

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF HOT, COLD AND 'KIRANDI' IN EAST COAST MUSLIMS' GASTRONOMY

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### ABSTRACT

*Food habits are among the oldest and most entrenched aspects of many cultures that exert deep influence on the behavior of people. The cultural background determines what is eaten as well as when and how. In every part of the society, people have diverse feeding habits that have been inherited from generation to generation. Among various dimensions of food selection and intake, a combination has been used in different cultural contexts to classify food. East Coast Muslims of Sri Lanka claim a different dimension in their gastronomy. The study was based on the author's own experience, observations, recordings, and interactions with locals of Sainthamaruthu Divisional Secretariat area. When started to live in the study area the author experienced a different explanation model in their gastronomy. What I intent to find in the research study more specifically were my two research objectives which were precisely reliving on my research goals. They were to find out cultural dimensions of hot, cold and Kirandi among East coast Muslims and to examine the explanation models of hot, cold and Kirandi related to their food culture. Sainthameruthu Muslims share a unique explanation such as kaduppu and kirandi when they select food.*

**Key words:** *Gastronomy, Culture, Muslims, Food selection.*

### INTRODUCTION

People around the world have beliefs and behaviors related to health and illness that stem from cultural forces and individual experiences and perceptions. Better nutrition and healthy living require an understanding of factors that influence what we eat. Paul mentions that "if you wish to help a community improve its health, you must learn to think like the people of that community. Before asking a group of people to assume new health habits, it is wise to ascertain the existing habits, how these habits are linked to one another, what functions they perform, and what they mean to those who practice them" (Paul, 1955). Health and illness are defined, labeled, evaluated, and acted upon in the context of culture. In the 18th century, anthropologist Edmund Tylor defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871).

It is pointed out that a wide range of behavior from folk dietetics such as bathing and water boiling are influenced by hot or cold reasoning (Nichter,



1987). It is emphasized that the hot or cold conceptual framework serves an integrative function in the traditional health care arena.

East coast Muslims share a unique health culture related to hot, cold and 'kirandi' (usually associated with allergy). The interest towards this research drawn based on an experience gained in several villages in East coast region. Accordingly I intended to find in the research study more specifically were my two research objectives which were precisely reliving on my research goals. They are to find out cultural dimensions of hot, cold and Kirandi among East coast Muslims. Second objective was to examine the explanation models of hot, cold and Kirandi related to their food culture. In order to fulfill above objectives, following methodology was used to collect data.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was based on the author's own experience, observations, recordings, and interactions with locals of Sainthamaruthu Divisional Secretariat area. The research was a qualitative and the selection of the research field was purposive. More than ten years of experience living in the research area was the main source of understanding the concept. This protracted experience helped to understand the sociological approach, selecting, preparing, sharing, eating, etc. of food which lead to different explanations in gastronomy of Sainthamaruthu people. All the revealing were gathered as narratives.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Classification here is not based on common Sinhalese cultural explanations of hot and cold but based on a regional specific one. Each and every attempt of food preparation and intake consists conscious selection process.

In brief, this system of classification is based on hot-cold values, which refer to an intrinsic quality rather than to temperature or spiciness and are ideally present within the human body in approximate balance. Hot and cold as a form of meaning embraces cognitive, evaluative, and affective features of Sinhalese culture. Similarly East coast Muslims are aware about hot and cold ideologies, with different explanations. Cold, in Chinese tern yin is always allied with "kaduppu" which brings pain. All kinds of green leaves are examples for this explanation. Especially Keera, is a unique green leaf available in the area explained as kaduppu or kuluma (cold). After in taking keera, they used to say "I am not sure whether I will be able to get up from the

bed next morning". Pumpkin, ladies finger, varieties of village gourds, sour banana and edara banana, varieties of cool drinks, watermelon, etc. fall to this explanation category.

Hot food in Sainthamaruthu is discussed as "kirandi". Kirandi food for Sainthamaruthu people is the allergy causing foods. Skin rash, itching, inflammations, swelling of the lips, tongue or throat shortness of breath, trouble breathing, wheezing, stomach pain, feeling like something awful are consequence of kirandi foods. Balaya fish, prawn, crab, sprats, shuda fish are explained as high kirandi fish varieties. Further drumstick and its leaves, brinjal, papaya, pineapple, etc. are too considered as kirandi foods. In Sinhalese culture sneezing is caused due to cold foods but Sianthamaruthu people link sneezing, itchy red eyes and running nose with kirandi.

Main curry dish is that important here. Hunting and gathering cultures put a high value on "meat" and claim that, without it, they are "hungry" no matter how much vegetable food they have ingested (Lee, 1968; Holmberg, 1950). In the study area main dish such as fish, beef or chicken is a must. Finding a vegetable curry does not have much attention.

Food preparation method contains hot and cold consciousness. Garlic and green chilies has a big role in balancing hot and cold. Green leaves are cooked with coconut milk and plenty of garlic is added.

## CONCLUSION

Though there are studies available about cultural dimensions of food this study reveals a different explanations about East coast Muslims. Hot and cold as explained in the Sinhalese culture is not aligning with study area's explanations. No one ought to defend all cultural practices indiscriminately.

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