shavan (February to August), and harvested during Ahin-Kati (mid-September to mid-October). This short-duration variety matures in about three months and is deeply embedded in Bodo cultural practices. Before consuming the new harvest, it is first offered to **Bathou Bwrai**, the supreme deity of the Bodos, in a ritual known as **Wngkam Gwrlwi Janai** or **Neon Janai**. This offering reflects gratitude to nature and underscores the community's spiritual connection to agriculture, ensuring that consumption is in tune with ecological cycles and religious observance.

1.2 Bawa rice is a unique deep-water variety traditionally grown in low-lying, flood-prone areas. Sown before the onset of the monsoon, Bao rice adapts to rising water levels by elongating its stem, enabling it to thrive in conditions where other crops would fail. Its cultivation showcases the Bodos' deep understanding of wetland ecosystems. Bao rice supports biodiversity, requires no artificial irrigation, and is grown without chemical inputs. Its resilience and ecological compatibility make it a vital crop for sustainable farming in challenging environments.

1.3 Maisali rice, a variant of Sali or winter rice, is cultivated from Kati to Aghun (June to November) and harvested in late autumn or early winter. It is grown in lowland fields with good water retention and is valued for its high yield, aroma, taste, and long storage life. As a daily staple, Maisali rice reflects the Bodo community's adaptation to seasonal rhythms and local soil-water dynamics, contributing to food security and ecological balance.

These three rice varieties- Asu, Bao, and Maisali not only fulfil nutritional needs but also embody traditional ecological knowledge. Their cultivation is closely aligned with natural cycles of rainfall, soil type, and water availability, supporting biodiversity and avoiding the pitfalls of monoculture. This form of diversified agriculture strengthens ecological resilience and sustains both the environment and the community. In addition to these, the Bodos cultivate special rice varieties such as Jwsa, a fragrant and high-value grain, and Maibra, a sticky rice used in brewing rice beer and preparing traditional dishes. These are grown using indigenous methods that avoid synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, preserving soil health and supporting local ecosystems.

2. Kharwi/Khari (Alkali):

Kharwi is a traditional alkali used as a food additive in Bodo cuisine. In ancient times, when Assam was landlocked and salt was scarce, khar served as a substitute for salt. Assam has a distinct history regarding salt, with conflicts once waged over its possession (Narzary, 2024). Among the Bodos, kharwi is made from the pseudo-stems of banana trees, remains of black lentil plants after harvest, and stems of Curcuma aromatica (wild turmeric). These materials are burned to ash and shaped into small balls called **kharwi-phithor**, which can be stored for long periods. When needed, the **kharwi-phithor** is mixed with water and filtered through a

coconut shell to produce the alkali solution. Kharwi is commonly used in cooking fish, meat, and vegetable dishes. It was also traditionally used as a shampoo. It is believed to offer therapeutic benefits such as aiding digestion, cleansing the stomach, and treating skin allergies.

This traditional additive not only reflects the ingenuity of the Bodo people in adapting to resource scarcity but also forms a vital part of their cultural and ecological heritage.

3. Ondla/Onla (Rice Flour Curry):

Ondla is one of the most important and culturally symbolic curries in Bodo food heritage. This thick, hearty preparation is made from rice flour and khardwi, an alkaline liquid made from the ash of burnt banana stems or other plants. It is commonly cooked with local chicken, pork, bamboo shoots, or seasonal vegetables. Known for its unique texture and mildly alkaline taste, Ondla stands out as a cherished culinary tradition within the Bodo community.

In Bodo society, Ondla holds a central place in both everyday life and ceremonial occasions. During **Hatha-Suni Haba**, the traditional Bodo marriage ceremony, the ritual is considered incomplete without this dish. It is customary for the new bride to serve Ondla, along with rice and local chicken, to the groom.

The preparation of ondla during **hathasuni haba** is itself steeped in rituals. The new bride is expected to prepare rice flour by manually grinding rice using traditional tools called **uwal-gahen**. The bride is often assisted by other women in the household, symbolizing communal support and the transmission of culinary knowledge. Once the rice flour is ready, a special dish is prepared. For this occasion, it is customarily cooked using a pair of local chickens (one male and one female), reflecting symbolic balance and harmony. Significantly, turmeric is never used in this particular preparation, marking it as distinct within Bodo culinary traditions. Once the dish is ready, the bride begins the ritual known as **Hatha Khurnai** by first serving the meal to the groom. She then serves all the family members and guests attending the wedding. This act of serving represents her acceptance into the new household and signifies her role in upholding the cultural values of respect, hospitality, and social harmony.

