



Exploring the Traditional Nourishment Customs and Cuisine of the Koch Rajbangshi Community of Assam.

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Abstract:

The traditional eating customs and cuisine of the Rajbangshi people, an indigenous population that located in North Bengal, sections of lower Assam, northern Bangladesh (Rangpur Division), the Terai region of Eastern Nepal, Bihar, and Bhutan. The study looks at the community's cooking customs, emphasizing the value of using materials that are found locally, preparing them simply, and creating traditional meals. In order to highlight the depth and variety of the community's culinary traditions, the research also explores their traditional sweets, drinks, and seasonal foods. In order to support the preservation of the Rajbangshi community's cultural identity, this study attempts to record and save their traditional dietary traditions and cuisine. The traditional eating habits of the Rajbangshis, an indigenous royal population, will be the main topic of this paper's investigation. The community's rich cultural legacy includes oral traditions in language, dance, music, medicine, song, home construction, and agriculture.

According to the Rajbangshi people's eating habits, they mostly eat rice, cereals, various pithas (skillfully baked breads), etc. Green leaves from various plants and vegetables are also consumed by them, along with several traditional curries like as Shidol, Shuktani, Chheka, Pelka, and Bhelka. Moreover, the residents of this village also heavily consume Jolpaan or Nokul, Chira, Muri, Dai (curd), and Pontha or else Poitha Bhat (wet rice). The majority used to eat fish with all the seasonings. When it comes to eating meat, these individuals are drawn to goat and duck. Pork and chicken are of little interest to anyone.

Key Words: traditional, Rajbangshi people, indigenous, culinary tradition, royal population investigation, shidol, Shuktani, Chheka, Pelka, Pontha Bhat, Nokul.

Introduction:

The Koch Rajbangshi is an indigenous group in northern West Bengal and Bangladesh, originating from the Koch kingdom founded by Biswa Singha in 1515 A.D. The history of the Koch Rajbangshi is controversial, with scholars arguing that both terms refer to the same group of people with indistinguishable anthropological, cultural, and chronological legacies. The term "Koch" has been interpreted differently by scholars, with some arguing that it signifies a Hindu caste and others that the term has lost its original significance.

Currently, the Koch Rajbangshi people are found in North Bengal, Assam, Garo Hills, Purnia, Kishanganj and Katihar Districts of Bihar, Jhapa and Birat Nagar Districts of Nepal, Rangpur, East Dinajpur Districts, and some parts of West Maymensingh, Northern Rajshahi and Bogura Districts of Bangladesh and lower parts of Bhutan.

Despite the importance of traditional food habits and cuisine in the Rajbangshi community, there is a lack of documentation and research on this topic. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the traditional food habits and cuisine of the Rajbangshi community, highlighting the significance of locally sourced ingredients, simple cooking methods, and traditional dishes.

Objective of the Study:

1. The purpose of this study is to record and examine the Rajbangshi community's traditional eating customs and cuisine, including their ingredients, cooking techniques, and meals.
2. The significance of locally derived ingredients in Rajbangshi cuisine and their role in enhancing the community's food security and sense of cultural identity will be investigated in this study.
3. This study will look at how the Rajbangshi community's traditional eating customs and cuisine are employed to preserve social ties and cultural legacy, as well as how they define their cultural identity.
4. The Rajbangshi community's traditional cooking skills and recipes, including ingredient combinations and preparation procedures, will be gathered and documented for this project.
5. Including the use of new products and cooking techniques, this study will look at how the Rajbangshi community's traditional eating customs and cuisine have been impacted by modernity and globalization.

literature review

Literature Review of the Topic has been discussed on the basis of the following categories: They are Traditional Food Habits, Cuisine and cooking methods, Nutritional Value of Traditional Dishes and Impact of Modernization and Globalization

Traditional Food Habits

The importance of traditional eating customs in the Rajbangshi community is highlighted by research by Chakraborty (2017), who also stresses the use of locally obtained products and straightforward cooking techniques. In a similar vein, Roy's (2019) study explores the traditional eating patterns of the Rajbangshi people, emphasizing the significance of vegetables, fish, and rice in their diet.

Cuisine and Cooking Methods

The Rajbangshi community's traditional food is examined in research by Ghosh (2015), which emphasizes the use of regional products and age-old cooking techniques including boiling and steaming. Similar to this, Chatterjee's (2018) study looks at the Rajbangshi community's traditional cooking techniques, emphasizing the use of wood-fired stoves and clay pots.

Nutritional Value of Traditional Dishes

A study by Mukherjee (2016) analyzes the nutritional value of traditional Rajbangshi dishes, highlighting the high protein and fiber content of their diet. Similarly, research by Das (2020) examines the nutritional value of traditional Rajbangshi snacks, focusing on the importance of locally sourced ingredients.

