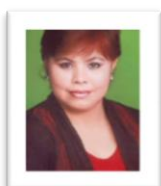


A Study of Traditional Food of Sonowal Kacharis of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam



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Abstract

The Sonowal Kachari, an ethnic tribe from Assam has a distinctive style of food and diet. They mostly eat naturally available vegetables, roots, leaves, herbs, fruits, fish, animals and insects. These foods have preventive, therapeutic, and remedial medicinal values. These foods helped the tribe to survive in adverse environmental conditions. With modernization some changes are seen in food habits but a trend for revival is also seen in recent years. A study is conducted to find out on this topic in urban, semi rural and rural areas of Assam, in Brahmaputra Valley. Study is carried out to find more about the food habits of the largest tribe of Assam, build up a base for further research, establish the food as a right nutritious food, in this geographical set up and environment of Assam.

Keywords: Sonowal Kachari, Traditional Food, Herbs, Medicinal Food, Assam, Brahmaputra Valley, Food Habits, Tropical Diseases, Natural Food.

Introduction

The Brahmaputra Valley of Assam is fertile land for natural vegetation which have great medicinal properties if taken in right proportion in correct process. These natural ingredients are being used by the ethnic tribes for fulfilling their hunger, satisfying taste buds and as medicinal decoctions to prevent or heal many diseases. The Sonowal Kachari, an ethnic tribe from Assam, who are also known as Bhumiputras, have been dwelling in this area of Ancient Kamrupa, since the Danava and asura rule. They live as naturally as possible, dwelling in the valleys of Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Dimapur to Dhemaji. This entire valley is fertile for both human, vegetation, animals and germs equally. Annual occurrence of flood, earthquake and other natural calamities with bouts of epidemic of various contagious diseases it's a challenging act of living and continued regeneration for centuries is no small feat. Survival of the fittest is the slogan of this entire valley of Brahmaputra.

The Sonowal Kacharis have survived since prehistoric age. Originally known in the Vedic literature as Kirat, has not only survived but remained one of the largest tribes with high rate of literate, healthy population. These might be due to the life style they have adopted and also the food they eat. They have a distinctive style of food and diet. They mostly eat naturally available vegetables, roots, leaves, herbs, fruits, fish, animals and insects. These foods have preventive, therapeutic, and remedial medicinal values. Foods helped the tribe to survive in adverse environmental conditions. With modernization some changes are seen in food habits but a trend for revival is also seen in recent years. A study is conducted to find out on this topic in urban, semirural and rural areas of Assam, in Brahmaputra Valley. Study is carried out to find more about the food habits of one of the largest tribe of Assam, build up a base for further research, establish the food as a right nutritious food, in this geographical set up and environment of Assam.

No written history is found about this tribe but their folklores, their family tree, folk songs and tales, religious style, traditions followed, contemporary history speaks a lot. In modern times a few books were written, articles were published in newspapers and magazines which are used as base. The seminars, conferences and workshop held to find out on these topics are taken in to account. The food of this tribe has scope for study, but little has been done on it. Finding the Nutritional value of these foods is the call of the day, as agriculture activity is reducing. More and

more people are getting involved in service sector on the other hand rapid population growth is further increasing the demand for food items, leading to shortage of staple food.

More and more use of chemical pesticides, fertilizers in modern agriculture techniques, the nutritional food value reduces. Further processing of the ingredients to prepare food, the nutritional value drops down. The traditional method of cultivation and ethnic cooking techniques helps in retaining the nutrition. Use of various herbs, natural ingredients found in wilderness make the food healthy. This will help in prevention of many diseases and make people healthy.

Area

Sonowal kachari dominated areas on Brahmaputra Valley, Assam. Sonaighuli, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Majuli, Sibsagar.

Population

The Sonowal Kachari people living in the valleys of Brahmaputra river, on both sides. Usually the Sonowal kacharis prefer to live in open areas near the forest, by swamps. Easy availability of fish, herbs, natural vegetation, animals grazing place. The people are simple and basic. They like to live on the essential needs and don't crave to live in crowded areas with too much noise.

