

Components of Bodo Folk Ritual Music in Biodiversity Conservation

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Abstract

Bodo folk ritual is an integral part of the culture and spiritual life of the Bodo people living in Assam, India. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and oral traditions, these ritual songs reflect a deep relationship between humans and nature. Performed during religious ceremonies, agricultural festivals, and seasonal rituals, they communicate ecological values, promote sustainable use of natural resources, and encourage respect for biodiversity. Banana plant (*Musa* sp.), betel nut (*Areca catechu*), betel leaf (*Piper betle*), Sal tree (*Sorea robusta*), Fig tree (*Ficus* sp.), pigeon (*Columba livia*), elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*), Rice plant species (*Oryza sativa*), ox (*Bos taurus*), etc. are the biodiversity components of Bodo ritual music. Through references to forests, rivers, wildlife, plants, and agricultural landscapes, Bodo ritual music serves as a traditional system of environmental education, contributing to the conservation of biodiversity.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Bodo, Bwisagu, Conservation, Folk

1. Introduction

The Bodos are one of the largest Indigenous communities in Northeast India and a few population in Nepal (Brahma, 1992). Their folk ritual music is inseparable from religious belief, agricultural practices, and seasonal cycles. Ritual songs performed during Kherai Puja, Garja Puja, and Bwisagu preserve traditional ecological knowledge and reinforce cultural values that support biodiversity conservation (Boro, 2024; Mochahary, 2025).

UNESCO promotes the knowledge, skills, and traditional practices of indigenous peoples and local communities to ensure their active participation in environmental governance, particularly in biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation (UNESCO, 2003). Through its Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) Programme, UNESCO encourages collaboration among indigenous knowledge holders, scientists, resource managers and policy makers.

Biodiversity loss refers to the decline and extinction of species, the erosion of genetic diversity, and the deterioration of ecosystems. Biodiversity degradation may pose risk to global peace, sustainable development, and increase social and economic inequalities.

2. Objectives

This study was done to analyze the role of Bodo folk ritual music in biodiversity conservation.

3. Methodology

Field observation of ritual performances during Kherai Puja, Garja Puja, Bwisagu and other ceremonies. Observations from documentations and listening to the song recordings. The information were analyzed using thematic analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

From the study it has been found that Bodo people has different types of ritual music (Brahma, 1960; Narzi, 2003, Brahma, 2017; Boro, 2024) with biodiversity components which play a significant role in biodiversity conservation (Table 1). Folk songs of Bodo music has rich description of agricultural life and related biodiversity components. Such song as example given in the following,

“*Sal sirini gaihenjwng dumbrukaosani uwaljwng*
Bihari sanwijwng dumdam dam dam swolaibai honwi alongmwnha
Ha ladwngmwn adwini khona
Mwswo baidwngmwn gong mena
Maikou gaidwngmwn rumbang-rumbang
Dao jalangbai parou jalangbai pari pari
Oma jalangbai mwswo jalangbai pari pari
Mwider jalangbai rumbang rumbang’’

(Bodo folk song: Singer- Ganakhanta Basumatary).

Since times memorial Bodos use large mortar made of fig tree (mentioned in song as dumbru kaosani uwal) and pestle made sal tree trunk (mentioned as sal sirini gaihen) for making hand-pounded rice traditionally, removing the outer husk. It also has biotic elements like ox, rice, birds, pigeon, and elephants (Table 1). In ballad song ‘Goraia dabraidw Basiram jwhwlao’; Basiram jwhwlao was a hero encouraged to ride fast the horse (Folk literature of Bodos- Dr. Anil Boro).

Table 1. List of Bodo folk ritual music in biodiversity conservation

Sl. No.	Type of ritual music	Biodiversity component	Role in conservation
1	Marriage song (Haba methai)	Banana plant (<i>Musa</i> sp., betel nut (<i>Areca catechu</i>), betel leaf (<i>Piper betle</i>)	Emphasizing the significance of plants
2	Traditional work song (Maonai-dangnai methai)	Forest and plant species Sal tree (<i>Sorea robusta</i>), Fig tree (<i>Ficus</i> sp.), pigeon (<i>Columba livia</i>), elephant (<i>Elephas maximus indicus</i>), Rice plant species (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), ox (<i>Bos taurus</i>)	Significance of forest ecosystem and products, thus promoting the conservation of trees
3	Cultivation song (Gainai punai methai)	Rice plant species (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), sticky rice plant (<i>Oryza sativa</i> var. <i>glutinosa</i>)	Emphasizing the conservation of varieties of rice
4	Ballad song (Jwhwlao methai)	Horse (<i>Equus</i> sp.)	Significance of horse thus promoting the conservation

