

Saraz and Sarazi: A Socio-Cultural and Socio-linguistic Heritage

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Abstract:

This paper presents a sketch of the socio-cultural perspectives of the Saraz region of erstwhile district Doda. The geographical area of Saraz is situated on the eastern bank of the river Chenab of the Jammu province in India. Socio-cultural aspects of Saraz are discussed along with the socio-linguistic and socio-religious heritage. The significance of the traditions of Saraz is highlighted in the present paper. Also, Sarazi is discussed as a linguistic heritage.

Keywords: Saraz; Sarazi; Culture; Heritage; Language; Documentation

Introduction

The terms ‘Saraz’ and ‘Sarazi’ are employed in context to the geography and the native speakers of the Sarazi language. Expressing briefly, Saraz is a vast geographical region, which stretches from district Ramban; district Doda; & and lasts up to Kuntwara of district Kishtwar. In this region, Sarazi is the primarily spoken by the sample size of 283329 speakers (Parihar, 2025). On different occasions, the people of Saraz celebrate the folk festivals such as Lohri, Holi, Tihar, Jatar, Shiv-ratri, Punyav *et cetera*. Each festival of the Sarazi speakers is discussed separately in the following sections of this paper.

Previous Studies

The present study admits that no previous research is found or executed in the domain of socio-cultural perspectives of the Sarazi natives of the Saraz region in erstwhile Doda. Further, the history, culture, and folklore of Saraz till today exist orally. There is no authentic published material till date related to the culture of Saraz. However, Sarazi, the language of the Saraz region is documented by various scholars such as, Mahajan (2018); Ashiqehind (2018); Parihar (2019) & Grierson (1911). Description of the language is available in the form of published books and papers. The lack of documentation on the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic tradition of Saraz invites attention toward conducting researches on it. This research is an effort towards the description and exploration of the culture of Saraz.

Methodology

This paper follows the participant observation method (Jorgenson, 1989). The nature of the present research is descriptive one. Also, the native speakers of the Sarazi have been questioned, interviewed, and recorded. The folkloric traditions of Saraz are explored with the help of a sample size of 500 informants. In order to gather the reliable information on the subject matter of the present paper, the researcher visited the numerous villages such as Jodhpur; Jatheli; Bheri; Bidwan; Premnagar etc.

Discussion

Tihar

One of the festivals namely **Tihar** is celebrated annually in the whole region of Saraz. This festival is observed in the month of March-April. Its duration lasts till five days. Day wise detail of the Tihar festival follows as:

Day One:

On the first day, the inaugural of the Tihar festival takes place with the onset of dawn. Culturally, the first day is called as *Karayo*, which literally means pudding-pale day. On this debut day, a hand-palm sized chapatti is fried. It is known as Suncholi, which is meant for offering to the local deities such as Kul-Devta (family deity); Kander; Bir; and some goddesses too. On the same day, local bread popularly called Teloro is also fried in cooking oil. Members of every Sarazi household eat and enjoy this cuisine.

Day Two:

This day begins with the culinary practice of cooking rice, commonly termed as Mero-Bhat (Yellow Rice). It is consumed with local ghee. Invitation is sent to the friends, relatives, and the like minded village fellows. All of them enjoy this food.

Day Three:

The speakers of Sarazi call the third day of the Tihar festival as Punyav. On this day, each member of the household fetches a citrus fruit called *Kimolo*. While holding Kimolo in Hands, the younger family members touch the feet of the elders and while doing so, a phrase is

pronounced as ‘Punyav bhuvā’ and in return, the younger fellow receives the blessings as ‘nich punyav’. The similar kind of festival is also observed in the non-Sarazi regions, such as Khori, Dhaar, Dugga, etc. All these villages fall under the jurisdiction of tehsil Dhrabshalla in district Kishtwar.

Day Four:

Few decades ago (10-20 Years), the fourth day is observed with the performance of throwing citrus fruit Kimolo over the rooftop. Also, the fruits are sometimes buried in the soil, which are subsequently found and taken out by the young boys of the village.

Day Five:

On this final day of the Tihar festival of Saraz, the married women and the elderly men visit to the water spring called ‘Naag’, where the act of worshipping the Naag Devta, natural spring water takes place.

In conclusion, this festival was celebrated with enthusiasm a few decades ago. Nowadays, the celebration of the Tihar festival of Saraz is cut short to only a single day. The younger generation hardly knows the significance of this festival and does not know how to celebrate it. This socio-cultural prospect of the Sarazi tradition is almost lost, vanished and it is urged through this write up to kindly revive the culture of Saraz. Another festival, Lohri deserves a mention here.

