

# A linguistic study of Ethnobotanical terms used in the Bat<sup>h</sup>uo religion

Bandana Basumatary

M.Phil Scholar, Bodoland University.

## Abstract:

*Bat<sup>h</sup>uo is an ethnic religion of the Bodo community. The relevance of ethno-plants in Bat<sup>h</sup>uo religion is worth mentioning. There is a value, beliefs in every use of ethno-plants in Bat<sup>h</sup>uo religion. This study aims at exploring the uses of Ethnobotanical terms in Bat<sup>h</sup>uo religion. It emphasized the societal values of the ethno-plants and beliefs of the devotees on it. The linguistic terminology for Ethno-plants is also taken into consideration. The Ethnobotanical terms used in the Bat<sup>h</sup>uo religion are the linguistic property to the Bodo community. In addition, the structure of the ethno-plants is to be highlighted in this study.*

**Key words:** Culture, beliefs, societal values, vocabulary, word structure.

## 1.0 Introduction:

Plants are the most crucial part of the human being. It has been used by the human being since immemorial for the different necessities such as food, shelter, medicine, rituals etc. The relationship between one aboriginal group of people and plants is studied in Ethnobotany. In general, Ethnobotany refers to the study of plants utilized by the indigenous people and their traditional knowledge, beliefs about the plants. The term “Ethnobotany” was first coined in 1895 by the American botanist John William Harsh Barger in the Philadelphia Evening Telegraph as a study of plants used by primitive and aboriginal people.<sup>1</sup> Richard Evan Schultes is considered as the father of Ethnobotany. According to him “Ethnobotany is investigating the plants used by primitive societies in various parts of the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Ethnobotany is closely related to the language and culture. Linguistic terminology used by an aboriginal group of people is property to this linguistic community. Moreover, studying the structure of Ethnobotanical terms is one of the essential parts of the linguistic study. Use of ethno-plants preserves the native vocabulary as well as helps in validating the culture of the particular community.

The present study deals with the Ethnobotanical terms used in the *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion. The *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion is an ethnic religion of the Bodo community of the state of Assam, India. The Bodos have been practicing the *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion since the remote past. This religion is truly connected to the nature. There is a belief that *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo Burai*, the supreme God has created the world with the five elements i.e. *bar(air)*, *ha(earth)*, *dui(water)*, *ɔr (fire)* and *ɔk<sup>h</sup>raŋ (sky)* which is considered as the five vital principle of the *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion as well as the five power of the *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo Burai*. The importance of Ethnobotany in the *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion is to be noticed. In *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion there is a belief, values in every used of ethno-plants.

<sup>1</sup> “Ethnobotany”-Editor-Suresh Kumar, Volume-1, Page No.-13

<sup>2</sup> “Ethnobotany”-Editor-Suresh Kumar, Volume-1, Page No.-53

### 1.1 Methodology:

The present study is analyzed on the basis of cultural and linguistic view point. The data for this study is gathered from both primary and secondary sources. As a primary source observation method has been done by the researcher. Moreover, the data has been collected from the secondary sources such as books, journal and thesis.

### 1.2 Aims and Objectives

- To discuss how the Ethnobotanical terms associated to the *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion are closely related to the language and culture of the Bodo community.
- To analyze the structure of the words of native names of ethno-plants used in the *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion.

### 2.0 Discussion:

The Ethno-plants associated with *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion have been discussed here.

#### (a) Sizuo (*Euphorbia nerifolia*):

The *sizuo* plant plays a vital role in the *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion. This plant is considered as a symbol of *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo Burai* among the devotees of the *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion. It is believed that the *sizuo* plant is the first creation of *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo Burai* among the plants. The *sizuo* plant is planted at the north-east corner of the courtyard.

The term */sizuo/* is composed with two free morpheme i.e. */si/(soul)* and */zuo/ (high)* which means the supreme soul. The term */sizuo/* is considered as native term of the Bodos.

#### (b) Zatrasi (*justicia gendarussa*)

##### Willow-Leaf Justica (Eng)

In *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion the *zatrasi* plant is considered as a holy plant and as well as a Laxmi, a Goddess of wealth in many place. The tender shoot of this plant is used to sprinkle the holy water. This plant is also planted towards left of the *sizuo* plant in *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo Bit<sup>h</sup>a* or near by the *Bat<sup>h</sup>wosali*. The term *zatrasi* is also the native term used by the Bodo community since the remote past.

#### (c) T<sup>h</sup>uluṅsi and Dubri hagra ( *Ocimum tenuiflorum* and *cynodon dactylon*)

##### Holy Basil and Barmuda grass (Eng)

These two plants are the most essential elements used for the religious purposes among the Hindus. In *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion also these two plants are considered as a sacred plant. The tender shoots of both the plants are used to sprinkle the holy water. The *t<sup>h</sup>uluṅsi* plant is planted towards the right side of the *sizuo* plant in *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo Bit<sup>h</sup>a*.