The ecological roots of Ondla further enrich its cultural value. The rice used is often from indigenous varieties cultivated through sustainable farming methods. The chicken is typically free-range or locally reared, reflecting environmentally conscious animal husbandry. Kharwi (alkali)**,** made from the ash of agricultural or plant waste such as banana stems, exemplifies a traditional zero-waste approach while also serving as a natural preservative and flavour enhancer. Additional ingredients such as bamboo shoots and leafy greens are usually foraged from home gardens or nearby forests, promoting biodiversity and seasonal eating. The cooking process itself is energy-efficient, often utilizing traditional stoves and simple techniques, making it a low-impact culinary practice.

Cultural taboos also shape the consumption of Ondla. Farmers traditionally refrain from eating this dish during critical stages of rice cultivation, specifically when paddy fields are in bloom or when the rice is about to seed. This abstention is rooted in traditional ecological knowledge, reflecting a belief that consuming the dish during this sensitive agricultural phase could negatively affect the crop. Such taboos highlight the

intricate relationship between food practices and the agricultural calendar, emphasizing respect for nature's rhythms.

Ondla is more than a dish; it is a living embodiment of ecological wisdom, cultural identity, and social cohesion in Bodo society. Its ritual significance during Hathasuni Haba reflects the deep interconnection between food, environment, and tradition, preserving the unique eco-cultural heritage of the Bodos.

4. Narzi/Narzwi (dry jute leaves):

Jute cultivation played a crucial role in traditional Bodo society, functioning not only as a key agricultural activity but also as a vital source of materials for daily life. The durable fibers of jute were traditionally crafted into ropes used for tying cattle, securing harvested crops, and fulfilling various domestic needs, illustrating the Bodos' sustainable and resourceful relationship with nature. While the plant was initially valued for its fibrous utility, its edible leaves gradually gained cultural importance. These leaves were sun-dried, stored for long-term use, and eventually prepared into a bitter dish known as Narzi. Originally appreciated for its medicinal and purifying qualities, Narzi evolved into a central element of Bodo cuisine and ritual practice.

The Bodo people have an ancient ritual called **Narzi Orgarnai**, where people touch dry jute leaves during death or funeral ceremonies to break ties with the deceased. This practice symbolizes the breaking of ties between the living and the dead. Dry jute leaves are cooked and eaten during the **Saradu** (death ceremony reception) by some **Bathou** religious Bodo people to signify the separation. The ritual is regarded as incomplete without this dish. In this way, Narzi has transcended its origins as a simple food source to become a powerful emblem of Bodo cultural identity, ecological knowledge, and ancestral continuity.

Cultural taboos also play a significant role in shaping Narzi consumption. In traditional Bodo society, farmers customarily avoid eating this dish during key stages of rice cultivation, particularly when the paddy fields are in bloom or when the rice is nearing the seeding stage. This practice is grounded in traditional ecological knowledge, reflecting the belief that consuming Narzi during this sensitive agricultural phase could negatively affect the crop. These taboos underscore the deep interconnection between food customs and the agricultural calendar, emphasizing a profound respect for nature's rhythms and the delicate balance required for successful farming.

5. Jou (Rice Beer):

Jou, also known as Jumai. Rice beer is not used as a daily beverage, but it is prepared as required, especially for use at marriages, funerals, harvest homes and other occasions that break the monotony of village life (Endle, 2021). It is far more than a traditional rice beer among the Bodo people; it is a vibrant embodiment of cultural memory, ecological wisdom, and ancestral heritage. Rooted in the rhythms of the land and shaped by the seasonal cycles of agriculture, Jou weaves together the threads of community, spirituality, and sustainability into a living, breathing tradition.

The journey of Jou begins with rice, the sacred grain that sustains Bodo life and defines their ecological identity. After harvesting, the rice is cooked and left to cool on large plantain leaves, natural, biodegradable surfaces that reflect the community's low-impact, zero-waste ethos. Once cooled, it is mixed with Amao, a

traditional starter culture essential for fermentation. The making of **Amao** is where the Bodo people's ecological intelligence and deep ethnobotanical knowledge are most vividly expressed. Traditionally, the preparation of **Amao** involved over 50 species of wild and cultivated plants, each chosen for its specific aromatic, medicinal, or fermentative qualities. Though today only a handful of these species are still commonly used, the diversity once harnessed underscores an intimate familiarity with local ecosystems. Plants such as **Mokhna** (Clerodendrum viscosum), jackfruit leaves, sugarcane, pineapple, and **Agarchita** (Plumbago zeylanica) are not intensively farmed, but respectfully foraged according to seasonal rhythms, demonstrating an ecological ethic rooted in sustainability and coexistence. These ingredients are ground with aged **Amao** cakes known as **Amao Mwkhang**, to maintain continuity of the microbial culture across generations. The resulting dough is shaped into cakes (**larus**) and sun-dried, using solar energy for natural preservation.

