
Rice, Ritual, and Resilience: A Bodo Epistemological Inquiry into Rice Cultivation as a Living Knowledge System

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Abstract

This study is an inquiry *from within* the Bodo worldview into rice cultivation as a living, relational knowledge system: a way of knowing that is held in relationship with *ha* (land), *mai* (rice) (*mai*), water, ancestors, and the divine. Grounded in the Bathou cosmology of the five elements such as air, sun, earth, fire, and sky and in Indigenous methodologies of relational accountability, the study engages 25 elders, farmers, and scholars of the Bodoland Territorial Region as bearers of knowledge whose interpretations frame the analysis. Findings are presented through Bodo conceptual categories rather than imported Western taxonomies: land classification as knowledge of *ha*; sowing, storing, and seed-sprouting as care for *mai*; the *dongo/jamfwi* canal as communal covenants over water; natural-indicator weather reading as conversation with other living world; and the rituals, festivals and observations — *Kherai*, *Mainao lainai*, *Bwisagu*, *Magw/Domasi*, *Wngkam gwrlwi janai*, *Saori/Gatha Janai* — as the pedagogy through which knowledge, ethics, and responsibility are transmitted across generations. The study argues that Bodo sustainability is not a management outcome but the expression of kinship: what the fields yield and what the rituals renew constitute a web of reciprocal obligation that the community understands as the source of resilience.

Keywords: Bodo epistemology; Bathou cosmology; Indigenous knowledge systems; relationality; rice cultivation

1. Introduction

1.1 The problem and the Question

The Bodo people are the largest living indigenous tribal community in Northeast India, living live an agrarian lifestyle in the Brahmaputra valley predominantly. Agricultural activities, especially rice farming are the backbone of their livelihood and economy. Rice is not just a crop, but its presence is felt in the body, ritual and whose flourishing is relative to the flourishing of the community (Boro). Bodo cosmology is relational in nature. In Indigenous Bathou belief, where ‘*Ba*’ means five and ‘*thou*’ means deep philosophical thought, representing five elements such as *Bar* (air), *San* (sun), *Ha* (earth), *Or* (fire), and *Okhrang* (sky) that constitute the universe created by *Bathou Bwrai*, the Indigenous Supreme deity of the Bodo (Barmahalia). The *sijou* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) with five ridges stands at the centre of *Bathou* alter, representing the divine, one being with five elements in this cosmos (Basumatary and Khawzawl). Everything is interconnected and relative; nothing exists in isolation in this cosmos (Debajyoti and John). Farming is participation in the continuous renewal of this association.

This study examines what Indigenous rice farming knowledge means, what it does to Bodo farmers, what responsibilities and relationship it carries rather than asking what Bodo farmers do in rice farming and what tools they use. Rice cultivation is a knowledge system whose ‘facts’ are relationships, methods are responsibilities, and whose institutions are ceremonies (Whyte). It is a living set of relationships that must be sustained, lived and practised to exist rather than a corpus awaiting preservation; Indigenous knowledge is inseparable from the responsibilities and relations they hold (Whyte). Indigenous knowledge systems are understood as a way of living rather than a body of information— existing and establishing relationships beyond ancestors, future generations and non-human world (McGregor). In this context, viewing through relational lens, rice farming is an agronomic practice of accountability.

Scholarship on Indigenous agriculture, including Bodo farming, largely focused on listing farming practices, categorising techniques and tools, and presenting Indigenous knowledge as data awaiting scientific validation (Agrawal). Such an approach treats Indigenous knowledge as a subject of study rather than a living knowledge system that is relational, communal and grounded in responsibility contexts. It separates Indigenous knowledge from the relationship and values that give it meaning and reinforces the very epistemic hierarchy that claims to challenge (Agrawal). Indigenous scientific understanding is positioned in relationships, reciprocity and responsibilities— an independent knowledge with rights to pursue its own terms (Bang et al.).

