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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FOOD-HABITS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM OF BODOS OF ASSAM: A STUDY.

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Abstract

Food habit of human being depends on food commodities available in the area. Food commodities encourage Cuisine, preservation, presentation and traditional knowledge on that. Cultural discourses of a particular community relates on the food habit they practices in the area. It has sole relation with religion and custom of a community. Bodo food habit is peculiar to other community having different type of traditional knowledge. The paper tries to approach the traditional technological knowledge in regards of food preparation and preservation of the particular community the Bodos.

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Introduction:-

Food habit of a community depends on ecology. It also has to depend on availability of food products, soil conditions, and tradition of beliefs, practices, social structure, and religious bindings. Besides, it relates with the community knowledge, how the foods are prepared, preserved, and discoursed in the context. The preparation, presentation and preservation knowledge are scattered in man and women folk in societies. Tradition of fishing, hunting, collection of food grains, leaves, roots, flowers, stems, buds, insects etc. have peculiar knowledge system. Bodo is a tribe from sub group of Mongoloid or the Kiratas, otherwise known as the Indo Mongoloids or Indo Tibetans. The vast tract of land inhabited by the Bodo people in the Terrain and build up Zone of Himalayan sub mountain region is only a plain land and highly suited for agriculture. They follow the Bathou religion, which has five principles. Bathouni Bandwa Bandwba, Sijauni siria Siriba, Thaigirni Khonga Khongba, Siphungni gudunga gudungba, Bwrai Bathouni raoa fongba. Its rendering is that lighten of Bathou is of five, Siri (line) of Sijou is five lines, hole of Siphung (the flute) is five, holy speeches of Bathou is also of five. They are living in a scattered manner throughout the North Eastern region of India. There are some small Bodo pocket areas also outside India- that is in Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Though they are in different climatic condition their habits of consuming food commodities, preparation of foods, fondness in living are partially alike. Being a tribe, their food habits, tradition of food collection, gathering, preservation, preparation are partially alike to North Eastern Indian tribes. The paper tries to study the Food habits of the Bodos specially living in the state of Assam. This group of people generally scattered in the bank of rivers, wetlands, nearby forests, hillsides. They have habit of domestication of animals like, cow, goat, pig, dogs, cats, hens, pigeon, duck etc. They gather, collect food from nearby jungles, forests, wetland like beelw (lake), hakhor (small pond), Dwima (river), gathwn nijwra (jan-juri), beher (pitoni), etc. Their collection of fish food from wetlands is interesting. It has folkloristic value. They have some creative knowledge in collection of foods. They follow some natural laws and customary law on those activities. Bodo women collect fish, Vegetables, stems, roots, leaves, buds, flowers as their food from nearby forests of open field free of costs. They cultivate food grains for their own for whole the year. Now days with the advent of society and growing population large quantity of food grains are produced.

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Methodology:-

The approach of the study is empirical and analytical. For the study of the topic participant, observation method is applied to know the food tradition of the community people. Different food preparation technology was observed in the pockets of Bodo inhabitants. Individual interviews were taken house to house in remote villages. For the secondary data books and other local magazines, journals, leaflets, pamphlets are studied. Food tradition of long years back was informed by old age people.

Importance of the topic:-

Food habit is an indispensable part of culture. The habit of consuming food varies with the variation of geographical area and community. Different types of traditional food habits will be focused and the food tradition of the community will be known to all. It has academic as well as cultural importance.

Rice the principal food of the Bodos:-

The Bodo food habit is simple and Ayurveda food. They are conscious in consuming food. Rice is the principal food of the Bodos 'this is supplemented by a plentiful of vegetables sometimes procured from the neighboring forests and it is seldom that they do not manage to procure some kind of animal food, flesh or fish.' (Brahma, Kameswar p.16) Bodos are mostly non-vegetarian from its early ages. They cultivate rice in two seasons and these are known as Ashu (which is cultivated in April-May) and Maishali (which is cultivated in the month of July-August). Rice roughly classified as the larger and the smaller grains (maima and maisa) (Endle, S.1990 p.14) cultivated three types of rice which falls under Ashu, Maisali and Baowa.

Rice preparation:-

Rice, which is consumed, is cooked by mixing sufficient amount of water on it. Methods of preparing rice are cooking, shacking with sieves on boiling water, steaming on boiling water on earthen pot are most common among the Bodos. These types of rice are generally consumed with different delicious curries and fried items.

Wngkham homnai:-

Cleaned rice (mairong) is boiled on a boiling water pot. When it cooked on steam of boiling water then it is called 'wngkham homnai'. this varieties of rice is made both sticky and non-sticky cleaned rice.