Impact of Modernization and Globalization

Bhattacharya (2019) examines how industrialization and globalization have affected the Rajbangshi community's traditional eating customs and cuisine, emphasizing the use of novel products and cooking techniques. Similar to this, research by Saha (2020) looks at how globalization has affected the Rajbangshi community's traditional food, emphasizing the disappearance of traditional products and cooking techniques.

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Methodology:

To Study various traditional food habits of the Rajbangshi people, qualitative, Quantitative, Historical and analytical method has been followed up. To prepare of this paper, we have followed both Primary and Secondary sources. Primary sources of data comprise of interview, personal contact, census data and other associated techniques. The Primary data is collected through individual and group interview. The study is also required to include relevant books of prominent authors Research work of some Research scholars, data collected from website and other information pertaining to the work as secondary data. The

study for the traditional food habits and food items among Rajbangshi people have been conducted in some Rajbangshi dominated village areas lower part of Assam

Historical background of Eating Customs and Food Products of Rajbangshi People:

In essence, the Koch Rajbangshi clan is a farming community. Their primary crops are pulse maize, wheat, and rice. For most people in this town, rice is their staple diet. The Rajbangshi people in this region also eat a lot of wheat bread (ruti) in addition to rice. Along with veggies, people often eat rice and pulses. The Rajbangshi people have diverse eating habits, cultures, and rituals depending on where they live. Even after that, we saw that they shared certain significant conventional eating behaviors. Meat, fish, rice, milk, and green vegetables are the staple foods of the Koch Rajbangshi population. Rajbangshi society consumes meat like mutton, sheep, buffalo, duck, and fish, with pork and chicken rarely eaten. Kalipuja is a popular time for sheep meat consumption.

However, among the Rajbangshi peoples, some traditional eating practices stand out. According to Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal's book "The Rajbangshis of North Bengal," these peoples' staple foods were Sukta, Pelka, Sukati, and Kachu Shak. In his book "Cooch Behar Loko Sanskriti," Dilip Kumar Dey also discusses the ancient Rajbangshi cuisine. He also made reference to the Pelka, Shidol, and Chhekha. Kolar Mocha, Kulti Kalai, Jhinuk, Shamuk, Takoya, Atiya Kola, Sajna Pata, Lafa Shak, Doi-Chira, Telani Cha, Manamuni, Basok Pata, Aamsi, Patashak, Khuria, Battua, Dheki Shak, Thakuri Kalai, Khesari Kalai, Gunda, Muri, Moya, and other traditional cuisines are also part of this community.

The primary focus of the current research is the traditional eating habits of the Rajbangshi people of northeastern India, as well as its biological and medicinal significance. During the study, the customary eating patterns of the Rajbangshi people are observed. It is also observed that the ingredients of these traditional food vary in region to region. However, a brief discussion of some of the community's most precious old-style eating customs is provided below.

Stale Rice

Stale rice, or panta bhat, is also quite popular and well-known in this community, as well as in other communities throughout Bangladesh and India. Making this stale rice is quite simple. This meal is made using rice that has been soaked overnight, usually in water. This dish is typically eaten with mashed potatoes (alu bharta), salt, onion, chile, and other ingredients in the morning. This meal has a lot more nutrients than regular rice, including calcium, potassium, salt, and iron.

Sidol

Among the Koch Rajbangshi community members that reside across our nation, sidol is one of the most significant and often consumed delectable foods. Ingredients needed to make this delectable dish were fish (locally known as Dhutra Mach, Chata Mach, Chanda Mach, Puthi Mach, etc.), Maan Kachu (a kind of arum), mustard oil, and turmeric. According to a middle-aged Rajbangshi woman I spoke with during my interview, Dhutra fish should be preferred while making Sidol. In her opinion, Sidol is made more delicious if Dhutra fish are used to prepare it in exchange for other little fish. The Rajbangshi households have a saying that is frequently used in reference to Dhutra fish. The saying goes, "Shaghair modhey Putra ar Macher Modhey Dhutra." This proverb denotes the importance provided by the Rajbangshi people on fish they generally prefer for better taste is Dhutra, a kind of tiny fish.

Chheka

Chheka is a popular and significant traditional dish among Rajbangshi people, second only to the Sidol. The pseudo stem of *Mocha balbisiana* kola and the bulb, or underground stem of the plant, are the main components of Chheka. The Koch Rajbangshi people's eating patterns include chheka as a fundamental component. Actually, chheka is an alkaline fluid. It functions similarly to baking powder. Chhekas come in a wide variety. The ladies of Koch Rajbangshi are very skilled in making several types of Chheka. These include Kachu Patar Chheka Sidoler Chheka, Maj dal Chheka, Napha or Lapha saqer Chheka, Chaal kumrar Chheka, and Nali Pata Chheka. Consuming this dish is said to be very beneficial for managing gas and acidity as well as for preventing constipation.

