

## CHAPTER 10

# CONCLUSION

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*Mech* is one well known tribe mostly living in the Duars region of West Bengal and in the Kokrajhar district of Assam. In some areas of Assam they are also referred as *Bodo*. People of this primitive tribe love to live in forest villages or in localities quite nearer to forests. They are living in Duars, the present study area, for much longer than 400 years and were leading completely forest dependent life style. Recently they have learnt to cultivate some common crops like paddy, corn, jute, potato, etc but they prefer to consume their traditional vegetable those are available in local vegetations in abundance. Their previous population structure and the available natural resources were in good proportion and the forests were providing them enough food and other resources for their survival. But, the recent depletion in forest and other types of natural vegetations and, on the other hand, increase of *Mech* population is forcing them now to depend on sources outside the forests.

This forest-dependent life style helped them to recognize numerous useful plants to satisfy their different needs for proper survival.

The edible plants they selected are quite useful and many of those plants might be agreeable for people living in other areas. If investigated properly then many of their wild edible plants can be used widely and can be marketed. In addition, *Jou*, the rice beer they prepare also can be improved and its marketability can be tested. *Meches* also have their own special cuisines prepared using their own recipe and a few of those can be acceptable by others. Their most important preparation, *Ondla* (veg & non-veg), that is a must during their marriage ceremonies, can be marketed with little improvised taste.

Selection of fodder plants is also important as they maintain a good number and variety of livestock. Some of the selected species can be grown in fallow-lands to improve the fodder supply in villages located little away from nearby forests. If the livestock with *Mech* families remain healthy with their selected fodders, then, certainly those fodders will keep the livestock healthy maintained by other communities elsewhere. However, the nutritive status of their preferred fodders needs to be verified.

*Mech* traditional healers, *Ojas*, are quite conversant with the diseases they and their domestic animals suffer. They have developed a wide variety of drugs to use against those diseases, using mostly locally available plant materials and rarely with animal or inorganic materials. Their medicines are quite effective as the people remain healthy using these medicines only. Unless the situation is quite worse they will not visit a hospital, which is generally located far away from their settlements. Their single-plant medicines

and formulated drugs – all are quite effective and the practice level of *Mech Ojas* is quite good. During the survey, majority of the sufferers expressed their satisfaction about the improvement from their sufferings. For the treatment of some diseases they are having more than one formulated drugs used by different *Ojas*. However, in their method of treatment there is no use of any antibiotic like material and the plant extracts or pastes or tablets etc are working nicely. It is now important to verify these medicines scientifically to find out if any lead is available for the development of new drugs for their application over wider areas. - - The story is also same for the veterinary medicines practiced by them.

*Meches* are believers in *Bathou* religion. They worship a number of Gods and Goddesses. They organize a number of festivals round the year. Their worships related to get permission to start cultivation and to harvest the produced crops are very important. They also arrange *Phunai* to praise their deity to keep the society clean and healthy. The ethnobotany of their festivals and *Phunais* shows that they try to please their Gods and Goddesses using plants those are somehow valuable for them. Crops and other edible plants, medicinal plants, etc are commonly used for such purposes.

For survival we need to construct our houses. *Meches* construct houses of very simple design with thatched roof. Whatever may be the structure, they need construction materials. Main trunk or primary old branches of different trees are collected from forests for main poles and for thatching leaves of some grasses are the important materials. Not only for housing, have they also used plant materials for many other purposes for survival including the construction of hunting and fishing equipments, storage vessels, etc of their daily use. They also use some poisonous plants mainly to stupefy fishes and poison the arrows for hunting.

The cultural aptitude of *Meches* is quite high. They can frame dances, and can compose songs, poems and puzzles. In all these, references to plants are quite common.

The record 31 new ethnically useful plants and the additional new uses of 104 species of plants are probably making the results of the survey significant.

In fact, for the *Mech* society, the traditionally acquired knowledge on the uses of plants is quite high. Many of their Traditional Knowledge appears to be beneficial for the human society as a whole. But, the *Mech* society is changing rapidly through the adoption of the facilities of modernization in the outer world. This is endangering the huge stock of *Mech* Traditional Knowledge, which needs to be surveyed and documented immediately so that, in future, those can be scientifically evaluated and can be used for the betterment of the entire human society.