FOOD HABITS OF TIWA TRIBE IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT:
North-east food habit is a mixture of different indigenous styles with considerable regional variations. It is signified by very little use of spices, fried and fermented foods. Fish, alkali, bitter substance and acidic foods are prevalent among the tribes. The food habits of the Tiwa tribe are peculiar with use of some special dishes. This write-up is converging different folk-foods of the tribe and their preservation methods. A brief account of wild vegetables and edibles used by the tribe is also given with their scientific names.

KEYWORDS: Tiwa People, Major Food, Preferable Food, Different kinds of Dishes, Food Preservation system.

INTRODUCTION
Food is the most essential element of life for existence of mankind and other living things. It is not possible for anyone to live without food. Food habits and crops differ place to place depending upon the geographical location and biological environment. Assam and North-East receives a good monsoon precipitation in comparison to other regions of India. As being a high rainfall region, fertility rate is also abundant. That is why this region is known as the land of agriculture. Strive for food from the very beginning of the human civilization led to the cultivation of crop in different methods. They not only hunted animals for their flesh, but also domesticated them. Thus food habits grew among communities and gradually a set of foodstuffs traditionally accepted and celebrated among them have become known as traditional or folk food. Folk food brings out the true picture of the entire tribe as it is an integral part of a community.

Tiwa People: Tiwa is one of the prominent tribes living in India’s North-East and in Assam. The tribe belongs from Mongolian race and of the Bodo clan. They live mainly in Morigaon, Kamrup, Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. Besides, along with Dhemaji, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur districts of the State, they are found to be residing in outskirts of neighboring state Meghalaya. The tribe living both in plains and hills has its own cultural as well as linguistic characteristics. Although the Tiwa people living in the plains of Assam have accepted the Assamese language and have assimilated with the Assamese people, they have kept their traditions alive.

Major Food: Different types of food are prevalent among the Tiwa people. This aboriginal and early settler tribe used to hunt in the forest for their livelihood. Gradually they incurred the social habits and adopted a social life. They started farming as well as preservation of the cultivated crops. They started farming of ginger, garlic, banana, chilly as well as different fruits and...
flowers on the tilted foothills by removing the wild forest. Cultivation of rice also started there. Agriculture is the essence of different festivals with joyous expressions of the tribe. During the festivals, the sense of taste gradually developed among them.

Rice is the major food among the Tiwa people. They cultivate different types of seasonal crops during the year. They keep some of the cultivated rice for consumption and sales the rest for buying other necessary stuffs. Tiwa people used to fetch fruits and foods from jungle. Along with practicing poultry and husbandry, they used to hunt animals in the jungles. Besides, cultivating most of the wild vegetation and edible plants around their homestead, they enjoyed the privilege of visiting the forests for collection of edible plants mostly in groups. The edible plants and wild vegetation consumed by them are Dhekia shak (Diplezium asperum Bl. Woodsiaceae), Matikaduri (Alternanthera sessilis (L.) R. Br. ex. DC.), Bor Manimuni (Centella asiatica (L.) Urban), Bhedai lota (Paederia foetida L.), Narasinha (Murrya koenigii (L.) Spreng.), Jute, Mati Kaduri, Til, Samsuri, Khilpokhi, Titaful (Phlogocanthus thrysiformis (Hardow.) Mabb.), Bahkaetc; acidic fruits like Outenga (Dillenia indica L.), Kau thekera (Garcinia cowa Roxb. ex D.C.), Rupahi Thekera (Garcinia lanceafolia Roxb.), Kují Thekera (Garcinia morella (Gaertn.) Desr.), Bor thekera (Garcinia pedunculata Roxb.), Tepor tenga (Garcinia xanthochymus Hook. f.), Mesta tenga (Hibiscus subdarifa L.), Rohdøi (Averrhoa bilimbi L.), Kordøi (Averrhoa carambola L.), Bogori (Zizyphus mauritiana Lamk.), Nal tenga (Tetragastrum thomsonianum Planch.), Aam (Mangifera indica L.); different types of Kochu (Curcuma zedoaria (Berg.) Rosc.) such as Man kachu (Giant alocasia), Ol kochu (Amorphophallus paoniiifolius (Dennst.)) Nicolson), Kola Kochu (Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott), Dahidal Kochu (Alacasia odora (Roxb.) Koch.), Bez kachu (Alacasia fornicata (Roxb.) Schott.), Dholbari Kachu etc.

