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Documentation And Analysis Of Wild Edible Plants Consumed As Herbal Food By The Bodos

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Abstract
This paper explores the wild edible plants (WEPs) consumed by the Bodo community of Assam from a folkloristic perspective. The Bodos, one of the major indigenous communities of Assam, Northeast India, possess a rich tradition of utilizing wild edible plants as a vital component of their herbal food culture. This research article aims to document and analyze the variety of wild plants consumed by the Bodo community, focusing on their nutritional, medicinal, and cultural significance. Field surveys, interviews with elderly informants, and participatory observations were conducted in selected Bodo-dominated villages of Baksa district to collect data. The findings reveal that a wide range of leaves, shoots, roots, fruits, and tubers are not only used as supplementary food but are also valued for their therapeutic properties, particularly in treating common ailments such as fever, digestive disorders, and skin diseases. The study highlights the dual role of these plants as sources of nutrition and as elements of indigenous healthcare practices, reflecting the Bodos' close relationship with nature. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that modernization and changing food habits have led to a decline in the traditional use of many such plants, raising concerns over the preservation of this intangible cultural heritage. The research underscores the need for documentation, conservation, and further scientific validation of these plants to ensure their sustainable use for future generations.
Keywords: *Bodo, wild edible plants, herbal food, ethnobotany, traditional knowledge*

INTRODUCTION

Wild edible plants (WEPs) are crucial components of many traditional food systems worldwide. Across the world, indigenous communities have relied on WEPs not only as a source of nutrition but also as a foundation of their traditional healthcare systems. The Bodos, one of the largest ethnolinguistic groups of Northeast India, particularly inhabiting Assam, have developed a rich knowledge system concerning the use of wild plants as food and medicine. This ethnobotanical wisdom, transmitted orally across generations, reflects the community's deep ecological awareness and cultural identity. For generations, they have used wild plants not just for food, but also for health and healing. These plants are found in forests, fields, and near water bodies, and are often eaten as part of their daily meals. Many of them are believed to help with common illnesses and improve overall well-being. This traditional knowledge is passed down through families, but much of it has not been written down or studied properly. Traditionally, they have relied heavily on the surrounding environment for their livelihood and sustenance (Endle, 1990; Brahma, 2011). A significant component of their food culture is the use of wild edible plants, which are collected seasonally from forests, riverbanks, wetlands, and fallow lands. These plants are not only incorporated into daily meals but also valued for their medicinal properties.

Wild edible plants consumed as herbal food by the Bodos include a wide range of species green leafy vegetables, tubers, fruits, seeds, and shoots. These plants are consumed in diverse ways: boiled, stir-fried, fermented, or preserved. Some plants are eaten specifically for their taste and nutritional value, while others are consumed with the belief that they prevent or cure ailments such as stomach disorders, colds, fevers, or skin diseases.

However, modernization, urbanization, and changing lifestyles have led to the gradual erosion of this traditional knowledge. Younger generations are often less aware of the importance of wild edibles, and ecological degradation threatens the availability of these resources. In this context, systematic documentation and analysis of wild edible plants consumed as herbal food by the Bodos become vital.

The present study is an attempt to document and analyze the wild edible plants consumed as herbal food by the Bodo community. By doing this, the study hopes to protect traditional knowledge and show how it can be useful for healthy living.

OBJECTIVES

i. To document the diversity of wild edible plants consumed by the Bodo community, including their local names, parts used, and seasonal availability.

ii. To identify challenges and threats to the use and conservation of wild edible plants.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Boroni Jolonga (2001) Kalicharan Brahma, the author of this book analyse about the traditional way of procuring medicines from the natural ingredients available in the natural environment. Ingredients collected from the tress and plants (stems, roots, leaves, seeds, etc) and the uses of these herbs in different types of health problems and issues as cure is mentioned in this book. However, the author does not portray or discuss about the traditional views and beliefs of the Bodo folk about herbal vegetables.

Boroni Muli Bifang Laifang (2002) by Birendra Kumar Brahma, Brahmananda Patere, Hati Basumatary, the authors of this book analyse about the needs of lost and rare herbal plants in the knowledge of the people and the ways of curing illness or health problems by collecting it themselves. The plants name, its identification, its uses and the diseases to be treated and how to be treated is mentioned in this book. In this book, plants are grouped into two categories and been discussed, these are- i) leaves & roots type of plants and ii) tree type of plants.