Area Wise Population Chosen at Random for Data Collection

Area	Male	Female	Total
Sonaighuli	17	36	53
Dhemaji	20	23	43
Lakhimpur	16	20	36
Dibrugarh	24	21	45
Majuli	12	15	27
Sibsagar	11	7	18

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out what type of food the Sonowal Kacharis consume
2. To find out what are the food values and medicinal benefits of the food eaten
3. To find out how they have made the generations to accept these foods to consume for survival, healing and prevention of diseases.

Methodology

Population

The Selected population is observed specially during their traditional festivals, ceremonies, fests and conventions.

Area Wise Population

Participation in various festivals as a member of the community has given in-depth information. These are further used and reviewed in the literature available on this subject.

Data Collection

Primary

1. Interview
2. Seminar
3. Observation

Secondary

1. Books, magazines, news papers
2. Websites and internet search
3. Electronic media programs, talks
4. Social Media

Research Design

Descriptive survey method. The research is carried out more on the basis of experimental research design.

Experts are interviewed to understand the meaning of each of the traditions, food taken traditionally, their values and benefits.

The interviews are done at random among the selected population.

Review of Literature

Tribes of Assam, published by Tribal Research Institute, has an array of essays on different tribes of Assam. The origin their food habits, festivals, customs & rituals are documented after proper collection and documentation.

Sonowal Kachari Sanskriti By Labhit Sonowal, A literate person from Dhadum Borpothar of Tinsukia, considered to be in a highly esteemed position has written this book where he have given detailed description on the Sonowal Kachari tribe of Assam. The traditions, rituals, food was a big asset for this research.

Sonowal Kachari Samaj Aru Sanskriti, A compilation of Topics on Sonowal Kachari Tribe, a compilation of various topics on Sonowal Kacharis of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. From traditional festivals, ceremonies, marriage, death, bihu, puja, Sabah all are detailed in articles of various writers. These articles are previously published in various news papers, magazines, books, souvenirs. They are collected and compiled together. The book has given in depth knowledge regarding various customs, rituals and traditions followed. The food habits, the ingredients taken and the customs attached to them are well defined.

Indigenous herbal medicine among the Sonowal Kachari tribe: A study in a forest village in Dibrugarh, Assam, India, Indra Baruah and Ripunjay Sonowal has given a descriptive information from the research they carried out as anthropologists. The physical structure, their living habits, their food habits are well documented. The paper has described as to the physical structure, the topography they live, the food available in their surroundings has made them face all the hurdles in the environment. The paper contains a list of ingredients, their scientific names, their medicinal values.

The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam, Writer Binita Barooah has presented this paper after a thorough research on the Sonowal Kacharis of Brahmaputra Valley, Assam. The origin of Sonowal Kacharis, their family history, about their living style. This book gives information about the origin, spread and family structure with traditions followed, of the Sonowal Kacharis.

Asomar Loka- Sanskriti. In this book, detailed information is provided by the writer Chow Lokeswar Sonowal. The book contains detailed information of almost all the tribes of Assam. The chapters are divided into birth, death, marriage, traditional, festival, ceremonies and traditional customs followed by the tribes of Assam. The book contains researched information by interviews, book reviews and folk lore information. It is a great book for

research work on any matter of almost all the tribes of Assam.

Analysis

Its feels good to find Sonowal Kachari tribe carrying on their age old beliefs and traditions so specifically, yet accepting the modern way of life. This is possible because these age old beliefs are easy-to-do, seems to have scientific explanations, systematically chronicled. A few things in particular is seen among them. The tribes of Sonowal Kacharis are people who like to live in natural surrounding with more open place, close to nature, near forest or in between, paddy fields, by rivers and remain in tune with the nature. They observe and follow traditions in their food habit and like to survive on herbs, fish and wild insects, lives etc .They are very gentle and seldom indulge in physical fighting, rather look upon to their elders in case of disputes. They would rather sulk and stop communicating instead of fights and arguments, although they are very powerful and strong, mentally and physically. This symolishes that they are peace loving tribes. They listen more – speak less , read more – write less , think more – act less , plan more – execute less. They are very intelligent people, with great capacity for hard work, in most critical environment. They like to share and eat together in community feast etc . The people in

villages are very co-operative, understanding, friendly and helpful. The husbands are very caring and understanding towards their spouse. Physical and mental violence towards wife and children is seldom heard of. The married women enjoy freedom of movement and choice of their selection of profession. Infidelity is seldom heard off. They give a lot of attention on children’s education. The people are mostly highly educated and have deep knowledge. Most people are well placed in Government and private sectors. However, they are not very good business people. They are very soft spoken and gentle speakers, sometimes to the point of being introvert too.

