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FOOD HABIT OF THE KARBI: TRADITION AND CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The Karbi is one of the most prominent tribe of North-East India. These Karbi people generally reside in hilly places and by the side of the river, which variously impacted their food habits. Rice, different leafy vegetables, meat, fish etc. are mainly included in their food habit. Generally they don't prefer to take oil and spices on their cooking; they prefer to take boiled food. Rice, meat, fish, vegetables etc. traditionally they put inside green bamboo pipe and then put the pipe in fire and boil the food. Both sour and bitter dishes are included in their food system. Meat and dry fish are much favoured by them. The Karbis who reside in the plain area are generally influenced by the food habit of the plain people yet their cuisine in most extent similar to their ancestor. Although their different traditional food items are served in different rituals and festivals yet the food habits of the present generation has changed. Under the influence of globalization they started using modern food habits by using oil, spices etc. Further they adopted the various food habits of other countries like the habit of eating *momo*, *chowmin*, *roll* etc. Again by reducing their local beer *apong* they take tea, coffee and other such beverages.

This present paper will try to explore the traditional food habits of the said tribe and about the change comes into their food habit.

Key Words: Karbi, Food Habits, Globalization, Tradition, Change Etc.

Introduction:

Karbi is one of the most prominent tribe of North-East India. Karbi people are mainly resided in Karbi Anglong district and some of their offspring's are also seen spreading in other district of Assam i.e. Golaghat, Nagaon, Darrang, Kamrup, Lakhimpur etc. They generally take their livelihood from agriculture. Linguistically the Karbis belong to the Tibeto-Berman group.

From the folk lore of the Karbis it has been observed that during the long past, once they lived on the banks of the rivers Kalang and the Kapili. During the reign of the Dimasa Kachari kings, they moved to the hills and some of them entered into Jayantia hills and others moved towards north east by crossing river Barapani.

Predominantly Karbi people are animist but as time passes they grabbed Christianity. Moreover it has been observed that some of them have been taken *Sanaton* Hindu religion. Also some of them were influenced by Mahapurush Sri Manta Sankardeva's new Vaishnavite idealism.

As the Karbi people mainly live in hills areas and so lots of distinguished characteristics have been seen in their food habits. Even the food habits of the hills Karbis are different from the other Karbis reside in plain areas.

Methodology:

The research methodology applied here is descriptive and analytical. It is based on both primary and secondary sources i.e. data collected from mainly field studies. Further information are also collected from books, internet etc.

Discussion:

The main food of Karbi community is rice. Moreover different leafy vegetables, meat, fish etc. are mainly included in their food habit. Traditionally the Karbi community don't prefer to take oil and spices in their



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cooking. Generally they prefer to take boiled food. In the traditional karbi dishes sesame seed powder replaces oil and naturally grown herbs like *Lopong* leaves are used instead of spice while *Jirlang*- a kind of garlic, *tihaso*- a wild turmeric available in the hills, are used for flavour and taste. Both sour and bitter dishes are included in their food system. Meat and dry fish are much favoured by them. Further they includes some kind of reptiles, silkworms etc. in their food items. Small fish mixed with local wine and fermented in bamboo tube is an important delicacy. In Karbi community bamboo shoot has been considered as one of the delicious dish and sometimes they add bamboo shoot with other food to get a sweet smell.

Pork meat with bamboo shoot is one of the most significant cuisines of the Karbi people. This type of cuisine is very easily absorbable further it can be made from natural resources as the people can keep boar in their own household. One types of alcohol they called as '*Hor*' is one of the indispensable liquid which they generally serve in every social event. Moreover it is used by them as a folk medicine for different diseases.

The nutritional health status of karbi people was quite well. Hard work, pollution free environment and consumption of several forest based nutrients and antioxidants that keep the adult population healthy. The Karbi people have been using many wild vegetables in their daily diet which compensates their caloric requirements. Further their common food dry fishes are very rich in phosphorus and dry meat are rich in high protein.

Rituals-Food:

In every ritual related with birth ceremony, marriage or death they generally serve pork, chicken meat with rice. The local beer '*hor*' is an indispensable part of every ritual. Among them generally they don't follow the fasting system in their rituals. But influencing by Hinduism they start doing fast during rituals where they have been taking light food specially fruits. In the rituals related worship also they offers pork, chicken meat and rice with '*hor*' to their deities. The main festivals of the karbi's are *Somangkan*, *Rongker*, *Sojun*, *Rasinja* etc. In different festivals also they usually provide pork, chicken meat curry with alkali and rice powder. Such type of curry is known as *Hanmoi*. This *hanmoi* curry they offered to their deities. In every festival they serve the local beer *Hor*.

