

INDIGENIOUS FOOD HABIT SYSTEM OF PADAM TRIBES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EAST SIANG DISTRICT, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Tabiram Yirang,

Asstt. Professor of Geography

J.N. College, Pasighat.

Abstract: *This paper is an attempt to highlight the indigenous food habit system of the Padam tribes of East Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh. Like any other tribal communities in the world, the Padams, which is one of the sub-tribes of Adi tribes, have a unique socio-cultural life which is always found to be inter-oven with the nature. They have their own traditional methods of preparations and consumption of food items in the society. The places of habitation, topography, climatic conditions, flora and fauna, nature of the land etc greatly influence the food habit patterns of the Padams. They have their own life styles of living, socio-cultural and socio-economic pattern, religions, and faiths and believe etc. Agriculture has been the main source of every food items and drinks in the society. Boiling, roasting, smoking and porridge or pastes are the important traditional methods of preparations and consumption of foods in the society. Whatever may be the kind of foods is not taken in a raw form except some green vegetables, nuts and roots. Rice is the staple food of the Padams living in the region. It is widely cultivated over the hills, valleys and plain areas. Other important food items are Maize, Millet, tapioca, sweet potato, green vegetables, wild roots, nuts, bamboo shoots, herbs and meats of different animals and fishes etc. Rice, maize, millets and tapioca are useful for preparation of local indigenous drinks. The indigenous communities living for thousands of years overlapping with biodiversity have highly complex and very specific knowledge system of management of local resources and their sustainable. Their traditional knowledge of the biological materials is very vast and age old tradition in nature. They have been living in this area overlapping with high diversity of species of flora and fauna in the environment since its antiquity. This high diversity of bio-resources is attributed to their indigenous management system of bio-resources. Their wisdom and indigenous knowledge (IK) has played an important role in the process of its biodiversity conservation in the region. They practice certain traditional system for protecting the diversity of flora and fauna in the region.*

Key words: *Traditional methods, food habits, local resources, biodiversity, bio-resources, indigenous knowledge system(IK)etc.*

Introduction

Human being is the most important biotic agents of the environment. Man's tendency for food and drink for his existence in the society has been deep rooted in his daily habits and culture since the day man originated on this earth. He transformed the natural environment according to his life style and culture on this earth, and adjusts himself with the surrounding environment. He has been deriving all kinds of his requirements from the physical environment since his existence on the earth surface.

The factors like places of habitation, topography, types of vegetation, animals, climate and types of food growing in the region largely affects the food habits system of the people. The socio-cultural life is always found to be closely associated with the people of the Adis who are living in amidst with the inhospitable environment since time immemorial period. Thus, the nature has been effectively influenced the lifestyles of the Adis since its early time.

East Siang District is one of the most picturesque regions of Arunachal Pradesh centrally located in the state. It covers a vast tract of an alluvial land of about 10,484 sq. kms stretching from the foot hill regions of Bapi mountain range up to the Brahmaputra Basins in the south adjoining the Assam. It is bounded by Upper Siang District on the north, West Siang District on the West, Dibang Valley District on the East while the Dhemaji and Dibrugarh Districts of Assam on the south and south east respectively.

The Padams are one of the sub-tribes of Adi tribes mostly inhabiting in the villages of Silluk, Mebo, Ayeng, Bodak, Ngopok, Kiyit, Borguli, Motum, Siugar, Raling, Seram and Namsing. The main inhabitants of Padam tribes living in this part of the region are Yirang clan, Borang, Pertin, Perme, Lego, Tayeng, Doso, Peyang and others. The East Siang District is drained by the Siang (Tsangpo) river which originated from the northern part of China divides the whole region into two parts i.e. left bank side and right bank side. The whole left bank area is inhabited by the Padam tribes and the right bank side is dominated by the Minyong tribes and others. The total population of the Padams tribes in the region is approximately estimated to be more than about 1.5 lakh people as per 2001 census.

The Padam tribes have a unique pattern of food habits and drinks in their society based on the places of their habitations, topography, climatic conditions, nature of the land etc. They have their own life styles of living, socio-cultural and socio-economic pattern, religions, and faiths and believe etc. Agriculture has been the main source of every food items and drinks in the society.

