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# Food Culture Of Sarania Kacharies

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## Abstract:

Culture is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. Without culture a race will not be able to prolong their own identity for a longer period of time. A race can establish their existence in a global stage through its versatile culture only.

Food is an important cultural feature of a community besides being the most essential item for survival of human beings. The present study look forward to explore the relations between food and the community, the way food is socially and culturally constructed in the Sarania Kacharies society. The preparations and practices of food habit helps to understand the social relations and focus the cultural identity. This area of work includes issues like changing food practices, food and culture relations etc. In every community or in every culture, food ways have important roles to play signifying various beliefs and practices . Food is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviors|| (Barthes, 1975, pp. 49-50). The historical evidence also reveals that the effective communication of human being is organized only through the food ways of every cultural system. "The cuisine of a people and their understanding of the world are linked|| (Soler 1973, pp. 943)." Lévi- Strauss states, "natural species are chosen [as totems||]" not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are good to think'|| (1963, pp. 89). Food as a metaphoric term conveys different meanings and also mediates between nature and culture. The relation between nature and culture is universal in human society.

**Keywords:** 1. Assam, 2.Food-Culture, 3.Plan Tribe, 4.Recipe, 5.Sarania Kachari,

## People of the study:

Geographically Assam is situated in the migratory plane and it is a home of many races and tribes. The Assamese culture is enriched and formed by the people of different races and cultures. The tribes of both hills and plains have different ethnic and linguistic history and they have server assimilation in the culture of Assam. Among plain tribes Sarania Kachari community has a population of about 4 lakh. The specific census of the community has not done since 1891. Most of the Sarania Kachari people lives in the Northern Side of river

Brahmaputra specially in Baska and Udalguri District. A small portion of the community also lives in various parts of Nalbari, Bangaigaon, Kokrajhar, Kamrup (Rural) and Dhemaji district.

### **Objective of the Study:**

Overall the aim of this study is to identify the eating practices of Sarania Kachari community. The objective of this study includes.....

- Identifying consumption patterns.
- Studying consumption experiences and lifestyles.
- Studying the cultural aspects of consumption in Sarania Kachari community.
- Examining the Preference of food in Sarania Kachari community.
- To study the distinct taste of Sarania Kacharis.

### **Aim of the Study:**

The Sarania Kachari of Assam carries different characteristics by its distinct art, craft, costumes, and architecture and food habits. This ethnic group is distinct by their food habit as the preparation; processing and preservation methods of Sarania Kachari community are unique. But till now the foodways of Sarania Kachari community is a relatively untouched and new area of research. The aim of the present study is to collect data on the food habits of the Sarania Kachari society. The present work looks forward to analyse the food habits and various factors

### **Methods and Methodologies:**

To carry out the study data have been obtained both from primary and secondary sources. For primary sources data have been collected directly from the community and stakeholders. To conduct my fieldwork, I visited various areas Baska, Udalguri, Nalbari, Bangaigaon, Kokrajhar, Kamrup (Rural) and Dhemaji district. These are the districts of Assam. From the field study food habits of Sarania Kachari society were observed and their changes were also brought into notice. To explore the areas techniques like interview and observation methods were used. Non-participant observation method was also used to conduct the research. To obtain certain proper information interview method was used. The two-fold purposes of collecting data which researcher has classified to analyse the data. Later the information was partitioned into chapters and sub-chapters to discuss in a systematic way. The collected data were analyzed to make it relevant in present time and the food habits of Sarania Kachari society were examined to interpret and analyzed in order to fulfill the research work.

### **Introduction:**

The Sarania Kachari is one of the major ethnic plain tribe community in the state of Assam, North East India. All historical documents, the government gazette, revenue records in regards to the identity of Sarania Kachari are available and all evidences are based on these accounts have shown that they were the aboriginal Tribal or plain tribe of Assam. They were from Mongoloid race, called as Kiratas. Bhagadatta the ancient king of Kamrup who fought the battle of Kurukshetra for Kaurava was of Kirat origin.

Some historian stated that Saranias who were originally Tribal, were converted to Hinduism when the process of synthesis had started among the Aryyans and non Aryyans through cultural assimilation. So we can say that Saranias are converted to Hinduism through cultural assimilation. It is true that before the propagation of new vaisnabism by Srimanta Sankardev this tribe was not called as Saranias. As stated in Guru Charit, " They are called as Saranias, who initiated themselves fresh into the religion of Nama Saran." They performed their religious ceremonies through Brahmin priests as per the vedic process. Those who follows new vaisnabism performs their ceremonies without Brahmin priests.

The fertile soil of Assam and North East has given a choice of variety in crop and vegetable production, hence variety in food culture is observed depending upon the likes and dislikes, taste, necessity, rituals, season and availability of food species. As we know the demographic structure is rich with the inclusion of various tribes across all corners. So the cultural variety along with food habits has some similarities and changes which is prominent feature of tribal people.