Method of Cooking and Specific Vessels used for them:

Meat, fish, vegetables etc. traditionally they put inside green bamboo pipe and then put the pipe in fire to boil the food. Like curry they also take the rice boiled in bamboo pipe. Some food items like dry meat, fish, leafy vegetables etc. they usually wrapped in banana, turmeric and other such types of leaves and put all these into hot coal for eating. They also take some types of dishes seasoned with alkali. Small dry fish, dry deer meat with brinjal or papaya, pork meat with black pulse and alkali etc. are considered very tasty as well as healthy food. Besides all these they also take some types of food like fish, meat, tomato, brinjal, bitter guard, potato etc. which they roasted for eating purposes. Moreover the roasting pork is a very popular food among the Karbis. Karbi people usually prepare *Har* by mixing boil rice with different medicinal plant and keep all these in earthen pot for three four days and use it with water.

Thus from all these sayings it can be said that Karbi have generally follow six methods mainly to prepare their food and dishes. These different methods of cooking are named as *kalangdang* or *ki-up*(the method of steaming), *kangmoi*(the method of preparing dishes with alkali), *kiphi*(the method of roasting), *kangthu*(the method of steaming), *kimung*(food prepared using green bamboo pipe) and *karnu Pakrengsoi*(the method of toasting).

It's Cultural Aspects:

Food displays as an important mark of one's culture, ethnicity and religion. In Karbi culture too different food items have been offered to God in different occasions. It reflects their belief in divinity. Offering local beer *Hor* and meat with rice is a common practice they follow in their every ritual.



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It's Social Aspects:

They produced their crop unitedly through *jhum* cultivation besides it has been seen that they have been assembled for community fishing. In different rituals they commonly take the local beer, meat and rice. Producing and taking food together reflects the unity of the tribe.

It's Economic Aspects:

All the food which they have been taking has some economic benefits. As all mentioned food are prepared from locally available resources and very less amount of money is required for procurement of materials used for the said food preparation.

Folk Associated with Food:

Karbi people have been using different folk songs in different situation. For example during the time of *jhum* cultivation they used to sing as song namely *Aarakura*, which is very melodious. Some lines of this song are:

“Kurle iya o’ ho-i
Longhe iya o’ ho-i
Kurle iya hoi hoi hoi
E Ulang he he iya
O’ hai dei
O’ ulang he he iya
O’ hai dei

Ulang he he iya o’ hai dei

*Ulang he iya hai
E seng kan awatar jal heng
Ke map akheti pang niye
Nye ni jar doi abang he...” (Siphung Gunggang,p.122)*

The meaning of the song; we are going to start *jhum* cultivation. O! The deity of crops blessed us as if we are able to do it properly and filled our field with crops. Come on brothers we all do it joyously.

Change comes into their food habits:

In the present scenario lots of changes have been seen in their socio-cultural elements. Such changes have been seen in case of their food habit too. Although all these said food items are served in different rituals and festivals yet the food habit of present generation has slightly changed. The main reasons behind these changes are likely to be;

- Development of Industrial Revolution
- Changes in Thinking Process
- Changes comes in Life Style
- Impact of Globalization

Under the influence of all these they started modern food habits by using oil, spices etc. Further they adopted the various food habits of other countries also. Fast food like momo, chawmin, roll etc. is now most popular among present generation. Further Berger, Pizza, Hotdog; Sandwich etc. are also included in the recipes of modern generation. Instead of boiled food now fried rice, *pollaw*, *biriyani*, chilly chicken, chicken butter *masala*, *tonduri* chicken, mutton korma etc. are popular among them. Traditionally local beer *hor* was the chief beverage among the Karbis but now tea, coffee and other such beverages also they take. Moreover different types of local and foreign wine they take. Apart from these cold drinks like Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Miranda etc. are mostly popular among the present generation.

Conclusion:

If we look all these scientifically then we come to one conclusion that the traditional food habits of the Karbi tribe has no bad effects as all these they obtained from the natural resources. All these are environment friendly and



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they never used any chemicals, pesticides and insecticides during cultivation and harvesting, which equilibrium the bio-diversity of the region. Now a day it has been seen that their food items such as rice prepared in bamboo tube, pork with bamboo shoots, boiled chicken with various leaf in bamboo tube etc. are becoming very popular across the country.

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