The Sonowal Kacharis through ages has maintained their traditions but modernization has brought changes in their food habbits and also how they take the food, the process of cooking. Health wise they may not be good but in certain cases no options are available with the decreasing vegetation, afforestation, climatic changes. They have defied as long as possible by shifting from over populated places to less populated areas near forests, swamps or river valleys. This might not always be possible with the population explosion, scarcity of land and government regulations.

Table 3.1

In the table below we see the changes that has taken place in the food habit of Sonowal Kacharis

Traditions,Rituals,Custo ms	Changes Brought Media	Effects
Serving of Bhog in Ancient Mandirs	Serves sweets or prashad	Nutrition less food is served Causes more health problems. Ancient mandirs serve mostly rice, black gram dal, vegetables, sometimes meat which is nutritious. The vaisnavite& ancient temples also serve Gram, moong and other fruits which is highly nutritious.
Drinking Apong or Ghutung Pani	Drinks Shulai or Strong alcohol	Effects the health as modern alchocol is prepared from spirits & chemicals. Shulai contains Nasok or mithaine Ethnic drinks are prepared from herbs and rice. They have a relaxing effect and good for certain ailments.
Simple short ceremonies concluded by the elders in pujas, weddings,death ceremonies.	Long procedures followed in pujas, weddings, death ceremonies	Consumes too much time, energy and money. Ancient ways looked for more psychosomatic, mental, physical enlightenment and wellness. Modern ways are more pomp and show. The peace and fulfillment is missing.
Ceremonies, pujas held as per convenience of people involved	Ceremonies, pujas held as the astrologer, Bhokots or bamun ,priests say	People are in inconveince.Work is worship concept seems to get missing. For festivals of any religion too much time is seen to getting wasted. Like Durga puja, many Eid, Christmas. The inner self realization, soulful enlightenment is replaced by extravaganza. The mass media plays a major role in this.
Elders sit, Young ones meet, children play in the evening hours. There were sports clubs, music societies where friends meet. Occasions where the entire family get to gether.	All gets busy with TV, Internet, social media. Meeting friends and family members in social media seems to be enough.	Social bindings has disintregated , health has detoriated, Mental relaxation is nil. Mass media has played a big role in making people more attracted to media then to family & friends. True love & companionship is missing
Ceremonies like marriage, new born rituals, baby first feed, death ceremonies were simple.Entire family &	Elaborate,expensive, pomp & show, long celebrations take place	Wastage of time, poor cannot afford so more grievences, too heavy burden on middle class. Mostly becoming show off business, event managers plan & execute, friends & family dress up and eat and go. No

friends contribute and cooperate to make the occasions successful.		togetherness, no emotions, no feelings. Looks like a film shoot with all the cameras, selfies, vdo cameras moving around.
Simple rice ,saak and vegetables served as breakfast	Elaborate breakfast of roti,puri,dosa is served. Or simple oats, corn etc served. Many eat nothing to get slim	First meal which should be a staple food is skipped. Health detoriats, people become weak mentally physically. First meal should be nutritious and healthy like a king's meal. Unfortunately this is not so hence people are becoming weaker and ailing with many lifestyle diseases.
Eating good nutritious food in correct proportions	Eating of low calorie processed food, not eating or eating very less as a part of dieting,commonly heard in media and among people	People look toned and muscled may be but the physical and mental strength is missing. More diseases like anorexia, liver damage, kidney, heart, blood, neuro problems cropped up. The mass media is to be blamed for promoting unhealthy processed, packaged food.
Eating in Fig leaves or Banana leaves in any ceremony or festival	Eating from tharmacol or plactic plates in ceremonies, festivals, gatherigs.	Eating from fig or banana leaves makes the food more nutritious by adding Vit C,D and E. Eating from plactic or tharmacol harms by adding chemical to food. Tharmacol or plastic plates pollute environment. Leaves are biodegradable, hence doesnot pollute environment.