Methods of Food Preparation and consumption pattern

The Padam tribes have a unique socio-cultural life which is always found to be inter-oven with the nature. They have their own traditional methods of preparation and consumption of food items in the society. Whatever may be the kind of foods is not taken in a raw form except some green vegetables, nuts and roots. Rice is the staple food of the Padams living in the region. It is widely cultivated over the hills, valleys and plain areas. Other important food items are Maize, Millet, tapioca, sweet potato, green vegetables, wild roots, nuts, bamboo shoots, herbs and meats of different animals and fishes etc. Rice, maize, millets and tapioca are useful for preparation of local indigenous drinks. The following are the traditional methods commonly used by the Padam tribes in the process of food preparation and its consumption:

a) Boiling: It is the most commonly methods practiced by the Padams in the process of food preparation and consumption. The items like rice, maize, millets, vegetables, meat and fish are usually taken boiled. The curry

items are mixed together and then boiled simply with salt and chilies in a pot. The local spices such as ginger, bamboo shoots, black pepper are also sometimes used to have a better taste. In traditional manner, taking of mustard oil or other edible oils are totally absent.

b) Smoked: It is the best traditional methods of consumption of food by the Padam tribes since its ancient times. The main items of smoke are usually meats, fishes and other tuber roots. Smoked meats and fishes are very popular among the Padams. It is considered as food of delicious kind and having a good economic value in the society. The smoked items are usually kept either on bamboo tray over the fire place or in a basket.



Fig. 1 Indigenous way of drying the fishes by the Padam tribes of Silluk Village.

Besides the domesticated animals, the other source of getting meats and fishes are by hunting and fishing in the interiors jungles. Both community and individual hunting system are still prevalent in the society. During festivals and ritual performances animals like Mithun, Cow, Buffalo, pig, goat, dog, etc are sacrificed. People gather large amount of meats and fishes during the occasions of festival and smoke it over the fire for two or three days and then store it for the days to come to take during the time of scarcity. Even, the oily parts of the pigs are kept and preserved for 3-4 years to be used as medicines and gelycirines etc.

c) Roasting: Roasting is another important traditional method of preparation and consumption of food items among Padam tribes. Sometimes, Fresh or dry meat and fish are consumed simply by burning or roasting over the fire. Maize and other wild roots and shoots of some plants are usually taken in the same process as the roasted item gives a peculiar delicacy and unique taste. Normally, the roasted items of meats and fishes are usually taken along with the local drinks. The salt and chilies are also invariably used with the roasted items to have better taste.



Fig. 2 Roasted Fishes by traditional methods

d) Porridge (Paste): The method of Porridge or paste is also very common among the Padam tribes since the time immemorial. In this method, certain cereals are grinded to powder and then cooked by boiling with water till it turns into a thick paste or dough. Sometimes, it is wrapped with leaves of bananas and then burnt into the ashes and charcoal of a fire for certain time. Occasionally, items like rice, meat, fish, vegetable, etc are boiled together with the paste items and then eaten.

Preparation of Local recipes and drinks

Rice of different varieties, maize, millets, tapioca and sweet potatoes are the primary recipes of the Padams. Other like wild vegetables, bamboo shoots, herbs and shrubs are also the best source of recipes. Apart from the above mentioned food recipes, the varieties of drinks are also considered as recipes. In fact, Padam tribes are experts in making local drinks particularly the females are expert in this regard. Whenever, there is a get together of male groups, in between them two or three females are normally employed in preparing and supplying the local drinks.

During the agricultural season or community work, taking of meat with local drinks and meals are most common among the Padams and other tribes of the state as well. For the mid-day-meal, people usually carry with them the prepared food in packed wrapped in the wild leaves and taken sometimes with the local drinks by the people.

Types of local drinks

The indigenous drinks of the Padams are called '**Apong**'. This apong is the most favourite and delicious with the roasted and smoked items of meat and fish. There are two types of Apongs i.e. **poro apong** and **nokyin apong**. These are brewed mainly from rice, millets and maize. **Poro apong** is mainly prepared from the properly burnt paddy husks along with the cooked rice and then it is properly mixed with **Siye (Yeast)** and kept in a bamboo basket or plastic bucket for fermenting at least for a month or so. **Nyokyin Apong** is apong usually prepared from the specialized types of rice called **amkel rice** (red in colour) which is most delicious and nutritious in its taste.