The term *t<sup>h</sup>uluṅsi* is a loan word adapted by the Bodos. Etymologically the term */t<sup>h</sup>uluṅsi/* is derived from the Sanskrit word */tulsi/*. It is to be noticed that the word */tulsi/* has changed phonologically in Bodo language. The initial Phoneme */t/* of the word */tulsi/* has replaced to */t<sup>h</sup>/* Phoneme. Moreover, the consonant phoneme */ŋ/* and vowel Phoneme */u/* also included in this word. e.g.-*tulsi* > *thulsi* > *thuluṅsi*.

In terms of the word */dubri hagra/*, it can be adapted from Sanskrit word */durva/* via Assamese word */dubɔri bɔn/*. On the other hand, it can be native term to the Bodos. In Bodo community many plants are given name by looking the structure of the plant. e.g. *huri t<sup>h</sup>ɔk<sup>h</sup>ɔn* (*stick of old woman*), *uŋk<sup>h</sup>am p<sup>h</sup>urum* (*left over rice*), etc. In Bodo */dubri/* means short in size and */hagra/* means grass. As */dubri hagra/* is short in size it can be considered as *dubri hagra*.

**(d) K<sup>h</sup>anj<sup>h</sup>la:**

The term *k<sup>h</sup>anj<sup>h</sup>la* is one of the most mentionable cultural terms of the Bodos. The *k<sup>h</sup>anj<sup>h</sup>la* plant is mostly used in establishment of *Bat<sup>h</sup>uosali*, *K<sup>h</sup>erai Hunai*, and traditional marriage of the Bodos. The eighteen pair of *k<sup>h</sup>anj<sup>h</sup>la* plant is put towards the eastern edge of the *Bwisumut<sup>h</sup>ini Ali* (*the way of the earth*) accordingly. It is to be mentioned that in some geographical area, only sixteen pair of *k<sup>h</sup>anj<sup>h</sup>la* is utilize in the same. This plant is used to symbolize the men and women bound by the complexities and mysteries of the world.

**(e) uua (Poaceae):****Bamboo(Eng)**

There is a massive use of *uua* or bamboo plant in *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion. The *sizuo* plant is fenced with eighteen pair of small bamboo post and it is fastened with five pair of bamboo strips which is called the *Banduba*. Again, three small bamboo strips which are known as *Sirin* are fastened at the top along with the five *Bandu*. The eighteen pair of small bamboo post signifies the deities of Bodos. They are-*Muunsijsij Burai-Muunsijsij Burui*, *Si Burai-Si Burui*, *Aham Burai-Aham Burui*, *Ihiu Burai- Ihiu Burui*, *Hap<sup>h</sup>ao Burai-Hap<sup>h</sup>ao Burui*, *K<sup>h</sup>wrija Burai-K<sup>h</sup>wrija burui*, *Mohela burai-Mohela burui*, *Bulli Burai-Bulli burui*, *Song Burai-Song burui*, *K<sup>h</sup>wila Burai-K<sup>h</sup>wila Burui*, *Agraj Burai- Agraj Burui*, *Jumun burai-Jumun burui*, *Hazu Burai-Hazu Burui*, *Gongar Burai-Gongar Burui*, *Rozong Burai-Rozong Burui*, *Hasuj Burai Hasuj Burui*, *Amao Burai-Amao Burui*, and *Mainao Burai-mainao Burui*. They all are worshipped along with the *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo Burai*.

By folding the three bamboo post of the front (signifying *Muunsijsij Burai-Muunsijsij Burui*, *Si Burai-Si Burui*, and *Mainao Burai-Mainao Burui*) a form of *Daot<sup>h</sup>ub Bik<sup>h</sup>a* has been made which is symbolized the soul of the human being.

The eighteen pair of *Maya je*, which is put in the eastern edge of the *Bwisumut<sup>h</sup>ini Ali* also made by the small strips of the bamboo.

In fencing the the *Sizuo* plant only a piece of bamboo plant is used and the process should be accomplished within a day. The species of Bamboo used in fencing is called *uua gubui* or *mak<sup>h</sup>al uua* in Bodo language.

The word /*uua*/ is a basic noun. In terms of phonological point of view it is seen that, the structure of the word /*uua*/ is a compound of three vowel clusters. But it is not considered as a triphthong as it is not pronounced in one syllable. The word *uua* can be defined as a native word of the Bodos.

**(f) T<sup>h</sup>alir Bip<sup>h</sup>aj (Musa):****Banana Tree (Eng)**

Most of the part of banana plant (*t<sup>h</sup>alir bip<sup>h</sup>aj*) is used for many purposes in *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion. The top side of the leaf (*laizuo*) is used for offering the prashad to *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo Burai*. Moreover, the leaf of banana is cut in a particular shape which is called *laisi* is being used to offer the prashad to the eighteen deities. The fruit is also used as a prashad in *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion.

In *Garja puja*, there is a need of banana plant. A boat is made with the trunk of banana and small house also made over it with the bark of banana plant. The idol of evil god & goddess (*Baherani Mudai*) made with the bark of banana plant is placed Inside the house and letting them float away in the river or a stream. It is supposed that, by doing this practice the diseases may vanish from the village and good things will come to the villagers in near future.

