



## **Socio-cultural and Religious plants used by Bodo tribes of Dhemaji District Assam**

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### **Abstract**

The present study aims to document the plant species used in socio-culture and religious activities by the bodo of the Dhemaji district. In this present study the authors recorded a total of 49 plant taxa under 36 families. For easy identification photographs of plant species is comprised in this manuscript.

**Keywords:** *Bodo tribes, Cultural diversity, Dhemaji district*

### **Introduction**

The Bodos are the earliest settlers of Assam. It is believed that during the pre-historic era, the Bodos migrated to India from their original homeland of Tibet and China (Sarma, 2024; Saikia & Gogoi, 2020; Endle, 1911). E. Gait called them the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. The Bodos in the course of time have synthesized a vast knowledge in respect of acquiring and gathering knowledge of herbal Medicines out of wild plants for healing and curing of ailments and they are culturally and socially intertwined with forest around them. They worship their god near 'Bathou Gudi' ie the usual sacred place. This type of sacred place is found in the usual sacred place (Saikia & Gogoi, 2020). This type of sacred place is found in every countryard in the north-east side of its followers. When this place is taken for social gathering in a field it is called 'Bathou shale' the supreme god of the Bathouists is 'Anan Gosai' or 'Bathoubari' or 'sibrai' 'sibra' is called by more names also 'sibrai' is his Hindu counterpart. The socio-cultural and religious activity of Bodos has served the purpose of Bodos has served

the purpose of conserving their traditional heritage with plant since the time immemorial

(Brahma, 1992). Though Bodos have their own traditional religions the modern Bodos follows different religious like Bathou-kherai'Brahma, Hinduism, and Christianity.

## Materials and Method

The present study was carried out among the Bodo Tribe inhabiting in districts Dhemaji January to May. The information regarding the utility of different plants in different religious and socio- cultural activities was collected from elderly person and religious headman. The survey was carried out among local population and the community people was met in their residential areas. The visit was repeated for several times as requisite information for proposed work until was completed. Data was collected by questionnaire, interviews and discussion among local headman in their local language. The knowledgeable person was engaged with us to the location site where they have seen the plants. The collected plant specimens were identified by consulting relevant literature (Boro, 2020, Baro et al., 2015; Jain & Borthakur, 1980 etc.,). The collected specimens were deposited in the lab, Herbarium unit of the Dept of Botany, Silapathar science college, Assam.

## Result and Discussion

The present study documented a total of 49 plant species under 39 families which are associated with the socio- culture and religious beliefs among the bodo tribe. These plant species are used regularly by them in various socio-culture and religious activities. Among the different plants' parts, 28 % of leaves, 20 % of whole plants and 14 % Flowers are found dominant used in socio- culture and religious aspects by the bodo tribes in Dhemaji district. The plant species of the present study are arranged in alphabetically with their Botanical name family, Bodo name and uses as shown in **Table 1**.