Findings

1. A proper study is done among the Sonowal Kachari population, residing in Tinsukia Dsistrict, Dibrugarh District, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Majuli, Sonaighuli (Kamrup). The people donot like to open up and speak, hence observation and participation method was adopted. A very few books are found which were of great help. In the Ethnic food festivals often organized these days, a very misleading concept is portrayed, on Sonowal Kachari food preparation and serving process. Proper knowledge of cooking methods, eating the food in right time, season and weather will help us to eradicate many seasonal health hazards and lifestyle health problems.
2. The habitual food comprises savory rice items with a variety range of traditional vegetarian dishes. They love to add a few spices and chilies in their daily diet, like Jaluk[black pepper], bondhonia[Kind of aromatic herb], Ada [ginger], Kon jolokia [grain pepper] Bhootjolokia [Star hot pepper] , Nohoru [garlic] , pippoli[long pepper] Halodhi [turmeric] gash tenga or khorisha [bamboo shoot] , Bet tita [cane shoot] , Kon bilahi [cherry tomato] Nemu [lemon]etc . All these are highly nutritive, preventer of disease, immunity improver & aphrodisiac in character.
3. Gahori [pork], kukura[chicken], hahh[duck], Xamukh[water snail], amloi[red ant eggs] poluleta[silk cocoon], varieties of fish are savory as the non-veg dishes . 'KamolChaul', 'Chira', 'Pitha', 'Chewa Diya Bora Bhat', 'Chungat Diya Bhat' etc. Some drink ' MOD' a drink prepared of rice and herbs, known as ghutangPani.Tamul-paan-shali-dhopat- choon [bettlenut , bettleleaf , lime , camphor bark /root , tobacco leaf] is an integral part of their life .
4. The consciousness of tribe about beauty & wellness is communicated through their food habbits. Good food benefits in having good health, this again is the base of a civilization. Every civilization has unique food habits, mostly based on the environment.

5. Sonowal Kacharis mostly live in swamps areas, near rivers, beels, natural water bodies. The Sonowal villages still exists near forest reserves, by rivers or swamp. The food mostly is comprised of the ingrediants found in these areas. Fish, wild animals (now they avoid it) insects, wild herbs, leafy vegetables, wild berries, fruits, roots, barks etc. These ingrediants have enormous nutrients, medicinal properties to keep them healthy. Beauty is seen to bloom from good health. Sonowals have smooth, glowing skin, long, strong, straight or slight wavy hair. Their nails & teeth are strong, white, gum strong. Eye sight powerful, focused. Mostly strong boned, muscled and no fat. They are very strong, hard working and have good stamina. Their upper body is usually shorter then lower body. They usually don't get obese and have muscled textured body. Complexion brown to tawny to hey yellow. High cheek bone and madular bone Mostly engaged in agricultural work, they have the capacity to deal with diseases born out of swamp, forest and rainy season.

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Different Food & Dishes

Sewabhat is specially prepared rice. Bora saul is used for this Sewa Bhat. It is tied in Tora Paat and cooked in water till its tender and soft. Tora paterexijuabhat, tora is common plant found in swamp areas. It helps in hydrating skin, has vitamin C H, D and B in its leaves. Has medicinal qualities to cure stomach problems, The rice is wrapped and steamed. A special taste & aroma makes the dish nutritious and delicious.