The finding that surfaced through the study establishes that the Bodo Indigenous rice farming knowledge is inseparable from Bodo ontology, where knowing *ha* (earth) means standing in a moral relationship with it; planting *mai* (rice) becomes participation in a sacred economy of gratitude, reciprocity and community— an economy that renews each season in ritual.

The objectives are framed in community-focused terms: to grasp Bodo rice cultivation from the Bodo worldview of the relationship between *ha* (earth), *mai* (rice), water, community, ancestors and deities; to depict material practices of rice cultivation such as land preparation, sowing, water control, pest control, harvesting, and storing as an expression of the worldview; to perceive the ritual, festivals and practices, such as *Kherai*, *Mainao lainai*, *Bwisagu*, *Magw/Domasi*, *Wngkam gwrlwi janai*, *Saori/Gatha janai* as the pedagogy of the community for the transmission of knowledge and ethics; and to understand potential threats to this living knowledge system, and conditions of renewal from the community's point of view.

This study begins with self-location where the researcher is a member of the Bodo community, positioning this inquiry as conducted *by* the community *for* the community, through the conversation with 25 elders and knowledge-holders. This knowledge belongs to the Bodo community, held in common, transmitted through elders-youth relationships and answerable to all their relations.

1.2 Relationality as the Heart of Indigenous Knowledge

In Indigenous knowledge systems, relationality is the ground where knowledge stands. In Anishinaabe philosophy, knowledge resides in the land, revealed through experience on land and is shared with all creations— connecting cosmos, animals, plants and earth (Goodchild). Reality is presented with the interconnection of humans to other communities to whom we are responsible and connected, conducting ourselves with senses of respect, responsibility, generosity, obligation and reciprocity (Jacob et al.). The relational nature of Indigenous knowledge systems does not merely shape reality, but is reality itself, with accountability as their axiological corollary, projecting a kinship obligation of humans with animals, plants and the very substance of the world (Romm). Tynan represents relationality as living practice connected with responsibilities to kin, identifying how extractivism of research practices occurs without honouring the relationship or responsibilities aspects of Indigenous knowledge (Tynan). Relationality is the core of the Indigenous social research paradigm, where focus is on relationships, cultural embodied knowledge and deep connection to the land (Auger et al.), emphasising relationships among living and non-living, past and future generations and diverse knowledge systems connected to its own culture, language and land (Dimayuga et al.).

The epistemological consequence for this study is direct. Indigenous knowledge is not just information; it represents a way of life— something must be lived as a verb to be understood, known and practised (McGregor). When a Bodo farmer waters and grades the land or keeps a seed, it reflects more than farming techniques; it is a relational enactment.

1.3 The Bathou Cosmos: The Worldview of Bodo Farming

Bathou is the articulation of the Bodo world, which is a relational cosmos. The five elements of the universe, such as *Bar* (air), *San* (sun), *Ha* (earth), *Or* (fire) and *Okhrang* (sky), all of are created by *Bathou Bwrai*, the Supreme god (Barmahalia). *Bathou* is not a religion per se; it is a microcosmic

element of the macrocosmic world. A source of life that controls and connects all the objects of the universe; nature, planets, stars, air, water and space are all connected to a central force, and human relation with this is through the consecrated altar (Debajyoti and John). Nothing exists in isolation with other parts of the universe (Debajyoti and John).

The order is made apprehensible to the senses by the *sijou* plant, (*Euphorbia splendens*), symbol of the supreme deity and is situated in the centre of the *Bathou* altar, its five ridges are the material image of the five constitutive elements (Basumatary and Khawzawl). Moreover, the Bodo religion cannot be dissociated from a body of knowledge about plants: ethno-plants possess values and beliefs in their use in the *Bathou*, and their terminology is a linguistic property of the Bodo community (Basumatary).

This worldview is practised and transmitted, not just inherited. The Bodo traditions and knowledge are practised and passed down through folklore, worship, oral tradition, rituals and revered practices, and associated conservative practices and beliefs also produce the Bodo psychological identity (Barman). Bodo knowledge is thus incorporated in customs, traditions, and practices, transmitted through folklore, art, customary laws and ritual (Mushahary). Ritual cycles renew agricultural knowledge: in the *Kherai* festival, people pray for the welfare and prosperity of the village, and households and agrarian community for a good harvest (Goswami; Hajowary); the *Bwisagu* festival marks the Bodo new year associated with agriculture, harvest and the lunar calendar (Das and Singh). Ritual is not a farming decoration; it is a means of learning and renewing farming knowledge.