Fermentation takes place in earthenware or silver pots, materials drawn from the environment for their breathability, non-toxicity, and enduring value. Once sealed, the mixture is left at room temperature to ferment naturally. No synthetic additives, industrial inputs, or modern machinery are needed. The entire process is governed by traditional knowledge and the ambient conditions of the local climate, making it a practice that is ecologically light and environmentally attuned.

A special variant of Jou is made using **Maibra** rice, a locally cherished and possibly heirloom variety. This brew can be aged for up to six months without spoilage, a testament to the Bodos' careful selection of rice varieties suited for natural fermentation and long-term storage, factors essential for food security and ecological sustainability.

Jou is much more than a fermented drink; it is a sacred symbol, deeply woven into the ceremonial and seasonal fabric of Bodo society. Its role is especially profound during festivals such as **Kherai**, **Bwisagu** and **Magw Domasi.**

Kherai Puja is believed to be the greatest religious festival of the Bodo. They sacrifice cocks, goats, pigs, pigeons in the name of gods and goddesses during Kherai Puja. Along with the sacrifice the worshippers also offer Jou (rice beer) to the gods and goddesses. Jou is an essential part of Kherai Puja; without Jou, no Kherai Puja can be performed.

Bwisagu, is the most popular seasonal festival of the Bodo. The New Year or spring festival is a joyful celebration of life's renewal, agricultural fertility, and natural abundance. During this time, Jou is freely shared among family, friends, and community elders. It becomes a ritual of joy and unity, a libation that honours the earth's gifts and marks the beginning of a new cycle.

Magw Domasi, the harvest festival, carries a more solemn tone. On the first day of this month, the Bodos offer Jou in memory of their deceased ancestors, a sacred rite called **Gwthwisw Baonai**. This offering ensures ancestral blessings for the household and future harvests. In this way, Jou serves as a spiritual bridge between the living and the dead, the present and the past, firmly rooting the ritual calendar in the cycles of the natural world. These seasonal customs reveal the deep ecological consciousness embedded in Bodo life.

In a broader ecological sense, Jou functions as a cultural compass that aligns human behaviour with environmental stewardship. It is offered to **Bathou Bwrai**, the supreme deity of the Bodos, as a mark of reverence for nature's sanctity. It accompanies communal labour, easing exhaustion after hard fieldwork. It

is served to guests not merely as a drink, but as an expression of the land's abundance and the host's goodwill. Even in illness, Jou is consumed as a remedy, rooted in the belief that healing should come from the earth itself. Thus, Jou is not simply brewed, it is cultivated in ecological harmony. It embodies a sustainable practice that uses local resources without exploitation, values biodiversity, and reinforces the resilience of community life. In every cup, one tastes not just rice and fermentation, but the essence of forest, field, rain, and ancestral wisdom. Jou is a living testimony to the Bodo worldview, ecologically grounded, spiritually elevated, and profoundly human.

6. Goi-Phatwi (Betel Nut):

Betel nut (goi) holds a significant place in the food cultural heritage of the Bodo community. More than just a consumable, it embodies respect, hospitality, and long-standing tradition. Its presence is integral to various life-cycle ceremonies, including births, weddings, and death rituals, highlighting its cultural symbolism beyond nourishment.

In weddings, betel nut plays a vital role from the initial proposal through to the final union. The **Goi Khaonai** ritual, where betel nuts and leaves are offered and shared, stands out as a key tradition symbolizing goodwill and communal acceptance. A traditional folk song celebrates this ritual:

"Goy dedere, pāthoi sināri,
Dãobo khi sunoi,
Dãothu khoro henã dãbã;
Khão regãng khaobãi,
Ja regãng jābäi." (Brahma, 2021)

English Translation:

"Areca nuts of small, fine size,
Betel leaves of the best quality;
White lime as bright as the heron's droppings;
With a blade the size of a dove's head,
The Bairathis have cut the areca nuts in abundance,
All have eaten to their heart's content."

