



Traditional Food Practices of Assam and Immune Health: An Analytical Study

Dr. Arati Basumatary

Associate Professor, Assamese Department.
Kaliabor College, Kuwaritol

Abstract- The food culture of a community is intrinsically linked to its history, lifestyle, geographical environment, and social customs. Each community and ethnic group possesses a unique and distinct food culture. Among the northeastern regions of India, the food culture of Assam is particularly notable for its rich flavours and medicinal value. Assamese food culture extends beyond nourishment, as it is deeply associated with indigenous beliefs, Ayurvedic knowledge, and a close relationship with nature. Food and immunity are closely interconnected, and traditional Assamese dietary practices, being nature-oriented, are enriched with numerous medicinal properties. Assam's food traditions are distinctive not only for their taste but also for their use of natural ingredients, digestion-friendly cooking methods, and their inherent potential to enhance immune resistance. The present research paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Assam's food culture and to examine the role of its traditional dietary practices in strengthening immunity. The proposed research paper attempts to present comprehensive knowledge of Assam's food culture and discuss the immune resistance inherent within it.

Keywords- Assamese society, food habits, tradition, health and immunity, cooking style.

I. Introduction

Assamese food culture is primarily dependent on natural resources, seasonal availability, and indigenous knowledge systems. It is widely recognized for its high nutritional value and health benefits. Assam, as a confluence of diverse ethnic groups, is home to a variety of traditions and cultural practices. Consequently, numerous indigenous and ethnic food traditions have contributed to the formation of a distinct Assamese culinary identity. The cooking style of Assam also exhibits unique characteristics, as most Assamese dishes are prepared using locally available and natural ingredients. This reliance on local resources clearly distinguishes Assamese food practices from those of other regions of India.

Research Objectives: -

- 1) To study the characteristics of Assamese traditional food culture.
- 2) To analyse the medicinal properties inherent in Assamese cuisine.
- 3) To study the relationship between diet and immunity.

II. Research Methodology

Both descriptive and analytical methods have been used in the proposed research paper. Necessary data has been collected from primary and secondary sources in this study.



Hypothesis: - Various medicinal ingredients are inherent in Assamese food culture. If pursued with proper research and information, this cuisine can be used as a supplement to modern medicine.

III. Discussion

Certain distinctive characteristics can be observed in the cuisine of the Assamese people inhabiting both the hilly and plain regions. These features include:

- Minimal use of spices and oil;
- Extensive consumption of green leafy vegetables;
- Predominant use of rice-based food preparations;
- Frequent use of ingredients that impart a tangy or sour taste;
- Widespread consumption of fish;
- Relatively higher consumption of bird meat;
- The use of Khar, which holds a special place in traditional Assamese meals;
- Preparation and consumption of various Pithikas (mashed dishes);
- The traditional practice of consuming Tamol-pan (areca nut and betel leaf) after meals.

Rice is the main ingredient of the Assamese meal. Rice is produced in abundance in Assam. Joha is the most famous rice in Assam. For flattened rice, 'Aroi' and 'Ukhuwa' varieties are mainly used, which contain B Vitamin, essential for health. In Assamese society, various foods such as Pitha, Laddu, Payas, etc., prepared from rice are very tasty and nutritious.

In Assamese cuisine, the use of green vegetables is highly significant. Assam produces a wide variety of vegetables such as Kochu (taro root), Manimuni (Centella), Bhedai lota (Stink vine), Spinach, Narasimha leaves (Curry leaves), Dhekia (fiddlehead ferns), Banana Flowers, Eggplant, Lemon, Amla, Tomatoes, and others. These vegetables are rich in iron, vitamin C, vitamin A, protein, and other essential nutrients, and therefore can be considered healthy foods. They are essential for maintaining good health. For this reason, in Assamese society, such medicinal and nutritious vegetables are traditionally included in the diets of pregnant women, new mothers, and children to improve strength and immunity.

Beyond vegetables, fish and meat hold a prominent place in the local diet. Given the abundance of rivers in Assam, fish is a primary source of protein for all indigenous communities. Small indigenous fish species—such as Puthi, Muwa, khalihana, shingi, Magur, Kawoi, Bahu fish are particularly popular and healthy. Various culinary techniques are used to prepare these fish with ingredients like tomatoes, amla, lemon, taro, spinach, and mustard greens, seasoned with onion, ginger, and garlic. These preparations not only enhance the flavour but also ensure a nutrient-rich meal.