1.4 Bodo Agrarian Scholarship and the Gap This Study Addresses

Current scholarship documents Indigenous pest and disease management practices in traditional farming (Chhetry and Belbahri); catalogues Indigenous technical knowledge of Bodo farmers (Borthakur et al.); and records traditional rice farming and knowledge of land classification, irrigation, varieties and cultivation cycles (Brahma; Boro). In Kokrajhar district, 25 Indigenous practices used by farmers were studied (Das), and further syntheses of Bodo agricultural knowledge continue the documentation tradition (Narzary; Mochahary).

The limitation of current lies in treating Indigenous people as a subject of study or a practice to be catalogued, preserved and validated rather than as a living system of knowledge linked to relationships, responsibilities and community contexts (McGregor). Extractivism in research risks the relationality of Indigenous knowledge, and many research practices remain deeply extractive (Tynan). When Indigenous knowledge is treated as mere data that can be removed or transferred from one context to another, understanding of it is narrowed (Agrawal). Indigenous knowledge systems emphasis nurturing, reciprocity, responsibility and relationship among humans and non-humans; grounded in experience, Indigenous governance, cosmology, language, and religion, playing significant roles in local, regional and planetary sustainability.

The gap that this study addresses is that existing Bodo agrarian scholarship dominantly documents what and how tools and techniques are used in farming but does not treat practices as epistemology coming from the community's own terms. The study's analysis treats all elements of Indigenous knowledge as organizing categories rather than reading them as imported ones.

3. Methodology

3.1 Epistemological Stance

This study is not merely about Bodo knowledge but is conducted within it. The analysis applies Bodo categories and the community's validity standard, asking if the interpretation is true to what elders taught and whether it honours the relationship it describes. This is the methodological commitment of the study. Relational accountability demands that methodology must be positioned within a community context to be genuinely relational, demonstrating respect, reciprocity and responsibility, and extending that obligation to land, future generations and beyond human communities (David-Chavez et al.).

3.2 Design, Participants, and Relational Sampling

The study is qualitative and interpretive, supported by semi- structured conversations, oral narratives, and shared visits to fields and ritual sites through which knowledge is held and transferred. It aims to account for the actual ways in which this knowledge is carried without reducing it to mere discrete answers.

It follows the relational sampling approach of Kovach, wherein participants emerged through the community's trust of elders, farmers, academics of the region recognized as keepers of rice farming knowledge, joined by the researcher through kinship, village relationship, and the acceptance of community elders rather than by the researcher's criteria alone (Adyanga and Romm). Relational sampling is not only about choosing participants: it begins with participants' trust and their expectation that the community will benefit from the inquiry (Adyanga and Romm).

In total, 25 people with knowledge of traditional rice farming, related rituals and practices, participated in semi-structured conversations and oral narratives. Conversations were conducted in Bodo, and their interpretation and translation are treated as part of the interpretive analysis. The community knowledge was gathered with reciprocity, requiring customary observances of respect and assurance of community validation, correction and use. Such reciprocity aligns with a community-based participatory framework, where Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies treat communities as partners in the research process.

3.3 Positionality and Ethics

The researcher is a Boro from the community itself, making this study an inside inquiry, entailing responsibilities, accuracy, attribution of knowledge to holders, avoiding romanticism or apology,

and recognizing that the knowledge is held collectively. The interpretive frame is the Bodo worldview itself, following the epistemological transparency of Kovach (Latulippe). The positionality of the researcher facilitates access to kinship and longstanding trust rather than serving as a disclosure appended to the method.