Poro apong is usually used during the special occasions like festival, social gathering, house construction, house opening ceremony, marriage ceremony or offer on the arrival of some guests as a gesture of hospitality and mark of respect. It is also useful during the religious and rituals performances. Therefore, it is available in every house for own family consumption as well as for other purposes. The squeezing parts of the apongs are also useful as food for the pig. It is also useful for hunting of rat and squirrel in the forests.

Food preparation during the Festivals

Preparation of food and other items during the festival is not that much different from the day-to-day food preparation and consumption. The difference is only in the manner of its quantity. The Padams are very much fond of taking meat, both domestic and wild animals and birds. A festival is a very special moment on which the people have large quantity of food items, meats, fishes, drinks etc. Animals like Mithun, pig, cow, fowl, fish, etc., are usually sacrificed. Meats are usually taken with apongs (local wines) etc. Some are smoked or dried over the fire place and then preserved in a local basket called *beyen and* hanging it over the roof of the house for future consumption.

There are numbers of festivals of the Padams which are directly or indirectly related to agriculture, socio-religious etc and celebrated according to customs and traditions during which animals of various kinds are sacrificed and prepared. Aran, Etor and Solung are such local festivals which are related to meat and celebrated every year. Before the coming of this Aran and Etor festival, the village people usually went out for community hunting and individual hunting and stayed in the jungle for nearly a week or more to collect meat.

During the festival days, the participants as well as the observers are served food, meats and drinks to entertain their best. But sometimes, people are also maintained under tabooed from taking certain food items after their certain individual ritualistic performances at home but in participation there is no as such tabooed existed. Such observation of taboos are the essential parts of socio-religious and cultural life of the Padam tribes. Living in the great midst of inhospitable environment, the Padam tries to adjust and adapt themselves with the nature.

Some indigenous plants used as vegetables and medicines

The Padams are also in the habit of taking some indigenous leaves of various plants as vegetables. Some of them are also good as medicine for curing certain kinds of ailments. These green leafy vegetables are also the good source of proteins and vitamins for health. The following are the few indigenous plants which are used vegetables as well as medicinal purposes:

a) **Bangko** (*solanam spirale*). Bangko is a shrub and bitter in taste. Its tender leaf is the most usable part. It is generally available in the kitchen garden and open area near the villages. It is used as vegetable as well as medicine for the stomach pain, headache, vomiting, diarrhea and deasentry by the Padams in the region. It is usually steaming over the rice and taken. Bangko plant is also useful for certain ritual activities in the society. So, it is cultivated in the kitchen garden of every house.

b) **Ombeng** (*zantho xylumnitium*). Ombeng is generally growing along the river and stream side. Its tender leaf is used as vegetables as well as medicinal purposes. It is usually added in the preparation of fork meat to have more delicious and digestible. It cures the diseases like malaria and stomach digestion. Its stem is also useful as tooth-brushes. It is also one of the most favourite food items of the Mising tribes of Assam.

c) **Marsang** (*Spilan rhespaniculate*). It is an herb which is usually taken as raw either boiled as vegetable. Its tender leaf is the most edible part by the Padams. The matured seeds of these plants are also used as spices with chilly power. Its seeds are kept and shallow in the mouth for treatment of toothache bacteria by the Padams. It is also best effective for stomach suffering purposes. It is normally cultivated in the jhum field and kitchen garden by the Padam tribes.



Fig. 3 Marsang (*Spilan rhespaniculate*)

d) **Onger** (*zantho xylum rhessea*). It is another important favourite leafy vegetable of the Padams which is very much delicious with any kinds of foot items. It is believed to be anthelmintic in nature and its dry fruits yield essential oil 'mullilam oil' which is widely used in the perfume and flavouring industry. It is also best for early relieve of nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, diarrhea, deasantry and toothache etc.



Fig.4 Onger (*zantho xylum rhessea*)

e) **Rorii and Oyik** (*clerodendrum* and *cole brookianum*) are generally good with daal and bamboo shoot iyup and gives a delicious and digestible for stomach.

f) **Takemareng** is a type of herbs which is commonly used as spices along the food items by the Padams. It is a rare species of herbs which is not available in all the places. It also gives a good delicious chatony.