The people of Assam and North Eastern region usually don't like spicy food. They prefer boiled or less spicy food. Even they like to have bolied non-veg food item like fish, meat etc. Now a days changes has come to the food habits of tribes also. The wild herbs found in the forest of Assam contains medicinal quality. So the tribes use the leaves, flowers and fruits of trees as the ingredients of their food. More these herbs are used as a prevention to various disease.

When we closely look at the food habits of Sarania Kachari, it is observed that there is a similarity with the other tribes of Assam as far as food is concerned . But still there is some uniqueness In the food habits of Sarania Kachari. The meal of Sarania Kachari can be classified in two parts...

- 1) Main Meal
- 2) Secondary or Light meal or snacks.

The main meal of Sarania Kachari is Rice. They prepare three kind of Rice.

- i) Hot Rice (Served warm)

- ii) Cold rice: Rice prepared early in the day and served cold.
- iii) Fermented Rice : Rice soaked in water overnight and served on the next day.  
Usually rice is served with other food item together as a complete meal. The other dishes or food items served along with rice can be divided in various parts. Basically it can be classified as...
  - a) Veg Recipe
  - b) Non-Veg Recipe

## **Veg Recipe**

**Vegetable curry of wild vegetable and herbs:** Sarania Kachari eat various tempting curies prepared from wild herbs and vegetables. Those herbs and vegetables contains medicinal property. So they have them by boiling or raw so that their medicinal property can be restored. We can termed it as vegetable cuisine.

**Black Lentils or gram curry :** Black lentil is widely used in food habit of Assamese People. Not only the tribes but in every society its used as a prominent food item. Usually Sarania Kachari dry fish is mixed with Alkali and cooked.

**Curry of Tender Jute leaves :** The curry of tender jute has wide significance among the inhabitants of Assam. Sarania Kachari also used it widely. It is believed that having the curry of tender jut leave in the month of Chot- Bahag (Mid March to mid April) of of Assamese calendar helps to control the parasite like worms in human body. So tender jute leaves are highly preferred .

The tender jute leaves are called Sukta when dried. People eat Sukta soaked along with oil, onions, chillies together which is very useful in controlling the worms.

**Recipe of Polutus:** The flower and tender leaves of wood nettle is mixed with rice flour and a curry is prepared . Sarania Kacharis called it as “Tancha”.

**Recipe of Bamboo Shoot:** The curry made from bamboo shoot is pretty much popular among the Sarania Kachari Tender shoot is finely chopped and cooked along with Black lentils and alkali potash as a dish.

**Recipe of Alkali Potash:** Sarania Kachari eat dish of alkali potash cooked along with vegetables like white gourd melon, pumpkin, bottle gourd, radish etc.

**Recipe of the flower and the leaves of Drumstick:** Drumstick controls malnutrition and also cures the diseases like small pox or chicken pox. It is very rich in vitamin and minerals. The tender leaves of drumstick mixed with gram flour to fry together. Moreover sour and bitter crenels are also pretty much popular among the Sarania Kacharies.

**Recipe of the Leaves and Flower of Papaya:** Sarania Kacharies pluck the flower and have them frying along with ginger and garlic together. It has medicinal properties to prevent worms as it has bitter taste.

Moreover a curry is prepared from the leaves of papaya thrashing it with the rice flour and cooking it in boiling water.

### **Non-Veg Recipe :**

We may classify the non-veg Recipe of Sarania Kacharies into various parts. These non-veg recipes are cooked differently as their own process.

### **Fish curry:**

Assam is highly rich in its Biodiversity having lots of rivers and wet land. So naturally it's a habitat of large number of Fish species. So fish is an integral part of its food culture. So obviously fish is very much popular among the Sarania Kacharies. They collected fish by community fishing. Excess fish is stored after dehydrating conventionally to eat later. Fish is prepared with various ingredients for different taste. Mangosteen ( Barthequera ), Gourd, Radish etc are sliced and dried in air-tight bamboo pipes or earthen pots ( Tekeli ) to be cooked with fish using aklai potash whenever necessary. Sometimes Banana stem ( Posala ) and Bamboo shoot ( Bahgaj ) are finely chopped and with consumed with small fish. Similarly tender jute leaves (sukta) and Mustard green and dried in seaks or bags to eat later along with dried fish. Small decorated local fish species like Olive Barb ( Puthi ), Dorikana, Green Snakehead ( Garoi ), Spotted Snakehead ( Sengli ), One-striped spiny eel (Tora) are packed in banana leaves and are roasted in light steam and Sarania Kacharies eat with much satisfaction. Green Snakehead fish ( Garoi ) is very popular lickable/dips (Chutney) of Sarania Kacharies. Similarly Black Lentils with alkali potash cooked with dried fish is also favorite for Sarania Kacharies.