3.4 Interpretation through Bodo Conceptual Categories

The analysis began with the community's own conceptual architecture: *ha* as relative; *mai* as sacred being; water as force of life tied to communal covenant; the cycle of six seasons, such as *dwilaang bwthwr* (monsoon), *gwlwm bwthwr* (summer), *dufang bwthwr* (autumn), *gwjang bwthwr* (winter), *udang bwthwr* (pre-spring), *meseng bwthwr* (spring) as cosmic time; ritual as pedagogy and *Saori janai/Gatha janai* mutual exchange labour as the community's ethics and values. There are not mere academic translation categories but categories in which Bodo practitioners themselves think and teach. Therefore, the analysis becomes internal to the community, examining the meaning of performance and how relationships are sustained through the practice of Indigenous knowledge.

4. Findings: Paddy Cultivation as a Web of Relationships

4.1 Ha as Relative, Not Resource

In the Bathou's philosophy, the land is not just a medium for farming but one of the elements constitutive of existence. Bodo believes that creation depends on these five elements, such as soil, water, fire, air and sky, associating with every other part of the universe; nothing exists in isolation (Debajyoti and John). Reading the Bodo indigenous community in these terms: their land is not just an input to cultivate but a relative element, establishing a relationship of obligation rather than entitlement.

The knowledge-holders and elders of the community describe reading their lands before farming or working on them. Farmers use indigenous techniques and practices to distinguish plots by their water holding capacity, direction and pace of drainage, soil quality and their previous yield. Land is studied using its own local terms rather than agronomic descriptors and categorised, such as *hama ha* (alluvial land suited to paddy), *khandina ha* (infertile land that farmers leave in recognition of its limits), *sharab daria ha* (land cultivated with water), *hashrao ha* (land unsuited to paddy because it will not hold water), and *jamphai daria ha* (land suited to paddy with proper irrigation). These are not mere categorical names but carry distinct functions and instructions: what to sow, when to plough, which land should be left to recover, etc. For Bodo farmers, naming a plot is building a relationship of knowing, understanding and responsibility with the land itself.

This Indigenous practice reflects a form of ecocentric orientation that the Bodo landscape sustains: *Bathou* is centred in the organic growth of the cosmic, a framework challenging anthropocentric practice. The ecocentric orientation appears in how the community treats the natural world in their rituals, humans invoking and begging pardon from the guardians of places and creatures before

acting. It is the ethical performance of Bodo farmers, showing humans do not have the right to destroy or corrupt other living or non-living things, and emphasises having prior knowledge from protectors concerned before acting on anything on the land. Therefore, on this understanding, land is not just a material for farming for Bodo farmers but a mutual-partner entity which is active, relational and reciprocal in cultivation.

Indigenous land-related knowledge of the Bodo community is transferred through oral tradition, rituals, and other associated conservation and belief practices that the community acknowledge as an integral part of community identity. The vulnerability of this relationship is the change of ownership; when a land is converted or sold, it breaks a deep relationship held between a person and the land, leading to the end of ties— obligation, rituals and reciprocity practices. Land remains with terms or names, but loses the knowledge attached to it.

4.2 *Mai* as Sacred Being

Mai (rice) is the backbone of Bodo agricultural and ritual practices, and the community treats rice as more than just a product. *Mainao*, representing *Lakshi*, a goddess of wealth, is identified with the rice itself. She is adorned during the pre-harvesting season with a natural lamp burnt in the field as a symbol of welcome while rice starts to bloom. Deities are prayed for the protection of the field and better crops in the home. These divine practices are not just an invocation for productivity but an act of recognition, hospitality, and a language of connecting the divine with non-humans through humans.

This relationship is further expressed in a ritual observation called *Mainao lainao*, a pre-harvesting ritual of adorning the goddess, *Mainao buri*, where the woman of the family performs a *puja* and carries back a small bundle of rice stalks as a symbol of *Mainao* into the main house. It establishes how rice farming creates a divine gendered relationship. The Bodo community do not treat rice as a simple crop or food but gives it a divine attribute and connects to humans by bringing it with rituals and keeping it inside the domestic space as kin rather than as stores. Therefore, the relationship of *mai* (rice) with the divine and the Bodo community is continuous and sacred in form. It is not merely an isolated agricultural product.