Lohri:

This festival is mainly celebrated in the winter season by the Dogra and Punjabi people of the Northern India. The region of Saraz also observes this festival in the month of January every year. On the first day of Lohri, the people of Saraz lit a bonfire and offer Ground Nuts, Jaggery, Raw Rice et cetera to Agni (God of Fire in Hindu Mythology). A popular dish called Khichdi is cooked on the second day of Lohri. It is eaten with Ghee. On this day, the elder male, especially the married one offers some raw food to the passed away members of his family. In the Sarazi language, this act is known as ‘*Pind Manasno*’; it is equivalent to the *Pind Daan* of Hindi. Young boys and girls of Saraz used to utter the dialogues such as, “Dharmi mayno mash-eti pii”. Whosoever, utters this dialogue was chased by the rest of the children of the group. Once he or she is caught, that fellow usually offers Jaggery to the catchers. This is literally a word play of

run and chase followed by the dialogue. It has socio-cultural and linguistic importance in the history of the festivals of Saraz. Another prominent festival, Shiv-Ratri is also celebrated. Since antiquity, this fest is known as Shu-rat, Shib-rat etc. Multiple variants of pronunciation of 'Shiv-Ratri' are in practice; however, the essence of celebration is almost the same in the entire Saraz.

Shu-rat:

This festival marks the worship of Lord Shiva, a popular God in Hinduism. However, it is believed that the witchcraft practitioners and the people with black magic powers are free to exercise their powers over the common denizens of the village. Usually, Shu-rat is celebrated in the month of February each year. Normally, three days are spent celebrating it. First day is called 'Nikri Shu-rat' meaning 'minor night of Lord Shiva'; second day is termed as 'Bodi Shu-rat', it is the major night; and the third night is 'Budi Shu-rat' meaning 'aged or culminating night'.

In detail, three consecutive days and nights are observed as Shu-rat. During the observance, a limestone type whitish powder, Sokh is used for drawing pictures of Trident, Goddess Kali, Lord Shiva, and other powerful deities. This is done on the floor of all the rooms of the house. Each household in Saraz exercises this creative venture. Furthermore, children and adults in a family put on woolen beads (mustard seed put inside). Here, the use of mustard beads is typically known as Bidri, which is a symbol of protection or safeguard from the ominous spell of witches and their craft. Another belief is also prevalent, that is, the natives of Saraz use thorny sticks of sacred plant called Tumru. It is believed that these sticks have some spiritual and ascetic powers to protect all the family members. Such sticks of Tumru are placed on the doors and windows of the house so much so that no evil could dare enter the house virtually or magically. There are many mythical beliefs associated with the Shu-rat festival (also Shiv-rat) celebration in the Saraz region. However, it is a matter of separate research.

In addition to the aforementioned festivals, there is one tradition of Saraz, which is popularly known as *Kharko*; it is a harvest festival equivalent to the famous harvest festivals, Onam (celebrated in Kerala), Baisakhi (Punjab & Haryana), Bihu (observed in Assam), Wangala (Mehghalaya & Assam) etc which are celebrated across India. The term 'Kharko' deserves a mention. Women of Saraz hold silver, copper, or an earthen pot on their head and visit their respective fields where the crop is ready to be harvested. New crop is worshipped, and then the

farmers are free to harvest the crop. This act of worshipping the crop in the field is known as Kharko. Earlier, this festival was celebrated while beating drums, singing & dancing. Women used to dance on the day of Kharko. However, this practice of harvesting has come to negligence by the modern day women. It is a matter of concern to revive this cultural practice once afresh so that the younger generation would know the ways of celebrating it. It is also important to discuss Sarazi as the language of the Saraz region.

Sarazi is the language of the Saraz area. It has been briefly discussed by Grierson in his text, Linguistic Survey of India. Parihar & Dwivedi also documented Sarazi under the linguistic descriptive tradition (2019). Ashiqehind (2018) argues that the Sarazi language is an endangered one. The world of linguistics can gauge the importance of Sarazi through certain dialogues pronounced in the socio-religious dance popularly known as Kod. The dialogues are “*Shabash Dholi Hoo Ho*” meaning ‘Bravo! Drum beaters’; “*Zhiko Zhiko Taal Hoo Ho*” meaning ‘Rhythm of beating the drums is slow but mesmerizing’ and the like. Vocative case is observed in the first dialogue and an example of the full reduplication is observed in the second dialogue. These dialogues are pronounced by the Sarazi dancers on the occasion of Kod, a traditional socio-religious festival of Saraz. Kod is also known as *Dhakku*, as the beating drum used is the traditional ones.

In conclusion, there are many socio-cultural and socio-linguistic traditions observed in the region of Saraz. All of them need to be explored and researched on thoroughly.

Conclusion:

Saraz is a land of many festivals, cultures, and traditions. A detailed research is possible on the aforesaid traditions of Saraz. This paper is an effort in highlighting the cultural richness of Saraz. There is a diverse scope for the folkloric, anthropological, linguistic, and cultural research on Saraz and Sarazi. Sarazi, the language of Saraz is spoken at home. In pedagogy, Sarazi is yet to be introduced. The culture of Saraz is vanishing gradually as the language of Saraz is hardly spoken by the present day children at home with their parents. It is a universal truth that language and culture are inseparable, interdependent, and intertwined (Jiang, 2000). If language dies, culture along with it also dies. Therefore, it is important to revive the culture of Saraz. It is only possible through research and documentation.

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