Fig.5 Takemareng (Local Name)

g) **Ongin (*Clerodendrum colebrookianum*)** is a tasty leafy vegetable which is especially good with fork meat as vegetable. It is locally as *phuinam* in Mizo and *Nefafupatta* or *Titapatta* or *pakkom Saak* in upper Assam. It is good for the high blood pressure patient. It is available in the dry field region and in the newly cultivated jhum field.

h) **Rikom** is used as spices. Its stem is also used as brush for the teeth. It is used as local poison for killing the fishes in the water. During the community fishing, rikoms are collected and grinded into power and thrown into the water for catching the fishes.

i) Bamboo Shoots

Bamboo shoot is another most common item of food of the Padams living in the region. It is usually taken with the items of meat of raw or dries for its better taste. The various items of bamboo shoots used by the Padams are **iting, ikung, ipeng and iyup**. These items are having high economic value in the market.



Fig. 6 Bamboo shoot (locally called Iting)

Iting is a raw part of the newly budding bamboo shoots. It is cut into pieces and boiled and then taken with the rice, salt and chilies vegetables. **Ikung** is a modified part of iting. It is kept in bamboo basket or in plastic bucket for some period to get it fermented. It can be taken as a curry even in the raw form or boiled with anything with little chilies. It is generally good with the dried or raw meat.

Iyup is the finer and dried items of fermented bamboo shoot. The fermented ikung is exposed to the sun light and get it dried and harden then it turns into finer, smoother and smaller in size and formed as *Iyup*. After it is properly dried up and hardens, then it is stored in a container or basket or tube so that it can be used as curry in future simply with salt, chilies, garlic and gingers with the rice elsewhere.

Ipeng is an elongated fermented *ikung* parts. Its size is about 6 or 8 inches long like a stick but soft. It is fermented properly and kept for a long period of time. It is also good with any things whether raw or dries items. It is more especially good with the dried or smoked or roasted meat items.



Fig.7 TALAAP (local garlic used as chatony and boiled with meat and fish)

List of the indigenous plants used as foodstuff by the Padams of Adi Tribes.

Sl. No.	Name of items and Plants with local names)	Scientific Name	Utilising parts	Mode of consumption and preparation
1.	Iting(Bamboo shoots)	Bambosa	Shoots/Buds	Both boiled and dried
2.	Ongin (Tita Patta)	Clerodendrum colebrookianum	Tender leaves and stems	Both boiled and dried
3.	Onger	Zanthoxylum rhetsa	Leaves and stems	Usually taken as boiled
4.	Marsang	Spilanthes paniculata	Leaves and flower	Usually taken as boiled
5.	Okomamang	Solanum nigrum	Whole parts	Boil and dried
6.	Petu(Mustard)	Brassica campetris	Whole parts	Boiled
7.	Nupuk	Fagopyrum esenlendum	Leaves and stems	Boiled
8.	Lori	Piper sylrestre	Leaves and stems	boiled
9.	Engin(sweet potato)	Ipomoea batatas	Tuber and leaves	Boiled
10.	Asi Tapa(pumkin)	Cucurbita moschata	Leaves and fruits)	Boiled
11.	Bayom(Brinjal)	Solanum melongena	Fruits	Boiled
12.	Gam	Glochidion	leaves	Boiled
13.	Paput		leaves	Boiled
14.	Koyir	Solanum Kurgir	Fruits	Boiled and Chatoony
15.	Kopi	Solanum melongene var.	Fruits	Boiled
16.	Oyik	Pou golgia hirta	Leaves and stems	Boiled
17.	Tapar(Local Mushroom)		Stem and flower	Boiled
18.	Omir (Papaya)	Carica papaya	Fruits and flower	Boiled
19.	Par(White Gourd)	Benincasa hispida	Fruits	Boiled
20.	Makung(Cucumbar)	Cucunus sativa	Fruits	Raw and Boiled
21.	Mari Makung(local cucumber)		Fruits	Raw and boiled
22.	Belang(Jackfruit)	Artocaraes heterophy	Fruits and leaves	Raw and Boiled
23.	Silum	Canarium Strictum	Fruits	Raw