Bora Saul

Bora saul is a variety of glutinous rice found in Assam a kind of sticky rice, rich in protein, carbohydrate, iron, Vitamin B3,B6,B12, Vitamin E, Anti-oxidants, light Alcoholic properties. Bora saul helps in strengthening muscles, balances nerves system, Organic and healthy, this white sticky rice is used to make sweets, Pitha or savoury dishes. The Sewabhat is accompanied with 7(seven)Saak- Babori, Jilimili, Durun, Matikaduri,Konbilahi, Bamheloshi, Jolokia These Xaak/saak is boiled with a little Rock Salt and Khar. Duck egg or chicken or fish is added to this preparation sometimes. Sometimes Sewa rice is eaten with KochuXaak prepared with Kon bilahi. The modern concept is to eat sewabhat with konAllobhoja or Pork prepared with BhootJolokia. Sewabhat is very beneficial for digestive system, nerves system, vascular system, muscular system and bones. Prevents insomnia, gastroenteritis, Constipation, nausea, restlessness, anxiety. Helps in relaxing, makes skin & hair shinny and healthy, improves hemoglobin, collagen, makes nails and teeth shinny and healthy, bones strong, improves muscle flexibility.

Xukoti

A special dish prepared from Fish and herbs. During rainy season fish is in abundance and sunny days are not a common. Therefore the fish caught, in abundance, are washed and left over the fireplace to dry in smoke. These smoked and dried fish are mixed with Kachuu (yum leaves), long pepper(pippoli) herbs like jute leaves (sometimes), Mandhania(a kind of aromatic herb). This mixture is kept in bamboo containers, to be used later in winter days. This special mix dish is very beneficial for health. It prevents malaria, cholera, typhoid, dengue, chicken gunia etc. Helps to arrest muscle pain, joint pain etc. People having peptic ulcer should avoid this dish.

GhotungPani

It's a drink made of Rice and herbs. The rice is washed and boiled. When steamed and soft it is mixed with a special pitha made of herbs. The investigator could collect list of only 54 ingredients. This drink is drunk as pure Prasad or sacred water in Baitho Puja, Bohag Bihu and other auspicious occasions. This drink helps to relax, relieves body ache, improves digestion, improves blood circulation, improves skin complexion. Scope for more research work on it.

Gahorimangkho with Ambepaat

This dish is a savoury and cooked in special occasions. Pork is cut in small pieces and boiled with green chilli, Ambe leaves (a sour tasting herb found in wilderness) and salt. When tender and boiled black pepper is added and served with steamed rice. As per

tradition Sewabhat and Pork is not to be taken at the same time. This may cause indigestion and may have contra-indications. Pork is easily available protein in rural areas. The Kacharis are hard working people engaged in agriculture and live in backward places. To work hard they need protein, fat and carbohydrate. Pork helps them in this particular area. Ambe leaves have great medicinal properties, hence if any fear of tap worm, it is destroyed while cooking with Ambe leaves. Pork is cooked with laixaak(aleavy vegetable common in Villages of Assam), Kon Jolokia(chilly as small as a paddy) Bon dhania (an aromatic leaf) if one is suffering from constipation or stomach problems. Pork is cooked with red dry chillies, garlic, ginger to have good taste. It is prepared as dry fry sometimes to eat with Mod or drinks. Smoked pork or grilled pork are other savouries often eaten, specially in chilly winter evenings with Mod or drinks to curb winter chill.

Mati Mahh

This black gram is considered a very sacred dish and must have for any auspicious occasion, community fienst, Baitho Puja, Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu bhuj, Gojai Bhuj etc. It is cooked without oil or any spice. Boiled with Elephant Apple, Outenga, salt, green pepper, ginger. Sometimes Khar or alkali prepared from banana plantation is added, in that case elephant apple is discarded because its believed that Alkali and acid (khar-tenga) is not supposed to be taken in the same time. This matimahh or black gram is very rich in protein, laxative, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals. The nitrogen helps in arresting ache and other diseases that are caused from water like jaundice, skin rashes, athlete's foot and fungus infection. Reduces skin hair, improves skin collagen, makes skin youthful, radiant, hydrant.

Amloituup or red ant larvae

During Bohag Bihu, the Sonowal kachari people invariably hunt for AmloiTuup and eat it. It's the red ant larvae. Well cleaned and fried with Duck egg or baby Tomato. The taste is tangy and looks like white lentils. Belief is that these particular dishes have the benefits of 108 herbs in it. Very nutritious and contains all the vitamins and minerals.