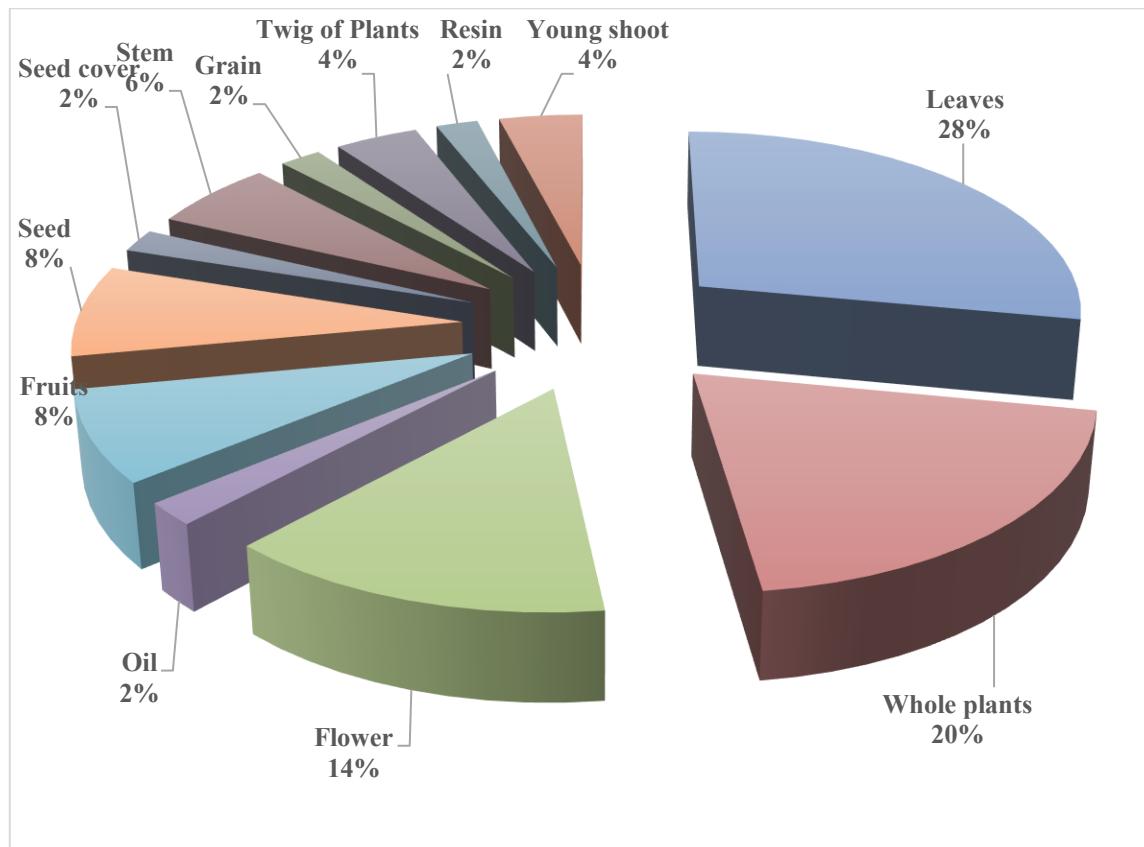
**Table 1.** List of plant species used by Bodo tribe in socio-Culture and religious activities.

Sl. No.	Scientific name & Family	Bodo name	Part uses	Uses
1.	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L) Corr. Serr. (Rutaceae)	Bel	Leaves	Leaves are used in offering to please Lord Shiva. This plant is considered as plant of 'Bwrai Bathou' (Lord Shiva).
2.	<i>Allium sativum</i> L. (Amaryllidaceae)	Sambram gufur	Whole plants	Plant is used to drive away the evil spirits
3.	<i>Alpina allughas</i> Rose. (Zingiberaceae)	Tarai	Leaves	Used in 'Gwka-gwkwi' a kind of social curry prepared during 'Bwisagu' the Assam new year.
4.	<i>Ananas comosus</i> (L.) Merr. (Bromeliaceae)	Anaros	Leaves	Young leaves are used in the preparation of 'Amao' the starter cake for 'Jwo' a kind of country made rice beer which is cultural and social drinks of Bodos.
5.	<i>Anthocephalus cadamba</i> (Roxb.) Miq (Rubiaceae)	Kwdwm	Whole plants	The plant is believed as a plant of Lord Krishna.