24.	Anke	<i>Castanopsis hystrix</i>	Fruits	Raw and boiled
25.	Sirang	<i>Castanopsis indica</i>	Seeds	Raw and Boiled
26.	Lirang		Tubers and barks	Raw
27.	Dorge		Fruits and leaves	Raw
28.	Rayil		Fruits	Raw and dried
29.	Ombe		Leaves	Raw and Boiled
30.	Tader		Fruits	Raw
31.	Talap(local onion)	<i>Allium chinensis</i>	Roots	Raw and Boiled
32.	Tapil (Mekai)	<i>Phoebe hookarianum</i>	Fruits	Raw and Porridge forms
33.	Takang	<i>Diplazium eseculentum</i>	Leaves and stems	Raw and boiled
34.	Oko Bere		leaves	Raw and Boiled
35.	Sayong		Leaves and stems	Raw and Boiled
36.	Namdung (til)		Seeds	Raw and Spices
37.	Obul		Leaves and stems	Raw and Boiled
38.	Sibol (Big Chillis)	<i>Capsicum chinensis</i>	Fruits	Raw and Boiled and Spices
39.	Aksap		Leaves	Raw and Boiled
40.	Paksum		Fruit	Boiled

Source: Data collected by the Investigator (Jan, 2022).

Thus, this paper is an attempt to highlight the traditional life styles of Padams in identifying their indigenous food habits system and the basic social values that shaped the pattern of social life. It is hoped that it will surely present the factual data to depict the socio-cultural life of the Padam tribes of East Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh.

Attitudes and preferences towards certain food stuffs and taboos

The Padam tribes in the region have certain socio-religious prohibitions and restrictions on anything which they follow strictly in the society. Likewise, there is a system of food taboos or restrictions over certain food items under certain circumstances as per by the advices of the priests. Some food taboos are restricted for a longer period of times and some are restricted only for few days or week or a month depending on the nature of the ritual performances.

Sometimes, meat sacrificed in ritual performances which are means to get cure from certain diseases are advised to take only by the older or matured people and tabooed for the younger. Even, the animals killed with a gun, arrow and other pointed weapons are tabooed for the husband, if his wife is carrying baby or under

pregnancy. Traditionally, even the young girls are generally not allowed to take any meat of any kind during her menopause period.

Therefore, social taboos are indispensable part of the socio-religious norms of the Padam society. Observation of taboo is subjected to individual and community life. Taboos are observed to make one safe and secure from certain unforeseen happenings and incidents. The fear of the taboo is so strongly inculcated in the psycho of the people that nobody in the society dare to violate a taboo. They feel that the infringement of a taboo in one way or the other will bring automatic punishment and suffering to them. It is done as per by the guidance and advice of the priests.

Utensils used for cooking purposes

Cooking is done in many ways through pots of metals or non-metals like bamboo tube and jungle leaf (Ekkam). Depending on the nature of places of habitations, the Padam uses various types of utensils for cooking purposes in the society. In early days, pots of clays or bamboo tubes were mostly used for cooking purposes but in the modern day, metal pots or aluminum or brass are most common.

Apart from the bamboo tubes, some banana leaves or wild leaves are also extensively used for cooking of food as it gives a very delicious taste of the food items. People living in the hilly regions are still practicing the bamboo tubes for cooking of food items. In fact, cooking of food in bamboo tubes gives a special kind of taste. Bamboo tubes are also used as the traditional pots for collecting and storing of water from the river.

Conclusions:

Nature has effectively been influenced the lifestyles of the Padams since its early time. The socio-cultural lives of the Padam tribes are always revolving around the physical environment. The Padam obtained all their basic needs from the surrounding natural environment. Some of the indigenous plants available in the nearby surrounding environment are used as vegetables by the Padams and some of them are as good as medicinal purposes for healing of various ailments of people in the society. With the development of modern technology, man could geared up his mental skills, gathered up more efficiency to develop more effective ways in producing his various foods and drinks in the society.

It has been observed that there is a great tendency of impact of modern life styles directly upon the present day society. Particularly, the young boys and girls are gradually disappearing from the traditional food habit system. Instead of traditional food, they are very much fond of taking oil and spicy things from the market. So, there has been witnessed a vast changes in the methods of food preparation and consumption among the tribal societies.

Further, under the development of education and medical sciences, people are getting special care about their dieting pattern. With the gradual improvement of economic conditions, peoples are maintaining their living standard and procuring foodstuffs and pulses from the market which resulted to change the traditional food

habits of the people. Both the physical environment and cultural environment in the region are closely linked together in diverse ways and effectively influence the life of the people in the region.

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