

Traditional food of Assam and Nutrition

Dr. Hirumani Kalita

Assistant Professor, Bongaigaon College

Email- hirumanikalita652@gmail.com

Introduction:

Assam is a naturally beautiful state in the North-East of India. The folk culture of Assam is very ancient and diverse. The folk food and traditional cuisine and the kitchen of any nation are of immense importance. It expresses the uniqueness and distinctive characteristics of a nation. Assam is mainly an agricultural state. Its culture is basically agricultural. Therefore, like the festivals, its traditional food is based on agriculture and the climate of Assam. Rice is the main food of the Assamese people as paddy is the main crop. However, the various dishes served with rice and the indigenous styles of their varieties have shown their characteristics. Similarly, the traditional snacks prevalent in the Assamese society are very important and distinctive. Our study attempts to give an overview of the traditional indigenous dishes of Assam. It is worth mentioning that the state of Assam is like an island in the middle of the tribal sea. The tribal people live in Assam also have their own cuisine. However, our study mainly covers traditional Assamese dishes. Discussion of the food of the tribal people of Assam is a very broad topic. Therefore, this study covers only the traditional foods of Assam- rice, various dishes, snacks and beverages.

Methodology:

This study is mainly descriptive. Analytical methods have been applied as required.

Subject Entry:

The soil of Assam is cultivated with paddy in abundance at different times. Rice is the staple food of Assam due to sufficient production of rice.

Rice:

Different types of paddy are grown in Assam and different rice is used for rice. There are miscellaneous type of rice such as various Joha (aromatic rice), Bora (waxy rice), Bhakua (semi-waxy rice), Red rice (deep and floating) etc. are used in the Assamese society. There are various types of rice prevalent in Assam like hot rice, panta bhat (a traditional Assamese dish made from leftover rice by submerging in water), topola bhat (steaming rice wrapped with the leaves of phrynium pubinerve).

2.0.2 Dishes with Rice:

Assamese people eat various types of soups or dishes with rice. It is very satisfying and contains essential vitamins and nutrients for the body. Various types of pulses such as lentils, beans, kale, etc. are traditionally grown.

2.2.2 Curry:

Various vegetables are grown in Assam and these are essential ingredients for mixed curry with rice. Vegetables like potatoes, radishes, pumpkins, white gourd, ridged luffa, brinjal, taro, curry banana, kohlrabi etc. are grown in Assam. Like the curries, fry of different vegetables is also popular among the Assamese people.

Pora-Pitika :(Rosted-Dishsed)

Various vegetables (potatoes, brinjal, tomatoes, etc.) are roasted and mashed with salt, pepper and mustard oil to make a delicious dish. Similarly vegetables are boiled and meshed.

Bota (Chutney)

Delicious Chutney is produced from various pulses, gram and peanuts, mint, coriander leaves to serve with rice.

Leafy-Vegetables:

Assamese people eat fry, curry or boil of different kinds of leafy vegetables with rice which are grown in the forest and fields of Assam. It is a very important

dish. It is a tradition in Assam to eat a dish of about 108 kinds of leafy-vegetables during the main spring festival of Assam, Rangali Bihu.

Tenga (Tart)

Tart prepared from various fruits available in the forest of Assam such as star fruit, tamarind, mangosteen, elephant apple, etc. is favourite of the Assamese people. It is climate friendly and healthy.

Khar (A dish seasoned with alkali, typically, made from ashes of banana peels)

Khar is a unique and distinct traditional food of the Assamese people. It is naturally prepared at home and its dishes are cooked and eaten. It is believed to be beneficial for digestion. Various vegetables, or fish or pulses are cooked with khar and eaten.

Tita (Bitter):

The Assamese people still use tita. They believe that it is essential to eat fried margosa leaves, night gasmine and bitter gourd, once a week.

Non-Vegetarian Dishes:

Assamese people traditionally eat fish, meat and eggs with rice. Chicken or duck eggs are of the parts of Assamese society. Similarly, Assam is a state rich in rivers and bheels and these are abundant in fish. Therefore, the widespread use of fish is a special feature of Assamese cuisine. Fish is fried, roasted, various fish curries with different vegetables, fish with leafy vegetables, fish roasted wrapped in banana leaves, and fish tarts cooked with various sour fruits found in the forest of Assam. The method of preparation of these dishes is completely indigenous and purely Assamese.

The meat of pigeon, duck, chicken, goat, pork etc. is prepared in various indigenous methods and eaten by the Assamese people. There are various methods used such as meat stew, roasting, leaf cooking and bamboo cooking.

3.00 Snacks:

The use of snacks by the Assamese people is very remarkable. They have different methods of application and are very beneficial for health. Since the production of paddy is high in Assam, jalpans are also made from paddy or rice.

There are different types of snacks made from different rice flours in Assam. Pitha (cake made from rice flours) is the lifeline of the Assamese society. Similarly, a delicious (snacks) made by frying rice flour and mixing with milk, jaggery and bananas is a favourite of the Assamese. In addition, chira (Flattened rice), muri (Puffed rice), akhoi (a traditional rice product), hurum (puffed rice product made from glutinous bora), sandahguri (Roasted rice flour), etc. are the treasures of the Assamese. These snacks are served with curd, jaggery, bananas and milk. Once prepared it stays well for a long time and can be served in a very short time. Moreover, food value also is very high. Again, there are several types of ladoos made of pithaguri (rice flour), jaggery, coconut, sesame seeds etc. used in Assam and these are traditional sweets of the Assamese. Similarly, 'payasa' made by boiling aromatic rice (joha) in milk is a favourite dish of the Assamese.

4.00 Beverages:

Tea is the main beverage of the Assamese. Tea produced in Assam has a high value in the foreign market. Red tea, milk tea, now green tea are drunk by the Assamese people and it is traditional to serve tea to visitors who came to their homes. Apart from tea, it is traditional to drink juices made of various sour fruits, fruit juices and cane juices during the summer season. In tribal societies, 'wine' made by their own way is traditionally consumed as beverage.

5.00 Betel-Nut:

The use of betel-nut is very significant in Assamese society. Its use is essential in any Vedic ritual and auspicious ceremony. After taking tea or rice, the Assamese people chew betel-nut. It is a tradition of Assamese to offer betel-nut when a guest comes to the house.

6.00 Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be said that the food tradition of the Assamese people is tasty and healthy. The traditional farming community of Assam produced paddy by working hard in the fields and Assam produces a large amount of paddy. Therefore, rice comes first in their diet. It is a characteristic of Assamese kitchen to prepare whatever is available in a tasteful manner. It should be noted that the dishes served with rice are oil and spice free compared to North Indian society, but they are very tasty and healthy. In addition, the combination of bitter, sour, alkali, leafy-vegetables, etc. used in the food gives it variety, and these food keeps the body balanced. The Jalpans (snacks) traditionally prepared by the Assamese community are also healthy and delicious. It has nourished the Assamese society since ancient times. The food of a society reflects the seriousness of its tastes and traditions. The Assamese are quite rich and tasteful in this regards.

References:

English:

Barua, B.K. *A Cultural History of Assam*, Guwahati: Bina Library, 1969

Assamese:

Gogoi, Leela, *Asamar Sanskriti*, Guwahati: Layarch Book-Stall, 1986

Barua, Birinchi Kumar. *Asamiya Bhasa Aru Sanskriti*, Guwahati: Banalata, 1957

Bordoloi, Nirmal Prabha. *Asamar Lokasanskriti*, Guwahati: Bina Library, 1972