6.	<i>Antidesma diandrum</i> (Roxb.) (Phyllanthaceae)	Lapasaiko	Leaves	Used in Gwka-gwkwi a kind of social curry prepared during 'Bwisagu' the Assam new year.
7.	<i>Aquilaria agallocha</i> Roxb. (Thymelaeaceae)	Agru	Extract oil	Agru aroma is used as fragrance during worship. This aroma is believed as fragrance of heaven.
8.	<i>Areca catechu</i> L. (Arecaceae)	Goi	Fruits	It considered as holy fruits and used in offering to God and Goddess.
9.	<i>Bambusa tulda</i> Roxb. (Poaceae)	Owa	Whole plants	Bamboo plant has relation from birth to death of Bodo people. Sharp bamboo stick is used to cut the nari (cord) of new born baby. They also use bamboo shang (carriage) which is prepared by tying with rope of cane (raidwng) strictly to carry the death soul.
10.	<i>Benincasa hispida</i> Thunb. (Cucurbitaceae)	Kumbra	Fruits	Mature enough fruits called 'kunbra bwrai' are used in preparation of 'Napam' a fermented fish. 'Napam' is a traditional heritage and social dish of Bodos
11.	<i>Bixa orellana</i> Linn (Bixaceae)	Sindur-bifang	Seed cover	The red dyes over the seed coat are used during worship.
12.	<i>Brassica campestris</i> L (Brassicaceae)	Besor	Seed	Seeds are used to drive away the evil spirits. Seed oil is used to lighten the lamp during worship.
13.	<i>Clerodendrum infortunatum</i> Gaertn (Verbenaceae)	Lwkwna	flowers	Twig of flowers are used in celebration of 'Bwisagu' the Assam new year. Young leaves are used in the preparation of 'Amao' the starter cake for 'Jwo' a kind of country made rice beer which is cultural and social drinks of Bodos
14.	<i>Calamus latifolius</i> Roxb. (Arecaceae)	Raidwng	Stem & tender Shoot	it is used as rope to tie during preparation of many social and cultural. Young tendered shoot-apex is used in 'Gwka-gwkwi' a kind of social curry prepared during Assam new year.
15.	<i>Curcuma amarissima</i> L. Roscoe. (Zingiberaceae)	Katri bipang	Flower	Twig of flowers are used in celebration of 'Bwisagu' the Assam new year. Leaves are used as traditional packaging materials.
16.	<i>Cannabis sativa</i> L. (Cannabaceae)	Ganja	Leaves	Used during worship of Lord Shiva.
17.	<i>Costus speciosus</i> Koen ex. Retz. (Costaceae)	Buritokon	Young shoots	Young shoots are used in celebration of 'Bwisagu' the Assam new year. Used in Gwka-gwkwi a kind of social curry prepared during 'Bwisagu' the Assam new year
18.	<i>Canna indica</i> L. (Cannaceae)	Pajati	Flower	The flower of this plant is believed as flower of heaven
19.	<i>Canarium bengalensis</i> Roxb. (Burseraceae)	Dhuna	Resin	The brownish clear resin of this plant is use as fragrance during worship.
20.	<i>Catharanthus roseus</i> (L.) G. Don (Apocynaceae)	Parvati pul	Flower	Flower is used to offer Goddess 'Parvati'
21.	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L. (Zingiberaceae)	Haldwi	Rhizome	it is use as holy plant. Bathing with rhizome extract before doing any sacred work is seen among the Bodos.
22.	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L. (Arecaceae)	Narengkhol	Fruits	It is considered as holy fruits and used in offering to God and Goddess.