Bet Gaaz

This particular shoots of cane are very hard job to prepare for cooking. They are cut, peeled from the thorny cane. Cut in small pieces. Mostly steamed with rice. Some do fry it in mustard oil. It helps to arrest abdominal worm, skin diseases Purifies blood and lymphatic system.

PoluPuuk

Sonowal Kachari people are very good weaver. They are indulged in sericulture too, expert in culture of Eri, Muga, Paat silk. Farming of these silk worms is a common thing. The worm inside the cocoon of the silk larvae is favorite delicacy among the Sonowal Kachari population. Especially it's a must in many villages during Bihu festival, mostly eaten with the rice beer. Lightly fried and served. Tastes like roasted chicken eggs. It is rich in protein, calcium, iron and Vitamin B complex.

Chengloti

A Creeper found in wild has a tangy taste, beneficial for any ENT problem and skin diseases. Fried lightly or wrapped in Tora paat or Banana leaf, kept in burning charcoal till it becomes tender. Garlic is added some times.

Fish is often added in everyday meal. Cooked with vegetables, saak, roots, herbs. Almost every vegetable dish has to have fish. The fish is not eaten in large quantity but just enough to enhance the taste and nutritional value of the dish. Number of varieties of fish are found in Assam, some in swamps, some in rivers, some in ponds & lakes. According to the fish vegetables or herbs or saak is added to the dish. The dish is very much soup like, nutritious, light, watery and delicious. The preparation varies from fish to fish. Like small fish are mostly barbequed in charcoal wrapped in Banana leaf or turmeric leaf

Sonowal Khorika

A savoury prepared from fish or meat. In summer months people remain busy in agricultural activities. It is very hard work hence need protein, calcium, vitamin etc and fish or meat is the easiest way to have it. While ploughing or plantation they often catch fish, usually in small number, not enough to prepare curry. They clean and nail these fish in thin bamboo sticks. Leave it on burning wooden charcoal fire, while they take bath or attend to other household course. When the fish barbeque smell emanates, they bring it out of fire, remove the black burnt portion and mash it. Add green chillies, cut in small pieces, mustard oil, little Khaar (Banana Alkali) and salt to taste. They eat it with Poitabhat (boiled rice cooked night before left dipped in water) or plain steamed rice. They eat meat of small animals in this process like mongoose, Monitor, Big frog (BamunBhekuli), wild rats, small wild birds, crabs, snail, water insects, insects and silk worms etc.

Pitika

Lots of vegetables like potatoes, yam, fruits, vegetables, roots, saak, etc are charcoal cooked directly or wrapped in leaves of banana, turmeric leaves, tora leaves etc. These when cooked are removed from fire and mashed with salt, mustard oil, chillies, bon dhania. These type of food is delicious, nutritious and easy to prepare.

A few chosen ingredients considered to be savory of Sonowal Kacharis

Egg

They eat duck or hen eggs, boiled mostly. They like to add it with amloituup or konbilahi. Egg is not a frequently eaten food as Sonowals believe that eating an egg means killing a dynasty of hen or duck, hence they try to avoid eating eggs as much as possible.

Xaak or herbs

Small plants naturally available or sometimes cultivated are called xaak. They can be termed as herbs. These xaak has enormous nutritional value and has the potential to cure & prevent many diseases, preserve good health. The Sonowal kacharis use xaak extensively. Infact all the curry, even daal, chicken curry, meat curry or even fish curry is indicated as xaak. Some of the xaaks are hereby mentioned.

Kochu

It is believed to be the king of xaak. Rich in iron, calcium, iodine, protein, hydrant, roughage, boron, potassium, phosphorus, copper and many other micro and macro minerals. Its often eaten when one suffers from anaemia, deficiency of blood, plasma or bone marrow. Keeps thyroid balanced, good for any gynaecological problems. However many people are allergic to it, specially people suffering from ENT problems, skin diseases etc. In certain problems like whooping cough, dry cough, or thyroid imbalance raw kachu is burnt and applied to the small tongue inside the throat. Mostly cooked with tenga or sour ingredient like unripe mangoes, tamarind, lemon etc. even though tengesi is tangy still it is never added to kachu.

