

TRADITIONAL FOOD HABIT OF THE RABHA PEOPLE

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Abstract

The study focuses on food of the Rabha tribe living in the district of Goalpara of Assam. The Rabha is one of the aboriginal tribes of Assam. They are distributed in Assam specially in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Dhubri and Kokrajhar, but their main concentration is found in the district of Goalpara followed by Kamrup and Darrang. This paper tries to examine traditional food habit of the Rabha people of Goalpara district of Assam.

Keyword: Traditional Food habit, Meal Pattern, Food items.

The proposed study is cover in Goalpara district, Assam. In collection of information, the standard anthropological methods and techniques such as observation –participant and non-participant, individual and group interview (structured and non-structured), this research approach was adopted for selection of subjects related to specified topics. This method can be use to obtain intricate details about phenomenon such as feelings, thought process and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods. A narrative case study methodology is employed; as such studies are useful for obtaining background information.

1.INTRODUCTION

The main source of nourishment for human body is food. It can be defined as any substance taken into body for providing nourishment. Nutritious foods are those substances which yields heat or energy to build up new tissues and to repair worn out tissues as well as to regulate the body processes. Food consumption is the primary concern of man in his physical environment. Man must eat to live and what he consumed affects his ability to drive the human body for proper work well and to live long.

Agriculture is the main occupation and economy of the Rabhas. They mainly depend on paddy cultivation. The major part of the cultivated land of the villages devoted to growing rice. Like other plains people of Assam, the Rabha also derive their livelihood mainly from agriculture. Men and women work together in the field. In paddy cultivation, heavy work like tilling the land is mostly done by men while women do the weeding, harvesting, threshing etc. Besides this, horticulture is also done by the Rabhas. They practice this type of agriculture like- betel nut, coconut, jackfruit, papaya, lemon etc. at their homestead land.

2.METHODOLOGY

3.TRADITIONAL FOOD HABIT

The paper is aim to study the traditional food of the Rabha people of Goalpara district of Assam. People select their foods not only for biological needs, but also for pleasure, good taste and for celebrations. Different population (they may be ethnic groups or any other indigenous tribal groups) inhabiting different parts of the world they have own traditional food which differs from other groups. Traditional foods include foods that have been consumed locally or regionally for many generations. Traditional foods reflect cultural inheritance and it identifies their society. The Rabhas cooked food in much privacy. Each and every household, irrespective of their economic condition has a build up area for kitchen, separated from the other living rooms. The man source of fuel is firewood. A Few months ago very few families used LPG but in the mid of 2018 government has distributed LPG to most of the families, so now science that every family use LPG. Outsiders are not directly allowed to enter in the kitchen. Cooking is considered as the women work and therefore entry of men is very limited in the kitchen. They use common traditional methods for preparing food.

The Rabha has a special type of food system depending on their resources like- agricultural products and forest collection. Rice is their staple food. The presence of other cereals is not observed in their diet, as regards pulses, the most regularly eaten pulses is the black gram (matikalai Rabha ; tupai). This pulse is almost an indispensable part of the Rabha diet and various delicious and mouth watering dishes are prepared from it. Another very popular recipe of these pulses is its preparation with fresh water snail (Samuk). The fresh water snail is either purchased from markets or collect snail from rivers and ponds during rainy season.

3.1. Recipe of black gram (matikalai Rabha ; tupai) with snail (samuk)

Ingredients

- Snail
- rice powder 1 cup
- water 1 liter
- alkali (khar) 2 teaspoons,
- Salt as needed
- zinger paste 1 teaspoons

Method

- First the snail fry on an iron pan without oil for 10 minute and put it a plat. Then the pulse is fried without oil 10 minutes. It is placed to cool and grind the pulse.
- Then the pulse is boil with water give a little alkali (khar),and add to test salt and zinger paste .
- When it boil then their mixed one cup of rice powder. After 10 minutes snail is add with this recipe. After 30 minutes it Serve hot with rice. They also prepared this pulse with chicken and pork.

4. MEAL PATTERN

There are three times meal pattern of Rabha people in a day i, e breakfast, Lunch and dinner. Now Rabha people are habituated to drink morning tea, they take mainly red tea. Generally the meal pattern begins with morning meal (breakfast), which is taken in between 6am to 8am.

The timing depends on the duties and function of the family members and on the livelihood of the families. The morning meal is very simple basically they taken roasted potato/brinjal/fish etc. One or two vegetable curries or chutney. Fresh dal is very rarely prepared for morning meal. Paita bhaat (Water soaked rice) prepared left over rice of previous night is eaten with salt, mustard oil, raw onions and chilies. This item is very popular among the young and adults, especially in summer. karkhara bhat (jhakra bhat) is rice cooked on the previous day and left overnight but not soaked in water, which the poor people eat for breakfast . Farmers and labour generally hardly take Roti as breakfast. They take rice as principal meals, the most popular items of light food are flattened rice (chira), followed by puffed rice (Muri), fried rice powder (khando gura), cakes (pitha), sweet balls (laru) made of various kinds. Most of the popular cakes and balls are made of rice. These are prepared basically in festival time and take it at breakfast. Muri is more favored as light refreshment. Many people also take it at breakfast.