Indigenous knowledge of *Mai* is also botanical knowledge held by Bodo farmers. Indigenous rice is bioculturally diverse because lands have distinguished morphological characters across localities, and this diversity of land determines varieties in rice, a knowledge inseparable from communities in selecting seeds based on land traits (Wangpan et al.). This consistency is visible in ethnoplants used in *Bathou*, carrying specific values and beliefs, helping in the formation of a linguistic property of the Bodo community (Basumatary). This Indigenous knowledge of plants or rice, its name, and its obligation are all one and interconnected, not seen as distinct three.

Within this belief and context, *mai* is considered a being, not just a commodity. Its cultivation is interconnected to other rituals and divine observations of the Bodo community. As an agrarian

people, this community perform *Kherai* for the welfare of the community and good harvest of *mai* (rice) (Goswami), and *Mainao buri* is invoked and prayed in the presence of people, meaning that crop or *mai* is held in common before anyone holds it. It becomes a sacred relational commodity for the Bodo people, connecting them through one deity, *Mainao buri* or *Lakshmi*.

4.3 Water as the Force of Life: Communal Covenant, Not Engineering

The Bodo community controls water in a shared responsibility rather than a personal demand for supply. The community utilise their own technical knowledge, skills and practices in the construction of irrigation canals and earthwork embankments to divert water from riverbeds or nearby streams into their fields. This whole is done together as a community— demonstrating water as a common source of social needs; building a communal covenant through water.

The *dongo/jamfwi* system is one such long-established Indigenous irrigation system seen on the *Saralbhanga River*, where the Bodo and neighbouring groups control and rely on this water source, representing a system of transboundary indigenous commons (Dutta and Yashwant; Devi). This canal system is conventionally maintained and shared regularly among Bodo farmers. Farmers treat their relationship with water as a covenant with an obligation.

The Bodo community practices a relational relationship with water. The elders of the community determine the water utility from the nearest river during scanty rainfall. Water is not lifted, purchased or opened; it is utilised in the presence of elders who carry rights of utility, which is why water utility is agricultural and ceremonial at the same time. Extending this moral framing to water guardians: the community pray water deities before fishing or acting anything in water.

Therefore, in this context, the *dongo/jamfwi* is not just an engineering solution of irrigation for the community but a form of covenant, showing water belongs to all in common, first for river beings, and the accessibility sits on conditions of accountability and care of water. This system breaks without social unity, obligation, and relationship with water.

4.4 The Living Field as Community: Care without Destruction

The land or field is not just space for farming; it is a part of the community and is taken care of. The Bodo farmers use their Indigenous techniques and knowledge to make their land pest and disease-free without destroying it. Examples of their Indigenous practices are the use of neem leaf extraction as an antifeedant, *Germani bon* and *posotia* as repellents, *black colocasia* for pests, bitter plant against fungi and tobacco leaf extract as an insecticide etc. These methods are used with an ethic of non-destruction, responding to living presence only through deterrence, confusion, and ecological allies rather than relying on destruction.

Bodo farmers read and anticipate the weather by interpreting the behaviours of animals and plants, influencing their planting and crop choices. These signs are merely data but taken as a conversation with the living world. This ethic is the principal expression that humans should not corrupt or

destroy lives or living things without reason or without the concern of elders. Therefore, caring for the land is not merely an act of conservation but an obligation of the community.

4.5 Harvest and Storage as Gratitude

Harvesting is a gift that the Bodo community receive with acknowledgement and gratitude. It is shown when they adorned *Mainao buri* and take a bundle of rice stalks before each rice harvest to the house as a sign of welcoming *Mainao buri* like a human rather than just treating it as a simple crop to be harvested. Rice becomes food not only through the process of drying, threshing and storage, but through how it is presented and welcomed in the house.