Muli Jolonga, (2007) (Bag of Medicine), by Renu Boro is a book which depicts measures and cure of certain ailments by consumption of various plants and herbs. The book comprises of 7 (seven) chapters. Introduction of Medicinal Plants Preparation of Medicine from Plants and fruits and its usages.

METHODOLOGY

The data are gathered from primary and secondary sources. Fieldwork has been carried out in selected villages of the Baksa district of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam, primarily in areas rich in forest cover, wetlands, and agricultural landscapes that provide diverse wild edible resources. Villages were chosen based on their accessibility, representation of traditional practices, and willingness of community members to participate. Descriptive method is preferred for the study.

DISCUSSION

The study of wild edible plants (WEPs) consumed by the Bodos highlights their importance as a source of food, nutrition, medicine, and cultural identity. These plants contribute significantly to dietary diversity, particularly in rural areas. Seasonal greens, tubers, fruits, and mushrooms provide essential nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, fiber, and bioactive compounds, supporting both health and well-being. Some species are also used for medicinal purposes, indicating the dual role of WEPs as food and herbal remedies.

Beyond nutrition, the use of WEPs is closely connected to traditional knowledge and local practices. The collection, preparation, and consumption of wild plants are guided by practical experience passed down through generations. Women often play a central role in this process, maintaining knowledge of edible species, recipes, and seasonal availability. Ritual specialists and elders also provide guidance on medicinal or special uses, such as detoxification of certain herbs or inclusion in ceremonial meals. Such practices demonstrate the integration of WEPs into both everyday life and socio-cultural systems.

WEPs among the Bodos shows that these plants are much more than sources of food. They are deeply connected to culture, traditions, and community life. From a folkloristic point of view, WEPs are part of the Bodo "foodways," which include not only what people eat but also how they gather, prepare, and use plants in rituals and everyday life. Many plants are mentioned in folk stories, songs, and proverbs, which pass knowledge from one generation to the next. These narratives teach practical lessons, like which plants are safe to eat, when to collect them, and how to use them for healing.

Women, especially mothers and grandmothers, are the main holders of knowledge about edible plants and recipes, while ritual specialists (*Ojhas*) know about medicinal and spiritual uses. Children learn by watching, helping, and listening to stories, making plant knowledge both practical and cultural. Gathering wild plants is not only a task but also a form of cultural performance, as people sing, tell stories, and explain traditions while foraging.

Modern challenges, such as migration, education, and the preference for cultivated foods, are reducing interest in wild plants among younger generations. Documenting these plants along with their cultural meanings helps protect both biodiversity and intangible heritage. WEPs, therefore, are not only a source of health and nutrition but also a way to understand and celebrate Bodo cultural identity.

The study also highlights the role of WEPs in local livelihoods and economy. Some plants are sold in village markets, providing supplemental income for households, particularly women. This commercialization, though limited, reflects the economic value of wild plants and their contribution to community resilience. At the same time, the sustainable use of WEPs is influenced by ecological factors, such as habitat availability, seasonal abundance, and environmental pressures. Forest clearing, agricultural expansion, and urbanization pose threats to the availability of these resources, emphasizing the need for conservation measures.

The study demonstrates that WEPs play multiple roles in Bodo communities. They are essential for nutrition, health, and income, while also sustaining traditional knowledge and local food practices. Understanding these plants requires a holistic approach that considers their ecological, cultural, and nutritional dimensions. Protecting WEPs is therefore not only about conserving plant species but also about supporting local livelihoods, knowledge systems, and community resilience in the face of environmental and social change.

The present study conducted in Baksa district documented a total of 30 wild plant species, that are primarily used for human consumption. Most of these plants are consumed as cooked vegetables, while some are eaten fried, raw, or in the form of chutney by the Bodos. The edible parts identified include leaves or young shoots, tubers, petioles, stems, flowers, fruits, rhizomes, and roots, with leaves and young shoots being the most commonly utilized. The WEPs used by the Bodos in the study area have been listed along with their scientific names, Bodo names, seasons of availability, edible parts, as presented in Table 1.