Rice cake preparation:-

The Bodos have the habit of consuming rice in roasted, steamed, and boiled shape. Preparation of different kinds of food items made from mairong or cleaned rice is their tradition. They prepare Phitha (cake) rice items like Phitha huguma a kind of **phitha** made of rice powder. Phitha huguma in some other places it is called **thingkhli** Phitha. Thingkhli is a small earthen pot in Bodo language and from this small earthen pot its name may derive as thingkhli phitha. It is made with rice powder of Jwsa or Joha (a kind of scented rice) specially. Now a day with the shortage of such type of rice, other rice (except sticky rice) is also used. In preparation of this phitha a sufficient amount of rice is wet for three to four hours. In festive season, they wet the large quantity of rice for phitha for whole night or eight to nine hours in normal water. Next morning the wet rice is grinded in **uwal** or **dingkhi** (dheki) and well shacked with sieve on 'songrai' or dala (a kind of bamboo made big tray) then a little salt, and little water is sprinkled and again shacked ready to prepare. An earthen pot with pouring water is boiled on and the prepared rice is kept on a 'khotha' or a small pot made from coconut cell. The rice powder is spread on the pot and a little 'til' is spread on it and again rice powder is spread gently. The rice powder pot is wrapped with a flat cleaned cloth and places it on the boiling pot. One has to mind that the pot should not be full with water (keeping below the pot neck) that the boiling water may reach the rice powder and damage in wet. The only water vapors heat will cook the 'pitha'. After getting a few rotations, the hot pitha gets ready to serve. Like this, the other non-sticky rice phitha or rice cake is prepared without sugar, salt or other materials is called 'Dangua Fitha'. This is a non-material without luxury phitha only with rice powder. The word 'dangua' in Bodo is used for an aged bachelor man or having no wife or female life partner. As the phitha is without any materials except rice powder this is called the 'dangua phitha'. This phitha is prepared only for offering in the name of gods and goddesses or departed soul of their households. The other rice made foods in Bodo are enthap phitha, Phitha, phitha Sithao, hapina Phitha, sSibing phitha, narengkhol phitha, gur methai phitha (cake with molasaes), laru, swurai, swurai dakha, sira, muri, akhai, kharai etc.

Rice Preservation:-

Rice which is to cooked are preserved in the pot this is called 'Maihendw' a pot of rice keeping. This pot is generally of earthen or bamboo made pasted with cow dung. The pot is placed on a secrete place free from reach of insects. They had the habit of sacrifice of chicken in the name of mother Lakshmi whom they worship as Bima Mainao in different occasions and festivals. Rice is treated as Bima Mainao among them. Before pouring out rice for preparation they salutes by saying 'hey ai mainao nwngkhwu songnw lanwswi nwng gajri da mwnde'. English rendering. Hey mother Lakshmi! It's going to take you for cooking you don't mind.

Onla Khari:-

'Onla Khari' a kind of rice powder curry is delicious to Bodos. This kind of curry is peculiar and its delicacy relates to the cuisine of Bodo women. This is made with simple and a little ingredients taking rice powder, cloves of garlic, ginger, salt, water, alkali and other substances that they wish to prepare. Different kind of onla khari curries are onla khari dao bedor (onla khari chicken), Onla fakhri (Onla with spinach leafy vegetable), Onla Oma bedor (Onla with pork), Onla ouwa mewa (Onla with Bamboo Shoot), Onla mwithru bibar (Onla with papaya flower), Onla khumbra gwan (onla with dry Guard), Onla with thaisuri bibar (onla with amara flower), Onla Mulagwan (Dry radish with Onla) Onla Khwma bibar (Onla with a kind of itching plant's flower), Onla Sebali Bibar (Onla With Sebali Bibar) Onaala Kharong Bibar, Onla Barsigi Bibar, Onla Khusia Gwan, Onla Bwthiya Gwan (Onla with dry loch fish), Onla Hangsw Bedor (Onla with duck meat), Onla Nathur Gwan (onla with dry prawn), Onlakhari lwnthi megong (Onla with a kind of creeper vegetable), Onla kharwi dousrem (Onla with a kind of sour creeper leaf) Onla kahri latha (Onla with Caterpillar), onlakhari thaigir (Onla with Dillenis Indica) Onlakahrwi Khunthai (Onla with small rounded bitter fruit).