5	Worship song (Kherai methai)	River, dove (<i>Columba</i> sp.), pigeon (<i>Columba livia</i>), buffalo (<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>), dragonfly (<i>Pantala</i> sp.), bear (<i>Ursus</i> sp.), tiger (<i>Panthera tigris</i>), lion (<i>Panthera leo</i>), horse (<i>Equus</i> sp.), crows (<i>Corvus</i> sp.), cranes (<i>Grus</i> sp.), betel nut (<i>Areca catechu</i>), betel leaf (<i>Piper betle</i>), sijou (<i>Euphorbia splendens</i>)	Emphasizing the conservation of different animal species, plants
6	Spring festival song (Bwisagu methai)	Butterflies (Order-Lepidoptera), daosen (<i>Leucas</i> sp.), snails (<i>Brotia</i> sp.), birds, streams, turi bari (<i>Imparta cylindrica</i>), rivers, lakes, creepers, brinjal (<i>Solanum melongena</i>), water gourd (<i>Lagenaria</i>)	Significance of biodiversity and structural forms
7	Lullaby folk song (Goto burkhainai methai)	Banana (<i>Musa</i>) and crow species (<i>Corvus</i> sp.), jackel (<i>Lupulella</i> sp.)	Significance of animal and plant species

Goto putunai methai the Lullaby folk song includes,

“Sial pwidwng honwi

Mwsa pwidwng honwi”

The most celebrated folk music of Bodo is ‘Bagurumba song’ and ‘Bwisagu methai’. Bagurumba song has a fixed lyrics, on the otherhand Bwisagu methai has various forms. Some lines of Bagurumba are:

“Bagrumba hai bagurumba...

Jat nongabwla kul nongabwla

Tambwrwm homnanwi bamnanwi

Lagwomwnka hai lagwomwnka...”

Bodo folk ritual music has particular nature which celebrates the biodiversity and different ecosystems. Nature occupies a central place in Bodo ritual songs. The lyrics celebrate: forests as sacred spaces; rivers as life giving resources; mountains and hills as place of spiritual significance. Birds and animals as companions and symbol of ecological balance. Trees, bamboo, and medicinal plants and traditional healing. The songs preserve information about seasonal changes, rainfall patterns, agricultural calendars, Such representations cultivate respect for the environment and discourage its destruction. Bodo ritual music transmits ecological knowledge from one generation to another. As an oral tradition, this music functions as an effective means of environmental education. Teronpi (2017) mentioned that rituals observed among the tribes of Assam shows environmental awareness. The respect for wildlife associated with religious beliefs promote harmony between humans and nature. These folk rituals help maintain ecological balance while strengthening community identity (Deka, 2019; Narzary, 2004). Bodo ritual music employs instruments made from renewable natural materials, including: Siphung (bamboo), Kham (wood and animal hide), Serja (wood and natural fiber), and Jotha (metal) (Baro, 2019). Traditional knowledge emphasizes careful harvesting and sustainable use of these natural resources. In Lingnan agricultural songs, egrets are frequently mentioned as a symbol of coexistence of human and birds in rice paddy fields (Liu and Song, 2025).

During the study it has been found that certain factors threaten the continuation of Bodo folk ritual music and its ecological knowledge in the new generation. The reason may be due to incorporation of urbanization and increased changes in lifestyles, moving towards modernization. Assimilation of language of other language in the conversations, songs, deforestation and habitat degradation, blending and commercialization of traditional performances may also cause decrease in folk rituals music among the new generation (Baro, 2019).

5. Conclusion

Bodo folk ritual music is much more than a cultural expression; it is a repository of Indigenous ecological knowledge and environmental ethics. By promoting reverence for forests, rivers, plants, animals, and agricultural landscapes, these traditions contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation. Preserving Bodo ritual music therefore supports both cultural continuity and sustainable environmental management. Integrating this Indigenous heritage into conservation policies can strengthen community-based biodiversity conservation efforts in Northeast India. Bodo folk ritual music represents a valuable component of indigenous cultural heritage that embodies traditional ecological knowledge and deep respect for the natural environment. The rituals and songs associated with forests, rivers, wildlife, plants, and agricultural practices poster environmental awareness and encourage the sustainable use of natural resources. Consequently, safeguarding these musical traditions contributes not only to the preservation of Bodo cultural identity but also to biodiversity conservation. Recognizing and incorporating indigenous knowledge into environmental planning and conservation strategies can enhance community participation and strengthen biodiversity conservation initiatives across Northeast India.

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