Dhekia

Sonowal kacharis consider Dhekia as the queen of xaak. It is considered as the sister in law (Bhaibowari) of kachu. Both of these two is never eaten together. Rich in iron, folic acid, fatty acid, omega 3 & 6, vitamin B, A, H, K. Its very beneficial for deficiency of iron, calcium, thyroid problem. Never to be taken at night with dinner.

Bhedailota

Any stomach problem or ailment, Sonowal kachari take Bhedailota as curry. They leaves are crushed and the juice is added to 4 times of the juice. Boiled with garlic, green chillies, salt to taste. It is taken with steamed hot rice. Beneficial for stomach problem, iron deficiency. The smell of the fresh raw leaves smell terrible but the decoction is very delicious, nutritious and have great medicinal properties.

BhootJolokia

The hottest pepper of the world, is considered to be very beneficial for acidity and gastric problem. It is taken raw with food.

Bamboo Shoot

Tender Bamboo shoot of BholukaBaah is cut or crushed in small pieces and left in Earthen tekeli or bamboo vessel or glass vessel or Guard shell for three days untouched. Some add thekera to bring the sour taste and mouth watering aroma. Then it becomes edible. It is added to pork, fish to prepare savoury even eaten raw as Chutney. Good for summer days when the temperature rise very high. It makes people to tolerate heat, helpful for Urinary track infection, prevents prickly heat rash, temperature comes down in fever, good for collagen growth and to keep the skin soft, youthful and beautiful. But should be avoided if one is pregnant or wants to pregnant, during menstruation, or if one is bleeding due to cuts etc.

Posola

Banana trunk of Athiakol is cut into small pieces or crushed into small pieces. It is cooked with mustard seeds or Banana Alkali. Very beneficial for people suffering from anaemia, gynaecological disorders, heart disease, bone marrow problem, thyroid problem, strength and youthful look.

Koldil

Remarking An Analisation

It is banana flower of AthiaKol cut into vary small pieces, cooked and eaten. Very beneficial as much as posola.

Manimuni

Small herbs growing in paddy fields after the paddy is harvested or in summer days in the pirali or areas that is not much wet or under water. It is very beneficial for blood related diseases, stomach problems and hair loss arrest.

Kalmou

Living near swamp they like to eat herbs or saak grown in the swamp areas. Kalmou is water plant rich in hydrant, protein, essential vitamins and minerals. During summer Sonowal people eat it to keep their stomach cool, balance thyroid hormones.

Food and beliefs

1. Tongloti (a kind of wild creeper) is taken to arrest diarrhea. Seen, taken and proved beneficial.
2. Dhekia and Kochu (Fern & Yum) is not to be taken/eaten at the same time. It may imbalance thyroid and parathyroid hormones.
3. Fish, meat or egg should never be taken with milk or milk products, causes white patches, Leukoderma.
4. Gheelapitha (a delicacy) is not to be eaten in Magh Bihu. It is first offered to cow during Goru bihu in Bohag Bihu and than human consume it.
5. Kath alloois to be taken in Magh bihu early morning with Mati Mahh after a bath in cold water, without drying the water off body. It is believed that this will make the eater strong and healthy.

Religion & Food

The Sonowal Kachari follow two styles of Religion: The animist, who celebrate Baitho Puja, praying Lord Shiva. The other follows Naam Dharam: who follow Sri Guru Shankardev. The Shankaridontot take pork, rice beer, Chicken etc The Animists eat pork, chicken and rice beer.

Rural Vs Urban

Urbanization has brought major changes in the food habit of the people of Sonowal Kachari tribe. People have discarded many nutritious foods for new easy to prepare dishes. A survey is conducted to find the changing Trends and patterns of food habits. This phenomenon is seen more in rural and semirural areas. Whereas the urban people are trying to rediscover their age old rituals, traditions and food.