This sense of gratitude and acknowledgement is extended through festivals celebrated across the agricultural year. The spring festival, *Bwisagu*, reflects the agrarian lifestyle of the community. Its celebratory components, such as fairs, religious activities, dance, music, and food, are deeply tied to planting, harvesting and present human relationship with nature. The saving of seeds for the next plantation season represents continuity rather than mere inventory. The Bodo households preserve the first rice stalks with love, reverence and ritual significance; it's not touched or eaten but kept either in the *Bakri* (granary) or *ishing* (kitchen). Therefore, showing gratitude is part of rice farming for the Bodo community; it is built on how harvest is received, preserved and shared.

4.6 Ritual as Pedagogy: The Knowledge of the Community

Rituals and practices reproduce Bodo Indigenous knowledge through teaching and participation, and do not just transmit information. The community observes different fairs and festivals during various stages of rice cultivation which are linked to the season and distinct agricultural and religious types. This classification is owned and represents the oneness of the agricultural and ritual calendar of the Bodo community. *Kherai* is one of the most important religious festivals, where the *Doudini*, a spirit-possessed woman, mediates between mortals and immortals, seeking welfare and a good harvest for the community. This role makes religious knowledge public, situating it within cultivation. The festival's dance forms are derived from natural phenomena, carrying distinct symbols, meanings, religious beliefs, cultural values and communal identity.

Similarly, *Bwisagu* is another important festival that teaches traditional practices and knowledge to young generations. It marks the New Year, accompanied by the *Bagurumba* dance, with its roots in nature, where the entire Bodo population participates. This participation leads to learning and understanding the season and crop, and the community's relation to both. In this sense, festivals are pedagogical for the community that transmit and preserve knowledge through celebration, observation and participation in public throughout the agricultural year. Together, these festivals offer an ecocentric framework connecting cultural practice with the knowledge production of the community through embodied performance. They invite relational accountability from the community: knowledge is renewed with every generation but the obligation towards them must be fulfilled and sustained.

5. Discussion

5.1 What Bodo Epistemology Teaches about Sustainability

The sustainability in Bodo rice farming is an expression of worldview, not just a byproduct of farming techniques (Berkes). For them, *ha* is a relative that must be conserved rather than exhausted; *mai* is sacred with seed diversity that is cherished rather than homogenised; water is a common covenant, which to be shared in common; field is a community managed by relationship rather than annihilation (Habiyaemye and Korina). In the field of sustainability science, chemical free production; botanical preparations and biological guardians; soil preparation with repeated ploughing, rotation, green manure, gravity fed irrigation without waste; low fossil fuel and carbon and in-situ genetic diversity demonstrate ecological sustainability; minimal purchased inputs, seed selection sovereignty, diversified production and local food security reflect economic sustainability(Brahma); collective festivals, rituals and practices such as *Bwisagu*, *Kherai*, *Mainao lainai*, *Saori/Gatha janai* renew communal solidarity, honour role of women in plantation, storage, seed selection, all represent social sustainability. The deeper point is its epistemological dimensions that make all of these single relationships from different angles.

5.2 Climate Resilience as Indigenous Futures

Indigenous rice farming techniques and practices respond to environmental variability. Bodo farmers have adapted various traditional practices of seed selection for water variability, temperature fluctuation and seasonal change; natural indicators help farmers with planting and harvesting timing; *dongo/jamfwi* systems manage water scarcity and surplus; diversified farming prevents loss; and collective and mutual helping systems, such as *Saori janai* or *Ghata janai*, provide help in farming work of a household (Boro). Adaptive rituals such as *embuni haba* (frog marriage) and insertion of plough upside down for rainfall; practice of tying used broom upside down to endless rain, warning of famine through occasional bamboo flowering, all represent anticipatory ethics, a climate resilient practice of Indigenous Bodo rice farming. In Whyte's terms, this knowledge sustains the Bodo community's capacity to adapt to future change on its own terms (Whyte).