23.	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> (L.) Schott. (Araceae)	Thaso	Young Shoot	Used in preparation of 'Napam' a fermented fish. 'Napam' is a traditional heritage and social dish of <i>Bodos</i> .
24.	<i>Corchorus capsularis</i> L. (Malvaceae)	Phatw (Narji)	Leaves	Dry leaves are used in preparation of a social curry 'narji wngkri'. Dry leaves are also used in ritual believes of <i>Bodos</i> to cut off relation with departed soul.
25.	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L)Pers. (Poaceae)	Dubri hagra	Twig of plant	The twigs of leaves are used in holy water (Dwi Santi) during worship
26.	<i>Datura stramonium</i> L. (Solanaceae)	Datura	Fower	Used during worship of Lord Shiva.
27.	<i>Dillenia indica</i> L. (Dilleniaceae)	Thaigir	Calyx	The persistent calyx is used in lightning during Kartik gasa i.e. lamp of 'Kartik' the Assam month. The five persistent calyxes of this plant are significantly mentioned in 'Bathou' prayer.
28.	<i>Elaeocarpus sphaericus</i> (Gaertn.) Heer (Elaeocarpaceae)	Undurmala	Seed	The beaded chain prepared from the seeds of this plant is used during the worship of „Bwrai Bathou“ (Lord Shiva).
29.	<i>Erianthus arundinaceus</i> (Reitz.) Jeswiet (Poaceae)	Engkwr	Whole plants	Whole plant is also use in construction of traditional kutcha house of <i>Bodos</i> .
30.	<i>Euphorbia neriifolia</i> Linn. (Euphorbiaceae)	Sijou	Whole plants	The <i>Bodos</i> tribe worship this plant 'Bwrai Bathou' (Lord Shiva).
31.	<i>Entada gigas</i> (L)Fawc&Rendle (Fabaceae)	Gila	Seed	Seeds are used in indigenous sports 'Gila gelenai'.
32.	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> Linn. (Moraceae)	Pakhri	Whole plants	<i>Bodos</i> worship their God under this tree. It is believed as a plant of Lord Krishna. They have ritual of offering drinking water to death soul with leaves of this plant.
33.	<i>Ficus bengalensis</i> L. (Moraceae)	Dhob	Whole plants	This plant is considered as devils plant
34.	<i>Hibiscus rosa sinensis</i> L. (Malvaceae)	Joba-bibar	Flower	This flower is used for offering to God and Goddess
35.	<i>Imperata cylindrica</i> (L)P. Beauv. (Poaceae)	Thuri	Whole pants	The plant is used as thatch for roping for a kutcha house. <i>Bodos</i> have their own traditionally design kutcha house
36.	<i>Justicia gendarussa</i> Burm.f. (Acanthaceae)	Jaathrasi	twig of plants	The twig of leaves is used in holy water (Dwi Santi) during worship.
37.	<i>Leucas aspera</i> (Willd.) Linn. (Lamiaceae)	Kansingsa	flower	The flower of this plant is specially used in offering to please the Lord Shiva
38.	<i>Laportea crenulata</i> (Sw.) Wight. (Urticaceae)	Koma	Leaves	The leaves with stinging hairs of this plant are used for irritating the guilty person as a social punishment
39.	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> L (Musaceae)	Thalir-athiya	Whole plants	Whole parts of the plant are used in social and religious activities. Fruits are used for offering. Portion of leave apex called 'laijwo' and portion of leaves apex called 'laikong' are used as article for offering. Rhizome and fruit peels used to prepare Traditional alkali
40.	<i>Maranta arundinacea</i> L. (Marantaceae)	Laihulai	Leaves	Used in making of 'Kopri' a traditional and cultural umbrella use in rainy season cultivation
41.	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L. (Anacardiaceae)	Thaijou	Leaves & Fruits	Leaves are used in offering. Fruits eaten as edible fruits

42.	<i>Nephrodium cucullatum</i> (Blume) Baker (Dryopteridaceae)	Saldaokumwi	Whole plants	This plant is used to keep away of evil spirit from ill soul of humans.
43.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> Linn. (Lamiaceae)	Thulungshi	Twig of leaves	The twig of leaves is used in holy water (Dwi Santi) during worship.
44.	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L. (Poaceae)	Mai	Grains	Grains are used in many religious occasions of Bodos
45.	<i>Piper betle</i> L. (Piperaceae)	Fathai	Leaves	Leaves are used in offering. Bodos have rituals of 'Patwi lai bisinai' i.e. teasing of betel leaves during divorce
46.	<i>Ricinus communis</i> Linn. (Euphorbiaceae)	Indi-bipang	Leaves	Leaves are used as food plant for eri-silk. The rearing of eri-silk worm is traditional heritage of Bodo women
47.	<i>Scoparia dulcis</i> L. (Plantaginaceae)	Bongpang rakeb	Leaves	Young leaves are used in the preparation of 'Amao' the starter cake of Traditional rice wine.
48.	<i>Sesamum indicum</i> L. (Pedaliaceae)	Sebing	Seed	Seeds are used in preparation of rice cake (pitha) a social cake during festival "Domasi".
49.	<i>Tabernaemontana divaricata</i> R.Br. ex Roem & Schult (Apocynaceae)	Pul Daodwi	flower	This flower is used in offering God & Goddess.



**Fig. 1-** Pie diagram of different plants uses in Socio-cultural and Religious aspects



**fig. 2:** Bodo tribes performing their socio-cultural and religious practices.

## Conclusion

The preservation indigenous knowledge with plant and forest diversity plays important tools for conservation of plant taxa. The Bodos tribes in Assam form the immemorial periods they involved in conservation of biodiversity in diverse Traditional method through religious purposes as scared plants.

They have their own religion and language and have unique traditional believes and knowledge in plants and forest. Perhaps the availability and richness of forest and plants of the areas where they inhabit may be the important reasons how they get influence with plants and forests in their socio-culture and religious life.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

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