Culture and Food

BahuwaNrityo, Special trained dancers wrapped in banana leaves and musk, emitting the story of Shiva- Dakya. During this dance the dancers do not eat any food since morning till the dance is performed. Immediately after performance they jump into the nearest pond or water body. Take bath. They then fiest with Steamed rice or Sewa Bhat. Haidang, House to house community singing and blessings, by elderly men& youths, to improve community well being and bonding.Lesheri – married ladies singing & dancing, making merriment. Lokhimadorabhuz – Community fiest by household to welcome the new harvest to barn or Goral.Nokhua – when the harvest is complete and new paddy is ready to be eaten a community fiest is called where the

greater family and friends are invited.Gorokhiabhuz – teenage boys meet for community fiest, mostly in forest or grazing ground like modern picnic.Gojaibhuz – Elders meet for community fiest and discussions and future planning.

Kati Bihu

Similar to Lakhimi Puja & Diwali, but instead of God & Goddess, paddy field & Tulsi [Basil] plant is worshipped and lights are lighted in homes and fields. House & surroundings are cleaned and gardens are cleared for Ravi crops.

Magh Bihu

Community fest & fire worship, early morning community bathing, plants & trees are warmed with fire. Games are played. Sweets, rice savories are prepared and offered to guests. Dear & near ones are welcomed. Cattles are let loose till Bohag Bihu.

Bohag Bihu

Community dancing & singing, like Zeng bihu, Lecheri, Haidang Husori are performed. People follow special beauty regimes with special baths, dresses up in new clothing. Cattles are bathed and new guhali, pogha are offered with savory suited for cattles. House & surroundings are cleaned, smoked with herbs, preparation for kharif crops start.

Baitho Puja

BaithoGukhai [lord Shiva], the Supreme ancestor, is worshipped on the 1st Monday after Shiva Ratri

Rowonibhuz

Community Fiest on the first day of starting of plantation of paddy.

Lokhimadorabhuz

Community fiest by household to welcome the new harvest to barn or Goral.

Nokhua

When the harvest is complete and new paddy is ready to be eaten a community fiest is called where the greater family and friends are invited.

Gorokhiabhuz

Teenage boys meet for community fiest, mostly in forest or grazing ground like modern picnic.

Gojaibhuz

Elders meet for community fiest and discussions and future planning.

Suggestions

The researchers would like to put the following suggestions after the study.

The Sonowal Kachari food & their ingredients should be further studied specially by the botanists, nutritionists and sociologists, to find the scientific details, which will help in finding pathways for location, recognition, preservation of these food ingredients. This will help to prevent diseases that causes epidemic. Proper scientific studies will help in finding new medicines as cure to diseases, specially in Areas that resemble Assam.

The persons who recognize these natural ingredients, persons who know the usage and benefits of these ingredients, the persons who have been keeping the traditions alive by carrying on the customs should be contacted and highlighted. Their knowledge should be recorded and preserved for further studies.

Remarking An Analisation

The locations where these food ingredients are found should be reserved, no urbanization should be allowed to take place in these places. There are many natural food items which are almost on the verge of extinct like the Dhanjolokia the smallest chilly. This plant grows only if the ripe ones are eaten by the xaliki or house mynah birds and excrete. There it grows. Environment change has made these birds rare and thus the plants are not growing any more. Favorable natural surroundings should be encouraged.

The medicinal value of the food ingredients remains intact only if they are prepared as they should be or rather the traditional way. The Sonowal Kacharis have been using traditional methods to prepare the food. The recipes, preparation process should be maintained and the people involved in cooking, cuisine and restaurant business should be discouraged to bring in changes to the cooking process.

Conclusion

The Sonowal Kacharis have a rich heritage of traditions, customs, rituals that surround around food which are very nutritional yet delicious. These food are still easily available but many are getting extinct due to pollution and deforestation. Most of the food ingredients are available naturally and cannot be cultivated. Its good that even in competition of western fast food, young generation still enjoy the

traditional food that has been eaten generation after generation. These food, dishes should be more focused and the good news should be communicated through mass media. There is ample scope for the food to be commercialized. These will improve the scope for employment and economic development.

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