Leafy Vegetable:-

Bodo woman are expert in collecting vegetable and leafy vegetable from their nearby forests or open fields. They collect different kinds of edible plants and leafy vegetables, which are traditionally consumed from the time immemorial. Most of the women go to collect vegetables in leisure time. Besides the collection of wild vegetables, they express their feelings in their day-to-day life. They get up early in the morning, prepare food from collected vegetables and fishes. Among those 'Onthaibajab', 'Khuduna', 'Bwigri mwigong', 'Gangdema', 'Samlaothi', 'buri thakhan', 'Kheradafini', 'kharwkhw mwigong', 'lwnthi', 'lapha saikho', 'nwrsing' or 'nerswn', Khunthai, 'Singri', 'Buthua', 'thaso' (arum) 'dhumphul' or 'khangswr', 'daofenda', 'daogang jwla', 'sibung', 'Mande' or Manjiya, helangsi, 'agjwla', 'manimuni', 'podina', haijeng, 'Khasithara' or 'gonger dundiya', 'dundia', 'sibru', 'dwusrem', 'ganga mala', 'maisundri', 'khifibendwng', 'burithakhon', 'burahood', 'harsiu', 'khungkha', 'Tharai', 'kouti', 'khaila', 'gwmbri', 'simfri', 'fosothia', 'hagrani thalir mwigong' 'barsigi bibar'. These vegetables are locally collected in the area. These are plucked, cut, chopped, minced, sliced and grated according to their need before preparation of delicacy food. It is worth as traditional medicines mentioned that most of the wild vegetables are used among the Bodos.

Cultivated vegetables:-

Bodos have the habit of cultivation of vegetables in rainy and springtime seasons. Rainy season vegetables are 'Khumbra' (whiteguard), 'Jwgwnar' (pumpkin), Bhol(bhol), jingkha, thaisum' (cucumber), khangkhrikhola, mwitha' (a kind of sour leaf), 'lesra' or 'sobai bima' (a kind of bean), 'dhunduli' (poto like fruit vegetable), Potol, 'banlu' (chilly), 'Thainbeng' (bangiinAssamese). 'Haijeng' (ginger), 'Haldwi' (turmeric) 'phanthao' (brinjal) Gwkha khangkhrikhola, Thaso (arum), Rahar, Sobai (lantil), Til etc. Among the winter season vegetables cabhage, cauliflower, tomato, potato, onion, garlic, 'dundia' (dhania), brinjal, phanthao gwkhwi (sour brinjal), banlu(chilly), sukha mwikhi (sour leaf), 'lai' (spinach), 'sobai' (Lantil), Pulses like -musur, khesari, mug (mung) etc.

Fish used as food:-

Among other delicacies of Kachari is what is known as dried fish (na gwan) i.e. the very small fish left on the surface of in undated land after the water has subsided. This is collected in large quantities near the bank of the Brahmaputra and carried north and to the Duars where exchanged for rice and Silk (Eri etc). This small fish is not cured or prepared in anyway lout simply dried in the sun and is very far from being attractive to the eye or the nose especially to the latter. They catch fishes from water with the help of different traps like 'jekhai', 'sen', 'pholo', 'khobai' 'je' (net) 'bwrsi' (hook) etc. enumerable fishes are by the community people. They say that fishes are larger in species then the rice they cultivate.

3.4.1. There are more than forty-five varieties of fishes in the book written by Bhaben Narzi 'Boro kochari samaj aru sanskriti'. Except those new species are discovered by the Bodo people. Of these 'na mudla', 'na khanda', 'na khodal'. These fishes are mostly found in the foothills of Bhutan in the Brahmaputra valley.

Nafam preparation:-

'Nafam' is most delicious fish made food of the community. Fish for preparation of nafam is cleaned and washed with water. Then it is dried in sun light till it got fully dried. The dried fish are grinded on owal or dingkhi (dheki) first then when the fish are grinded in dust white guard, black arum stick and man kachu sticks are grinded with fish powder. Then the grinded mixed fish powder with white guard, arum stick and man kachu are put into bamboo tube tightly. On the fish powder a piece of plantain leaf is covered and alkaline powder is poured over the leaf and paste of mud on the top is poured. Then dry thalir laikhong or dry sheath of plantain is covered on bamboo tube and tight with bamboo split. The tube is put inside the soil for three or four months. It can be preserved for whole years or so. When fishes are not available nafam is prepared with varieties of vegetables to make delicious.

Na Menai:-

Generally the small fishes are cleaned and kept on smooth new plantain leaf a little salt is sprinkled. And the fish is covered with plantain leaf tightly. Then the fish covered packed is given on charcoal. The packed would be rotate until it ready. When it got ready a little mustered oil, chilly may mix on it. Sometimes when fishes are spoiled then a few lemon buds may be given on roasting. It preserves the spoiling fish and a kind of good smell comes out from that.

Folk literature relating to food:-

They have also another Khuga methai(folk songs), mwnthwr (mantras or chants), bathra bhao(proverbs), bathra fandai(riddles), bathra (speeches) etc. Those narratives, genres provide recreational values to the community. For examples-

Song:

Fwi hai lwgwfw

Halws Bilwao helangsi meigong

khanw thangni

Sukhu Dukhuni Khwthakhw

Fwrmailaini

Ay Afayabw Hora Hora

Ada Bajwiyabw Swiya Swiya

Jwngni Bwiswalai Bargolangbay

Jwnglai Gwjaolangbay.