The mid day meal or lunch of the Rabha family comprises of a steaming platter of rice with curries, prepared from vegetables, roots and tubers etc. meat and fishes is a regular item. The dinner in Rabha family is ready in between 7 p.m. to 9p.m. the food items are more or less similar with lunch. Maximum Rabha people of Goalpara are veteran betel-nut chewers. Men, women and even children are found chewing betel-nut at almost any time of the day.

Following are the preparations most popular among the common villagers of the district: Seka or Khaar (Rabha: kharsi) : this alkaline preparation is popular throughout Assam. The alkali is prepared by the people themselves from the ashes of dried trunks of the banana by an indogenous process. Boiled cooking, alkali (khaar) a locally prepared liquid is used to enhance the taste of the food. The methods of preparing of these local specialties have been passed from generation to generation and have become a part of the fabric of life in the community. Boiling and roasting are common processes. In big celebration time they also seen fond of boiled items. Salt and oil are found to be used as condiments in cooking vegetables and curry to increase the taste and delicacy.

Rice-beer is the most favorite drink of the Rabha people, in their language it is known as jonga. Without rice beer no domestic or social function can be

performed. Drinks are used very often in our daily life. Children are not prohibited at all. Both the sexes are in the habit of drinking. The rice-beer is prepared in traditional system by the women. Before preparing jonga, a medicine bakhar which is essential for preparation of jonga . The bakhar is made by the women.

4.1. The recipe of bakhar

Ingredients

- rice
- water
- red chilies
- sugar cane leaf
- seniboon
- fern (be dhekia)

Method

To make this item they use rice powder, some pieces of seniboon (a kind of wild plants roots or leaves) and red chilies. All these things are grinded together and the dust is mixed with water and then it is shaped into small and small cakes. The cakes are put on dhekia leaf. Cakes are allowed to dry in dark place and it kept distance from the sunlight. After three or four days the raw cakes become fully fledged bakhar which is ready for use.

4.2. The recipe of rice beer (jonga)

Ingredients

- rice
- bakhar
- water
- earthen pitcher

Method

The rice is cooked and it is placed to cool, where the powder of the medicine bakhar is mixed with the cooked rice. In this process a little water also mixed with the mixture. Then it is stored in an earthen pitcher which is called jonga. After three or four days the cooked rice is ready to consume as a rice-beer. They rather use it as a kind of nutritious food but the educated mothers avoid this drink from their children.

5.VEGETABLES

The role of some of the vegetables is quite important in Rabha society diet. Like other tribes of Assam, Vegetable or non vegetable dish is taken with cooked rice; it called Rabha: mee, anja or shak (leafy vegetable). Vegetable are either grown in the kitchen garden or purchased from the local markets.

Table 1. list of some of the vegetables used by Rabha Goalpara District, Assam.

Serial no.	English name	Vernacular name
1	Ladies finger	Bhendi
2	Mushroom	Kaatphula (Nikhum)
3	Yam	Kola Kochu
4	Giant tora	Maan Kochu
5	Night scented lily	Dudh Kochu
6	Amaranth leaves	Moricha
7	Green amaranth	Khutura
8	Elephant foot yam	Wool kochu
9	Bignay	Lapha xaak
10	Margosa leaves	Neem Paat
11	Water Hyssop	Brahmi Xaak
12	Bamboo spp	Bhaluka bah

13	Bamboo spp	Jati bah
14	Malabari spinach	Ranga puroi
15	White gourd	Kumura
16	Mustard green	Lai xaak
17	Cauliflower	Phul Kobi
18	Cabbage	Bandha Kobi

5.1. Roots and Tubers

The common roots and tubers in the Rabha diet are potatoes(sc. Name : Solanum tuberosum ;Rabha: ghanthe, Aloo) , Carots (sc,name:Daucus carota:local name gajor), sweet potatoes(Sc. Name : Ipomoea batatas; local name Meetha aloo), radish (Sc.name: Raphanus sativus: local name: Mula), etc. Tender bamboo shoots and banana stem is the two most common item of the Rabha diet.

5.2. Flesh food

The traditional Rabha diet is overwhelmingly non vegetarian with highest consumption of meat and fish. Fists are mostly collected by fishing in the nearby rivers, ponds, fisheries etc. however, a considerable section also purchase fish from the markets. A traditional Rabha fish curry is always cooked with tenga (sour taste) or with khar (alkali) or with pithali (rice powder). Another most delicious and precious fish items of this tribe is Nakham (dried fish powder).