Shuktani

Another well-liked traditional dish among the Koch Rajbangshi group is sukati, commonly known as shuktani. The primary constituents of Shuktani are jute leaves (Deshi Patar Pata), salt, and other additives. After being sprayed with salt, it is allowed to dry in the sun. The dried leaves are subsequently stored. Shuktani is an oil-free substance that may be consumed the following morning on an empty stomach after being soaked overnight. It is said to improve human digestion to a certain extent. This diet is very much popular among Rajbangshi People to eradicate acidity and constipation from human body.

Pelka

This traditional meal is also regarded by the Rajbangshi people as being very delicious. A highly intriguing song that expresses a preference for pelka or velka is popular in Rajbangshi community. "Kai randibe mojar pelkani, sawatak thuiya jaw, O rasher biani" are the song's main lines. Typically, a variety of green vegetable leaves are used to make Pelka. There are several different kinds of Pelkas, including Kochupatar Pelka, Sajnapatar Pelka, and Napha Shaqer Pelka. The main materials needed to make Pelka are Chilly, Chheka, Garlic, PuiShak, and Sajna Pata (drumstick leaves).

Fotkani

This traditional dish is very significant and well-liked by the Koch Rajbangshi people. This dish requires simple ingredients like green chile, garlic, onion, chheka, chira, and kachu shaq (arum leaves). Wheat powder is sometimes used in place of Chira. It is regarded as a nutritious meal in this community.

Shamukh or Snail

Shamukh is also often consumed by members of this culture. They often favor eating round snails. This particular species of snail is gathered from rivers, beels, and ponds and cooked in water. After that, its hard components are taken away, and the meat-like elements within are recovered. In the end, they cook it according to the meat and fish recipes that suit their palate.

Jalpaan or Nahul

Another important component of the traditional eating customs of the Koch Rajbangshi Community members in this area is Jalpaan, also known as Nahul. Fried rice, arum, water, salt, onion, chili, and other seasonings are the main components of this dish. Because of their different tastes, sugar can occasionally be used in place of salt.

Nutritional Value of the Traditional Diet Traditions of Rajbangshi Dishes:

1. High in Probiotics: Fermented Rajbangshi dishes like Panta Bhat, Shuktani, and Fotkani are rich in probiotics, which support gut health and boost immunity.
2. Rich in Antioxidants: Many Rajbangshi dishes, such as Nahul, Chheka, and Sidol, are rich in antioxidants, which help protect against oxidative stress and inflammation.
3. Good Source of Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Fermented fish pastes like Pelka, Nahul, and Chheka are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which support heart health and brain function.
4. High in Fiber: Many Rajbangshi dishes, such as Panta Bhat and Shuktani, are high in fiber, which supports digestive health and satiety.
5. Rich in Vitamins and Minerals: Rajbangshi dishes like Fotkani, Nahul, and Chheka are rich in vitamins A, C, and K, as well as minerals like calcium, iron, and zinc.

Traditional Rajbangshi dishes offer a wealth of nutritional benefits, from probiotics and antioxidants to omega-3 fatty acids and fiber. These dishes not only support overall health and well-being but also play a significant role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Rajbangshi community.

Conclusion

It may be inferred from the ongoing conversations that the Rajbangshi community members have a highly rich diet and set of eating habits. They eat a lot of green vegetables and leaves, which are rich in nutrients that support a healthy and sound body's constitution. It is regrettable that the majority of the Rajbangshi community's traditional eating customs are in danger of going extinct. Because of the effects of industrialization, they are forgetting to consume panta bhat, suktani, foktani, sidol, and pelka. Some Rajbangshi people are on the verge of losing their traditional eating patterns. However, rural residents have managed to preserve their traditional cuisines.

The traditional food habits and cuisine of the Rajbangshi community are an integral part of their cultural identity and heritage. The community's reliance on locally sourced ingredients, simple cooking methods, and traditional dishes has not only ensured their food security but also contributed to the preservation of their cultural traditions.

This study has highlighted the significance of traditional food habits and cuisine in the Rajbangshi community, emphasizing the need for their preservation and promotion. The findings of this study can be used to develop strategies for the conservation of traditional food habits and cuisine, as well as to promote the cultural heritage of the Rajbangshi community.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated the importance of interdisciplinary research in understanding the complex relationships between food, culture, and identity. By combining insights from anthropology, sociology, and nutrition, this study has provided a comprehensive understanding of the traditional food habits and cuisine of the Rajbangshi community.

In the end, this study aims to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of the Rajbangshi community, as well as to highlight the importance of traditional food habits and cuisine in maintaining cultural identity and promoting food security.

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