English Rendering:-

Come friends, let's go

For plucking Helangsi (Leafy Vegetables)

In the halws lake

Let us share our Joy and sorrows,

Our parents do not pay attention to our marriage

Our brother and sister in law have no well wish on us.

We are over aged (Now)

We have floated now.

Song:-

Thing Thopho thopho

Bara masala

Na bedor mwnbwla

Kharwi ondwa

Hathaiyao Thangdwng

Gongana gongtham labwdwng

Nwng dam Ang dam

De burwi damdw dam

De burwi damdw deAng mwsani

English version:-

Thing Thafa Thafa twelve spices
If fish and meat is available
Alkali and ondwa (Alkali with rice powder)
Gone to market purchased three Gongwana
You play, I play
Oh! Dear, play (Yet)
Oh dear play (now)
I'll perform dance (now)

Like this Bodos have bathra bhao relating to food habits i.e.
Na gwanabw bidwi dwiyw.
I.e. Dry fish also gives egg
Literally: - The unexpected may be expected.

Lai hwba Lapha Khayw:-

I.e. if gives chance to pluck lai
Then pluck lapha
Literally:-If you give one chance then he takes more chances.

Jouni Phukhri, Ongkhamni ali:-

Bedorni akhai
I.e. pond of wine
Heaps of rice
Parched of meat.
Literally:-Profusion of rice wine and meat.
(Rashmi Brahma)

Food as means of problem solving:-

They use food as a means of gathering and decision making. Major problems are to be solved by a family. They after food as respect and request to overcome their problem communally. They get together for having food and in taking food discussed various problems arise in them. Marriage, funeral ceremonies of death person, building houses, harvesting paddy and other crops from farm are the gathering of their community members. Those are provided by food items. Battle nut and leafs are offered as a sign of respect in the Bodo society. A pair of battle nut and battle leafs are offered to beg something. I valuable or to get relieve from the sin or offences done by a person in the society. Earlier couple went to their guests or parents in laws to respect them with a pair of 'jou fithai' (rice beer pot) and a cock in the month of "Magh" and 'Baisagu' of the Bangla months.

Alkali preparation:-

Consumption of alkali among Bodos is an age old habit. Production of alkali in among them is very simple. They called alkali as 'Kharwi' in Bodo. Kharwi in Bodo is prepared from banana, papaya, bamboo, pulse plants, etc. Banana or papaya plants are pieced into long shaped and dried on hot sunny days. Or the stems of the banana plants are sliced and dried. The n these are burned and the ashes are mixed with a little water and make patted as cake or kept without making laddu inside a kharwi kho(a bamboo made bag with straw).

Alkaline curry:-

There are different types of alkaline curries in Bodo food habit. Among those wngkhri gwbab, sobai khari, narzi khari.onla kharwi dao bador (rice powder alkaline curry with chicken), dao bador sobai kharwi (Lantil alkaline with chicken curry), oua mewai dao onla(Bamboo shot , rice powder curry and chicken), ongkhri gwbab (alkaline curry),narji gwbab (dry bitter leave alkaline), moithru Na kharwi (papaya fish curry), khumbra gwan onla (dry white guard alkaline onla) khumbra kharwi (white guard alkaline curry), kharong bibar onla kharwi, khwma bibar onla kharwi, mwithru bibar nagwan,lwnthi onla, lai bibar onla,thaisuri onla,thaisuri bibar onla ,narji onla, thaigir onla, mula gwan onla, khusia gwan sobai, hangsw onla, dwousrem onla, khunthai onla, onla fakhri etc.

Bathwn preparation:-

They prepare 'bathwn' (shutni) from crab, caterpillar, silkworm, ganjema (a kind of water insect), 'enkhaori' (an water insect), dried fish, gusengra (an land hole insect), 'ganda galeb' (an water insect), 'guma gwthao' (a paddy field grasshopper), gumadaorai (grazing field grasshopper), 'gumagodol' (a lake grasshopper), 'guma khofri' (grasshopper), 'guma narenga' (large kind of grasshopper)

Conclusion:-

The food habits and traditional knowledge from generation and it keeps the health of the Bodo people healthy. The food tradition of the Bodos has deep relationship with the culture, social and economic development also. Challenging food articles of Bodos due to multicultural consumption reduce of forest lands, wetlands, soil erosion, industrialization, earth filling on lakes, death river, encroachments are leading them ignorant in regards of food knowledge. It also helps in losing Energy, protein, calcium, iron, vitamins, Thiamins, Niacin etc causes different deficiencies in health sector. On the other hand tradition of preparation, preservation of food is also being changed with the change of technologies. If those could demonstrate scientifically in the modern world it may help them to know the people of the world.

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