Table:1 List of wild edible plants

Sl. No.	Bodo Name	Scientific Name	Edible Part	Time of Availability
1	Zari	*Spilanthes paniculata Wall. ex D.C.*	leaves, stems	Throughout year
2	Mani muni phisa	*Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides* Lamk.	stems and leaves	November-March
3	Manimuni gidir	*Centella asiatica* (L.) Urban	stems and leaves	November-March
4	Sona phuli	*Hypericum japonicum* Thunb. ex Murr.	leaves, flowers and stems	February-March
5	Rupha phuli	*Mazus rugosus* lour.	leaves, flowers and stems	February-March
6	Maisundri	*Houttuynia cordata* T hunb.	Leaves and root	
7	Buthua	*Chenopodium album* L.	Stem and top leaves	November-March
8	Helangsi	*Enhydra fluctuans* Lour.	Stem and top leaves	
9	Kheradaphini (Mathigaldab)	*Premna herbacea* Roxb.	Leaves and young shoots	March-June
10	Sibru	*Lasia spinosa* (L.) Thaw.	tender stems	April-August
11	Zwglaori	*Plectranthus ternifolius* D. Don	leaves	June-November
12	Jolonga Banthu	Carthamus tinctroius Linn	leaves, stem, and flower	February-March
13	Khiphi Bendwng	*Paederia foetida* L.	leaves and tender twigs	May-October
14	Khansinsa	*Leucas aspera*	leaves	November-March
15	Singri	*Oxalis corniculata* L.	leaves and stems	October-February
16	Khuduna (su gwnang)	*Amaranthus spinosus* L.	young shoot and leaves	September-January
17	Mwiphrai	*Basella alba* L. *var. rubra* (L.) Stewart.	young shoot and leaves	May-July
18	Dausrem	*Vitis rependa* W & A	leaves	March-June
19	Dingkia	*Pteris ensiformis* Burm.f.		April-September
20	Nwrsing	*Murraya koenigii* (L.) Spreng.	leaves	Throughout year
21	Olodor	*Amorphophallus sylvaticus*	Young shoot	March-June
22	Laphasaikho	*Antidesma acidum* Retz.	leaves	March-October
23	Tharai	*Alpinia nigra* (Gaertn) Burt.	Young shoot	March-September
24	Daopenda	*Casearia glomerata* Roxb ex DC.	Young shoot and leaves	April-October
25	Mande	*Ipomoea aquatica* Forsk.	Young shoot	March-October
26	Onthaibazab	*Lippia geminate* H. B. & K.	leaves	April-October
27	Azinai	*Monochoria hastata* L.	flower bud	April-July
28	Kharokhandai	*Oroxylum indicum* (L.) Vent.	flower	March-July
29	Thunthini	*Oldenlandia corymbosa* Roxb.	whole plant	November-March
30	Khunthainara	*Solanum indicum* L.	fruit	May-November

CONCLUSION

The present study has highlighted the richness and significance of wild edible plants (WEPs) in the food culture, healthcare practices, and cultural traditions of the Bodo community in Baksa district, Assam. A total of 30 species belonging to diverse families were documented, most of which are eaten as vegetables, either cooked, fried, or raw. Leaves and young shoots emerged as the most commonly consumed parts, though tubers, stems, flowers, fruits, and roots also formed an important part of the dietary repertoire. These plants are not merely food resources but are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the community, reflected in their use in folk traditions, oral narratives, rituals, and everyday life.

The study emphasizes that WEPs contribute significantly to dietary diversity, provide essential nutrients, and serve as herbal remedies for common ailments. Moreover, they play a role in strengthening household economies, with some species being sold in local markets. Women and elders continue to be the primary custodians of this traditional knowledge, ensuring its transmission through practice and storytelling. However, modern pressures such as urbanization, ecological degradation, and the declining interest of younger generations threaten both the biodiversity of these plants and the intangible cultural heritage associated with them.

Documenting and analyzing these species are therefore a crucial step toward safeguarding not only the plants themselves but also the knowledge systems and cultural identities they represent. Conservation strategies that combine ecological protection with the preservation of traditional wisdom are essential for sustaining these resources in the future. Promoting their use can help ensure healthy food, stronger livelihoods, and the continuation of Bodo traditions for the future.

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