The Bairathis, women specially chosen to cut and distribute the betel nuts, are central to the ritual. Their role is celebrated with playful teasing when they delay, expressed in another folk song:

"Oi Bairathi loliã,
Khãono babangsin goy
Khãonäikhou jong jāliã." (Brahma, 2021)

English Translation:

"O lazy Bairathi,
We will not eat the betel nuts
You have cut carelessly!"

Even in divorce, betel nut plays a symbolic role. The tearing of a betel leaf in the **Pathwi lai bisinai** ritual marks the formal end of a marital bond.

As a customary offering to guests, betel nut strengthens social ties and conveys honor. Through its role in rituals, folk songs, and ceremonies, betel nut remains a cherished element of Bodo food heritage, representing purity, unity, and the community's enduring cultural values.

7. Nature's Influence on Meat Consumption:

Meat holds a vital place in the food heritage of the Bodo community, shaped by their ecological setting, subsistence practices, and cultural beliefs. Living in forested and agrarian landscapes, the Bodos have traditionally relied on a mix of domesticated animals, such as pigs, chickens, ducks, and goats, as well as wild animals like deer, tortoises, and rabbits. This reflects a sustainable and ecologically attuned approach to food sourcing.

Pork is highly valued and often features in festivals, rituals, and communal feasts. Hunting practices, guided by seasonal rhythms and inherited ecological knowledge, underscore the community's close relationship with nature. The custom of drying meat (**bedor gwran**) during hunting or agricultural seasons is a practical and adaptive method of preservation, ensuring availability during monsoon or busy farming periods.

Religious and customary laws also shape Bodo meat consumption. Among Hindu Bodos, certain animals such as cows, dogs, cats, foxes, and scavenger species are taboo, and consuming them invites social punishment under customary law. These food restrictions reflect moral values rooted in spiritual belief and community ethics.

Thus, the meat traditions of the Bodo community are not only dietary choices but expressions of ecological balance, cultural identity, and ancestral wisdom, making them an enduring and significant aspect of Bodo food heritage.

8. Fish, Snails, and Insects in Bodo Food Heritage:

Fish is a staple in the Bodo diet, harvested from natural water bodies and home-grown ponds. A wide range of local fish species are consumed, and traditional preservation techniques like sun-drying and smoking are used to make **na gwran** (dried fish). One of the most treasured traditional dishes is **Napham**, a fermented preparation made by grinding small dried fish with arum stem. This mixture is stored in bamboo tubes (**owa hashung**) sealed with plantain leaves (**talir bilai**), and can be preserved for up to two to three years. Another favourite is **na menai,** where small fish are wrapped in plantain leaves and roasted in the hearth, showcasing the community's innovative cooking methods using natural materials.

Equally significant is the consumption of snails, locally known as **samo**. Varieties such as **samo pisa, samo ladai,** and **samo lingri** are collected from freshwater sources and paddy fields. These snails are soaked and cleaned thoroughly over one to two nights to remove impurities before cooking. The preparation and rhythmic communal eating of **samo** reflect the refined cultural practices of the Bodos, blending ecological knowledge with culinary skill.

The Bodos include a variety of edible insects in their diet, such as silkworms, bees, red ants, grasshoppers, frogs, and crabs collected from water bodies and forests. These foods are rich in protein and represent a sustainable use of the biodiversity around them.

Together, fish, snails, and insects not only nourish the Bodo people but also express their deep respect for nature, ancestral knowledge, and cultural identity, making these foods an enduring part of their ecological and gastronomic heritage.

9. Vegetables and Fermentation in Bodo Food Heritage:

The traditional food practices of the Bodo community reflect a deep-rooted ecological consciousness and sustainable use of biodiversity. Surrounded by the rich vegetation of Assam, the Bodos have developed an extensive tradition of consuming both cultivated and wild green vegetables, practicing fermentation, and using natural preservation methods that align closely with the rhythms of their environment.

Green leafy vegetables, known as **gwthag megong** in Bodo, are central to the daily diet. While some are cultivated in home gardens and fields, a significant number are wild varieties foraged from forests and uncultivated lands. These wild greens include species like sibru (a thorny plant), dwishrem (a sour creeper), lapha saik'o (Malva verticillata), jwglauri (a fragrant herb), nak'i, kungk'a (both bitter herbs), ganga mala, raidwng (young cane), and dingkiya (a type of edible fern). Another aromatic favorite, anthai bajab or bwrma dari, is often used in fish curries with kushia na or mutton. These greens are not only rich in nutrition but also possess medicinal properties, demonstrating the community's traditional ecological knowledge.