The native name of the fruits used by the Bodos are started with the /*t<sup>h</sup>ai*/ bound morpheme. e.g. *t<sup>h</sup>ai-zuu* (*mango*), *t<sup>h</sup>ai-gir* (*elephant apple*), *t<sup>h</sup>ai-k<sup>h</sup>a* (*garcinia cowa*), *t<sup>h</sup>ai-bej* (*cucumber*), *t<sup>h</sup>ai-suri* (*hog plum*) etc. The same thing is applied for the word /*t<sup>h</sup>alir*/. It is combined with two bound

morphemes i.e. *t'ai* + *lir* = *t'ailir* > *t'alir*. The word */lir/* is considered as a free morpheme but in terms of the word */t'alir/*, it is occurred as a bound morpheme.

**(g) Gəj-p<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ui (areca catechu and piper betle):**

**betel nut and betel leaf(Eng)**

There is a significant role of *gəj-p<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ui* (betel nut and betel leaf) in Boro society. These have been used in social and rituals practices of the Bodos since the remote past. In the practice of *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* religion a pair of *gəj p<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ui* is offered to *Burai Bat<sup>h</sup>uo*. Moreover, it is offered in the name of eighteen deities by cutting it in a small piece.

The word *gəj-p<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ui* is the basic noun associated with the culture of the Bodos.

**(h) T<sup>h</sup>aigir (Dellenia indica)**

**Elephant Apple (Eng)**

The rinds of *t<sup>h</sup>aigir* (elephant apple) is basically used in *Kati Gasa* to lit the lamp. In the last day of Assamese Asin month, the Goddess of wealth, Laxmi is worshipped for the betterment of the paddy field. On this day, in the very evening, earthen lamps are lit at the paddy field to get rid from the insects as well as the earthen lamps are lit at the *Bat<sup>h</sup>uosali*, the granary, the shed, and the backyard of the house(*bari*).

It is worth mentioning that, in explaining the five philosophy of *Bat<sup>h</sup>uo* the five rinds of *t<sup>h</sup>aigir* is mentioned in the *Munt<sup>h</sup>ur* (Mantra). The following is given billow-

*T<sup>h</sup>aigirni K<sup>h</sup>əŋga K<sup>h</sup>əŋba*

*Sizuuuni sirija siriba*

*Sip<sup>h</sup>uŋni guduŋa guduŋba*

*Bathuuni bandwa banduuba*

*Borə buraini raoabu p<sup>h</sup>oŋba.*

*(Thaigir has five rinds*

*The sizuu has five ribs*

*Siphuŋ has five holes*

*The bathou has five knots*

*The old Boro man has also five holy words.)*

The word */thaigir/* is combined with two bound morpheme i.e. */thai/* and */gir/*. E.g-*/thai/+/gir/=/thaigir/*. It also considered one of the native fruit names of the Bodos.

**(i) Mai(Oryza sativa):**

**Rice/Paddy (Eng)**

*Mai* (Rice/Paddy) is considered as a *Mainao*, a Goddess of wealth in Bodo community. *Mainao* is kept in a pot, called *Maihendw* and it is placed in the north east corner of the kitchen. The place where *Mainao* is placed and worshiped is called *Mainao Bindw* in Bodo community. Moreover, a granary of paddy (*Maibakhri*) also worshipped as a place of *Mainao Burwi*. As a symbol of steadiness a piece of stone is kept in *Maihendw* and *Maibakhri* so that *Mainao Burwi*, a Goddess of wealth stays forever in the family.

The word /Mai/ is a basic noun and native word to the Bodo speakers.

### 3.0 Conclusion:

The present study reveals that ethno-plants are closely associated with the language and the religious culture of the Bodo society. In India it is observed that a number of plants are considered as a sacred plant and utilized in many religious purposes. In terms of *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion also, the ethno-plants play a vital role. It has been used and given importance since the remote past. There is a value, beliefs, in every used of ethno-plants. The authenticity of the ethnic *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion of the Bodo will not be remained without those ethno-plants.

In addition, in this present study it is observed that, the linguistic terminology for ethno-plants used in the *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion are mostly native to the Bodo speakers. These are treasure to the language as well as it helps in validating the religious culture of the Bodo community. Moreover, in this study the attempt has been made to analyze the structure of the Ethnobotanical terms in a morphological and phonological point of view. It is seen that in terms of Bodo native fruits name /thai/ bound morpheme is occurred at the starting of the word. e.g. *t<sup>h</sup>ai-zuu* (mango), *t<sup>h</sup>ai-bej* (cucumber), *t<sup>h</sup>ai-kha*(*garcinia cowa*) etc. The same thing is applied to the fruits name associated to the *Bat<sup>h</sup>wo* religion. These terms are combined with two bound morphemes. With regards to the *sizuu* plant, it is composed with two free morphemes. Ethno-plants such as *uuu*, *gɔj*, *p<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ui*, *k<sup>h</sup>aŋk<sup>h</sup>la*, *mai* are considered as a basic noun. It is worth mentioning here that, there is an adapted words too which are changed phonologically in Bodo language.

### Abbreviations:

Eng- English

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Bandana Basumatary

Email ID: bandana.basumatary79@gmail.com