5.3 Pressures on the Living System

Current change and development scenarios have shaken Bodo Indigenous farming knowledge and practices. It is facing acute pressures; a threat to relationships as well as to its techniques. The start of the Green Revolution and its scientific ideas of farming and productivity, such as the use of agrochemicals and HYV seeds, displaced Indigenous seed varieties, botanical pesticides and organic manure, leading to water and soil degradation and entangling Bodo farmers in debt (Talukdar et al.). Indigenous methods and practices are dismissed as outdated or marked irrelevant (Agrawal). Bodo youth migration and modern science-centred formal education have pulled young generations away from farming and learning traditional techniques: schools rarely incorporate and encourage Indigenous farming as a special area of the community's knowledge and learning. Oral

transmission of Indigenous farming knowledge and techniques is threatened due to the collapse of the *oja-bej* master-apprentice system, the death of knowledgeable elders without successors and the reluctance spirit of youth towards learning (Boro). Besides these, environmental changes such as deforestation, unpredictable climate, water contamination, and land conversion all undermine traditional techniques of Bodo farmers' weather reading and prediction. Moreover, another major modern factor is market-integrated productivity: Bodo farmers go beyond traditional ways of farming for surplus production to make more capital and export (Borthakur et al.). All these threats today threaten their own epistemic system and way of life.

5.4 Integration on Bodo Terms

The survival of Bodo Indigenous rice farming knowledge and techniques requires integrity of the system— engagement with modern science, not replacement (Agrawal). The *Agroecological synthesis* framework can respond to this need, where ecological logics of rice farming practices can be strengthened through modern scientific validation while preserving the core principles of the traditional intake as the standard (Berkes). *Precision and digital tools* can enhance indigenous rice farming practices, including AI- enhanced documentation of oral knowledge to carry the knowledge to youth on their own terms (Jacob et al.). *Policy integration* should prioritise the needs of the Indigenous Bodo community in providing subsidies for chemical-free farming, seed banks, inclusion of IKS in agricultural extension, demonstration of communal-mutual helping systems within government schemes, secured market for Indigenous rice, funding of *oja-bej* apprenticeship, community-led documentation and integrating IKS of rice farming into the Bodo medium curriculum with strategic planning. Such recognition has long been advocated by UNESCO's LINKS, and all these must follow the community's own terms and understanding, representing a living web of relationships through recognition of protected knowledge (Nations); it is not just a catalogue of techniques and practices.

6. Conclusion

The study understands Bodo Indigenous rice farming methods, practices and knowledge as more than a repertoire of techniques to be catalogued, but as a living knowledge system. These stem from within the Bodo worldview, not imported categories. Taking *Bathou* and its five elements as relations rather than resources, the study finds that farmers' knowing and obligation are the same thing; a relationality that extends obligation to ancestors, places, and beyond non-human communities.

The findings are held together as one interrelated system. *Ha* (Land) is read, named to know and build relationship with farmers; *Mai* (rice) is welcomed and preserved as a divine being in the house; Water is governed as a communal covenant among farmers; the field is protected with deterrence and botanical allies rather than destruction, and weather is read as conversation with the living world; Harvest is received with acknowledgement and gratitude and festivals,

observations and rituals practices serve as pedagogy through which indigenous knowledge of the community: season, crop and its obligation is learnt and passed through each generation. Reciprocity in mutual exchange labour systems such as *Saori janai* and *Gatha janai* further extends the idea of knowledge as a set of relationships that must be lived, practised to exist, sustained in accountability to land, community and future generations.

The study contributes to Indigenous scholarship through a new orientation of accounting Bodo rice farming knowledge with the community's own epistemological framework that understands sustainability, resilience and adaptations as byproducts of kinship rather than as management outcomes. Therefore, the contribution is not merely a new inventory but a new orientation.

The risks of survival for Bodo rice farming knowledge are critical and real, and they are epistemic as much as economic. Indigenous practices are dismissed as outdated or irrelevant. However, this knowledge system is a living system of the fields, granaries, ritual spaces of the Bodo community, and it continues to feed, teach and adapt. The responsibility of scholarship and policy is to deal with this Indigenous knowledge with respect and according to its own terms, learning and protecting the relationships that sustain it and following the community's own interpretations of its meaning and its future.

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