Pork is one of the most favorite items and its presence in any kind of socio- religious occasion is almost compulsory. The preparation technique varies according to the dishes. They often prepared the pork with potato or lai shak or pithali (Rabha; bamcha khali). dried pork (Rabha; bak makan) is almost common item among the Rabha.

5.3. Recipe Pork with potato curry (Rabha: bak makan mee)

Ingredients

- Pork
- Tomato

- Potatoes
- Salt
- Green chilies
- Onion
- Garlic
- Ginger
- turmeric
- Mustard oil

Method

This is one easy to make and delicious pork dish which is quite popular in Rabha tribe.

- At first, it marinates the cleaned pork meat pieces with mixture of some salt and turmeric.
- In a heat pan some oil and fry chopped onions along with green chilies and garlic pastes are given and then pork is fried till golden brown colour. Now add the potatoes and fry some time.
- Then there add the tomato, ginger and some amount of water and cook for a few minutes and take with rice.
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They take rice along with varieties of items like- vegetables, pork, mutton, chicken, duck, fish; meats etc. They also consume different varieties of insect like-

Table -2: Species and their scientific name

Sl.no.	Vernacular name	English name
1	wichiringa	Field cricket
2	mugapolu	Silk worm

3	Tekeli borol	The giant honey bee
4	moa	Honey bee
5	patpolu	Mulberry silk worm
6	Tara puk	Diving beetle
7	Japi puk	Water beetle
8	foring	Praying mentis
9	hamuk	snail
10	amloipuk	Red ant
11	foring	Grass hopper
12	Eri polu	Eri silk worm

Red ant is a traditional festival food of Rabha people. They take it in the cow Bihu of Bohag. They believe that this item is the best antidote of pox.

6. TRADITIONAL RECIPE OF THE RABHA . SOME OF THEM MENTION BELLOW –

Sindol (Sidal or dry fish) - The Rabha not only like fresh fish but they also have special preferences for the dried fish. Dried fish is a favorite item of Rabha people. From dried fish they prepare special food item known as Sidal . it is prepared by grinding smoked fish mixed with leafy vegetables and the mixture is kept in a sealed bamboo cylinder. It can be preserve for long time. They prepare Sidal curry with alkoli or simply boiled other vegetables.

6.1. Recipe of Sidal (Rabha: Sindol)

Ingredients

- sidol
- Salt
- Green chillies
- Onion
- khar

Method

At first sidol is boiled when it is boiled then add chopped green chillies, onion, salt and a little khaar and it is boiled for some times and after, it takes with rice.

6.2. Recipe of Sukati (jute leaves)

Sukati, it is prepared from dry jute leaves boiled in local alkali.

Ingredients

- dry jute leaves
- Salt
- Khar
- Chopped green chillies
- Dry fish/ sidol/ small fish

Method

In an iron pan boiled the jute leaves with khaar, salt and chillies when it is boiled then add dry fish and boiled again for some times. Then Serve it with rice.

6.3. Recipe of Gaja or jimtenga

another delicious traditional food of the Rabha is bamboo shoots (Gaja or jimtenga). Bamboo shoots are made into small pieces and dried, then it known as gaja. If the bamboo shoots are allowed for few days to decompose in a little water then it is called Jim, which is sour in taste.

Recipe of Gaja (Rabha: jim).

Ingredients

- Jim
- Salt
- Chopped green chillies
- Turmeric
- Dry fish/ sidol/ small fish

Method

In an iron pan boiled the jim for 5 minutes then add salt, chilies and turmeric when it is boiled then add dry fish and boiled again for some times. Then serve it with rice.

Pura or chhuba : this is roasted method. Like- roasted potato (alu pora, Rabha: ghanthe), roasted brinjal (baigan pora, Rabha: banthak), roasted fish (mas pora Rabha:na) vol (jinga) makoi, banana, kekora, fish, meat etc. .

6.4. Recipe of Pura or chhuba Rabha food

Potato pura or vodka

Ingredients

- Salt
- Green chilies
- Onion
- Mustard oil
- Dhuniya leaf

Method

At first the potato is cleaned then it is put to wood fire for roasted. When it is burned well then it is cleaned again and mix with salt, green chilies, onion, mustard oil and dhuniya leaf etc. and then take it with rice.

Bhaji(jaokai) : bhaji means fry items like-. Green leafy, vegetables and fish. Though a bhaji is normally prepared in oil but after frying a little water is given in the fry. Infact sometimes fry items are prepared in oil without water.

7. CONCLUSION

Food is a primary need of human beings. It is not only biological need but also social and cultural reflection. The Rabha tribe of Assam has much knowledge about the surrounding environment and its importance, which is reflected in their diets, but with the influence of market economy. It impacts in their traditional food habit. The traditional diet of the Rabha people primarily consists of rice, pulses, domesticated plants, vegetables, fruits, insects, fish, wild and domesticated animal. Locally prepared liquor is also an important food habit of their society. They are very fond of boiled food and the use of oil in their diet is very limited.

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