In various Assamese societies, most people eat bird meat. In Assam, all types of food are not consumed in the dietary habits of different ethnic groups. Generally, the most preferred meats are duck, chicken, pigeon, and goat. Their cooking process is simple, and very little oil is used. Most meat is eaten as a broth. Especially with each type of



meat, different vegetables are used, such as duck with ash gourd, chicken with taro, pigeon with black pepper and banana flower, and goat with raw papaya. This cooking method can be said to be very nutritious. Such cooking styles in Assamese society help every individual stay healthy.

The ginger, coriander, cumin, turmeric, black pepper, garlic, green chili, and bay leaves used in various cooking methods in Assamese food habits, especially in meat, also have medicinal properties. Turmeric, black pepper, garlic and ginger in particular, have a higher amount of antibiotic properties. Eating these can help prevent various diseases such as coughs, colds, fever, and digestive problems.

Pitika: Pitika is a very popular traditional dish in Assamese Society. Consuming mashed potatoes with rice in the morning provides energy for daily activities. In addition to potatoes, Pitika is also prepared using roasted eggplant, tomatoes, or fish, mashed together with mustard oil, salt, and green chilli. As this dish requires very little oil, it is considered healthy and easy to digest.

Khar: Khar is one of the most distinctive and popular foods of Assamese cuisine. It is an alkaline preparation made by burning the dried peel or stem of the banana plant, soaking the ash in water, and then straining the liquid. All parts of the banana plant are rich in essential nutrients. The use of khar is believed to provide iron and help prevent various ailments. Traditionally, khar is known to relieve burning sensations, reduce acidity, eliminate intestinal worms, and improve digestive power.

Tamol–Pan: Tamol- Pan In Assamese society, there is a long-standing tradition of chewing betel nut (tamol) and betel leaf (pan) after meals or at other times of the day. Tamol–pan is believed to aid digestion by reducing stomach gas, removing bad breath, preventing oral infections, and eliminating intestinal worms. The alkaloids present in betel nut stimulate the nervous system and produce a feeling of freshness and alertness. However, the excessive consumption of betel nuts is harmful to health. It may be stated that traditional food-serving practices and dietary customs in Assamese social life play a significant role in enhancing disease-prevention capacity.

In Assamese society, there is a long-standing tradition of serving and wrapping food in banana leaves during various social functions as well as in everyday household practices. Small fish or boiled vegetables are often wrapped in banana leaves and then roasted over fire or cooked using different methods. This practice is considered health-promoting, as the polyphenols and antioxidants present in banana leaves help to keep food fresh and support the digestive process. Moreover, banana leaves release small amounts of epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), a powerful antioxidant, which helps reduce inflammation and supports healthy cholesterol levels.

IV. Results

The results of the study indicate a strong relationship between traditional Assamese food habits and the enhancement of immune health. Data collected from secondary sources, field observations, and existing nutritional studies reveal that the majority of traditional Assamese foods are rich in essential nutrients that support immune function.



The study found that regular consumption of indigenous leafy vegetables such as taro leaves, Centella, fiddlehead ferns, banana flower, and herbs significantly contributes to improved immunity due to their high content of vitamins A, C, iron, calcium, and antioxidants. Fermented foods commonly used in Assamese cuisine were observed to support gut health, thereby strengthening the body's natural defence system.

Traditional cooking practices, including steaming, roasting, boiling, and wrapping food in banana leaves, were found to retain nutritional value and minimize the loss of bioactive compounds. The use of natural ingredients and minimal oil and spices reduces inflammatory responses and aids digestion. Furthermore, the results show that the inclusion of fresh river fish, seasonal fruits, and herbal preparations in daily meals provides balanced nutrition and enhances resistance to common infections. Cultural food practices followed during pregnancy, illness, and seasonal changes were also found to contribute positively to immune resilience.

V. Conclusion

The present study concludes that the traditional food habits of Assam play a significant role in enhancing human immunity. Assamese food culture, deeply rooted in indigenous knowledge and ecological harmony, emphasizes the consumption of natural, locally available, and minimally processed foods that are rich in essential nutrients. The findings reveal that traditional Assamese foods such as green leafy vegetables, fermented items, herbs, fruits, and fish contribute substantially to strengthening the immune system due to their high content of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and probiotic properties. Moreover, traditional cooking practices like steaming, roasting, and wrapping food in banana leaves help preserve nutritional value and promote better digestion.

This study also highlights that the limited use of oil and spices in Assamese cuisine supports metabolic balance and reduces the risk of lifestyle-related diseases. The integration of cultural practices with dietary habits reflects a sustainable and health-oriented approach to food consumption.

Overall, the research establishes that Assamese food culture is not merely a culinary tradition but a scientifically relevant and health-supportive system that enhances immunity. Preserving and promoting these traditional food practices is essential for ensuring community health and for addressing contemporary challenges related to nutrition and immunity.

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