The steamed small fish with Taro leaves is very delicious recipe of Sarania Kacharies. Similarly Climbing perch fish (kawoi) cooked with spinach, Ripe Ambarella ( Amora ) cooked with Green Snakehead fish ( Garoi ), Curry of Skunk vine ( Vedailata ) cooked with Climbing perch fish (kawoi) or Magur fish or any other small fish cooked with jack fruit seed or taro leaves curry along with dried fish cooked with Taro stem are very delicious. Similarly curry made of Taro leaves and small fish steamed in banana leaves is really unforgettable.

Sarania Kacharies small fish in furnace slab (Dhowachang – a place above the traditional burner to dehydrate ). The powder of dried small fish mixing together with alkali potash and thrashed taro stems and dried in slice in sunlight to make Sidol ( a dry fish dish ). Sidol is stored in bamboo pipe and earthen pot for further use.

The flower and leaves of Pulutus are eaten by cooking with fish and rice flour.

Tender bamboo shoot are minced finely and mixed with small fish and rice flour are cooked and eaten as curry. Thus various ingredients are used with fish to prepare delicious curry by the Sarania Kacharies.

Besides fish the use and popularity of meat is also observed among Sarania Kacharies. Though fish and meat cooked with various ingredients, the dishes are very healthy as they are less spicy.

### **Recipes of Meat:**

Sarania Kacharies love to have food being boiled. In non vegetable dishes they use spices like ginger, garlic, chillies, curry leave etc.

The dishes of white gourd melon prepared by the female of Sarania Kacharies is very delicious.

Among meat they prefer wild rabbit, dove, white breasted water hen, mongoose, porcupine, white- winged wood lesser whistling duck, monardian duck, orange breasted green pigeon, myna, Indian pond heron, sambar etc to eat.

Sarania Kacharies cook crabs along with Mesta Tenga.

Pork is an essential item for the entire Tribes of Assam and North East. Its an integral part of all the celebrations and festival. Some of them prefer banana stem fine chopped and fried in the fats of pork very much. Meats like pork, chicken, duck etc are eaten with mustard green herbs and rice flour very deliciously. Similarly chicken with skunk vine or Pork with banana stem etc are liked by Sarania Kacharies deep fried.

Moreover chicken or pork cooked with black lentil, duck with white gourd etc are prepared deliciously by Sarania Kacharies.

Uruka (The eve of Magh Bihu) is celebrated by preparing a pitha (Cake) with oil from fatty pork is been performed traditionally which is still prevailing among Sarania Kacharies.

### **Recipes of Insects :**

The consumption of insects is a prolific characteristics of tribal society. The tribes of Assam or outside Assam has this unique characteristic of consuming insects. The very same feature can be observed among Sarania Kacharies too.

Sarania Kacharies mainly consume insects like various species of bees, wasp, cricket, termites, various ants, snails, crabs, grass hopper, various larva etc either fried, roasted or cooked as a curry. The popularity of consuming insects can be anticipated from their folk songs.

One of the most important food item in Sarania Kacharies is Sajpani (fermented drink of rice). Like other tribes of Assam Sarania Kacharies don't consider Sajpani as their ethnic drink yet the importance of Sajpani is not the less. Wine is not used in every occasion auspiciously. Though they don't use it often, yet every household prepares the drink as per their demand.

The Sarania Kacharies usually call the wine as Serap. This Serap is must in community offering (Bhakat-Sewa). In a few others religious celebration Serap is also used. To prepare Serap they use common ingredients like other tribes do. Usually it is prepared from various rice like Bora, Ala or Sali ( assamese rice species) rice. The serap prepared from Banni Rice is called as Banni-Mera. The devotees called it as Kesaras.

To prepare the drink, Sarania Kacharies makes a special ingredients called Suruchi. Suruchi is called as Bakhar by the Sarania Kacharies. This Bakhar is prepared by mixing 1 kg rice, leaves of Pineapple 125 gm, the leaves of special assamese herbs called Bhete and one or two old Bakhar. This mixture is soaked in water approximately for three hours. After that it is being thrashed in Dheki ( An Assamese grinder like equipment ) to be dried in Sunlight. They are formed as a ball and covered to dry for four days to make it complete.

Rice is very important to make this drink. For a pot of wine 3 kg of rice is required. First they boil the rice and then left it to dry. Boiled rice is mixed with Bakhar in a warm heat and kept in wide utensil. Next day, these ingredients are put in a earthen pot and a coal is kept over the pot. After three days the wine named Sajpani or Serap is ready to drink.

### **Conclusion:**

This variety in food-culture among the Sarania Kacharies has enriched the versatile culture of Assam. This food have medicinal importance also which helps the tribal people to remain healthy.

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