Seasonal foraging and consumption of over a hundred varieties of green vegetables during Bwisagu (Bodo New Year, celebrated in April) is believed to prevent illness, showcasing a strong connection between food, health, and nature. Other popular edible plants include mwip'rai, manimuni (Centella asiatica), bwrwm bwthrw (Leucas longifolia), masundri (Houttuynia cordata), bala bothua (Chenopodium album), khiphi bendwng (Paederia foetida), and mandei (Ipomoea aquatica). They also use various edible roots like potato, tharun (yam), t'aso bedor (arum beet), and spices such as coriander (dundia), curry leaves (narsing), and k'asid'ara (Eryngium foetidum). Cultivated vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, papaya, bitter melon, and various beans are also common.

Among the cherished dishes is lapha mwidru, made by boiling lapha (Malva verticillata), emphasizing simple yet ecologically grounded cuisine. The Bodos also practice the age-old method of fermentation, especially with bamboo shoots called **mewai**. Sourced from forests, selected varieties of bamboo are cleaned, chopped, and fermented in earthen pots for 10–15 days. After sun-drying, they are stored in airtight containers and can last for months. This technique not only enhances flavor but ensures food availability during off-seasons, especially the monsoon.

Fermentation extends to other produce like radish, white gourd, and wild flowers such as gambari (Gmelina pedunculata), sewali, basukhi, kharo khandai (Oroxylum indicum), methekha, and siphung bibar. These are sun-dried and preserved to be consumed during periods when fresh greens are scarce, particularly during intense farming activities.

Mushrooms, called mwikhwn in Bodo, are another important part of the diet. Foraged from forested and shaded areas near their homes, Bodos possess detailed knowledge about distinguishing edible mushrooms from poisonous ones. Once collected, mushrooms are washed, seasoned with salt, chilies, and mustard oil, then wrapped in plantain leaves and slow-cooked in the hearth, a method that reflects their low-waste, eco-friendly culinary tradition.

These food practices, rooted in ecological intelligence, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable living, highlight how the Bodos have harmonized their diet with the natural world. Their vegetable-based culinary heritage not only sustains their health but also strengthens their cultural identity and deep connection with the environment.

From the wide array of both plant-based and animal-based resources available in their environment, the Bodos prepare a variety of traditional dishes that are deeply rooted in ecological knowledge and cultural preference. Among their favorites are **Samo Sobai** (snail cooked with pulses), **Oma Narzi** (pork prepared with dried jute leaves), **Naa Mwitha** (fish cooked with roselle leaves), and **Ondla Dao** (a chicken curry thickened with rice flour).

IV. CONCLUSION

The food heritage of the Bodo community reflects a profound ecological consciousness and cultural depth, where every ingredient, preparation method, and culinary practice embodies a sustainable relationship with nature. Rooted in forested and agrarian landscapes, Bodo food traditions, ranging from meat and fish consumption to the use of wild greens, fermented products, and insects, demonstrate a harmonious balance between biodiversity and cultural identity. These practices are guided by ancestral knowledge, seasonal rhythms, and spiritual beliefs, ensuring not only nutritional well-being but also ecological sustainability. The preparation of rice beer **(Jou)**, the ceremonial role of betel nut, and the ethical dimensions of meat consumption reveal a food culture where ecological wisdom and ritual significance are deeply intertwined. Traditional dishes like **Oma Narzi**, **Samo Sobai**, and **Ondla Dao** showcase the community's intimate familiarity with local flora and fauna, as well as their innovative use of natural preservation techniques such as drying and fermentation. The gathering of wild herbs, mushrooms, and snails illustrates a respectful use of local resources, guided by knowledge systems passed down through generations. Beyond their nutritional value, these food practices serve as cultural expressions, marking festivals, honoring ancestors, and fostering social cohesion. Whether through the offering of Jou during **Kherai Puja**, the sharing of betel nuts in matrimonial ceremonies, or the foraging of greens during **Bwisagu**, the Bodos demonstrate how food can be a powerful medium of cultural transmission and environmental stewardship. In a time of increasing ecological degradation and loss of traditional knowledge, the Bodo food heritage stands as a resilient model of how indigenous communities can maintain sustainable lifeways rooted in ecological balance, cultural reverence, and intergenerational continuity.

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