PREFERABLE FOOD:
The Tiwa people generally don't prefer oily and fried food. The use of spices and oil is less or restricted to the minimum. They love acidic (Khar) food, and most of the dishes are made of homemade crude alkaline substances. Items made of pounded and powdered rice are also frequently used among Tiwa people. Some items are roasted and baked. They did not prefer vegetarian food and vegetarian people were less in numbers. The hardworking people loved to eat a lot of meat and fish after toiling hard in the paddy fields. The one not having non-veg dishes was considered as poor in their society. So the guests in their homes were served with utmost care with lots of non-veg dishes made of ducks and chicken in spite of owning fishes and other items. Pigs, goats, ducks, pigeon, buffalo, deer's flesh are eaten by them. They sacrifices cock and goats in occasions, festivals and worships. Feasting the community with pigs in order to get community's pardon and for any occasion still exists as a tradition among the Tribe. Different types of wild birds are also hunted for meat. Variety of species of fishes found in the reservoirs, pond, rivers, and wetlands are fished by the tribe for making delicious food items.

The Tiwa people don’t prefer lots of dishes in the breakfast. Generally, in summer time, they eat fermented rice and in winter seasons, they prefer to warm rice with baked dried fish or with pounded Hukoti (Sambucus hookeri Rehd.) kept in bamboo cylinder. Sometimes chilly, potato, banana etc. are fried in fire and the mash is served with a little salt and oil. Likewise, in the dinner they consume a lot of meat and fish. The traditional food prevalent in Tiwa tribe are alkali, acidic, fermented foods, bitter substances, roasted & baked items, roasted items by wrapping with alpina leaf, banana leaf or maranta leaf, etc..

DIFFERENT KINDS OF DISHES:
The traditional food stuffs of Tiwa people are categorized as follows:

1. **Alkali dishes**: Use of alkaline substances in various dishes is popular among Tiwa people. It is prepared mainly from Bhimkol (Musa bulbasiana). Alkali is mainly used for making dishes of Matimaah (Uraria rufescense (DC.) Schindl.). Extensive use of Kolakhar is seen among them. Am haladhi’s (Curcuma amada Roxb.) dried leaf, and outer cover of fruit are dried, burnt and prepared the kolakhar. Alkaline dishes are mainly prepared with fish, dried fish, etc. Otherwise, pounded
hukoti (Sambucus hookeri Rehd.) is mixed in the dish. Boiled khar is another dish in some occasions. To make the dish gravy, pounded rice is applied over it. Khar is basically used in dishes of fish; however it is also used in cooking pork items. Khar, hukta and pork is mixed in this dish. Kochu, Titaful, Hukta tita, bamboo shoot, Tilpaat, Solongfer, Tora paat (Alpinia nigra (Gaertn) Burt.), Lai Kobi, etc are also cooked with Khar.

2. **Acidic dishes:** Acidic dishes are popular among Tiwa. Gaj Tenga, Ou Tenga, Mesta Tenga, Khil Tenga, Bota Tenga, Lai Tenga, Teteli Tenga (Tamarindus indica L.), Theker Tenga, Bogori, Rohdoi, Kordoi are cooked in different methods. A little bit of Khorisa (fermented bamboo shoots), or dried fish with pounded rice, chilly and Ginger makes such dishes a favorite one in Tiwa community. Guests are also served with such dishes.

3. **Tangkhari:** Tangkhari is the unique folk-food of the Tiwa people made with stems and Tubers of different types of Kochu like Nal Kachu, Ol Kachau, other edibles and vegetables like Mongamari, Chengmora Posola (Lasia spinosa (L.) Thaw.), Dhekia, Khutura (Amaranthus blitum L.), Bali Babori etc. The stuff is boiled and dried fish is applied over it. Later, salt, chilly, ginger and garlic is mixed with it. Meat and pounded rice is not used here.

4. **Bitter substances:** Tiwa community favors dishes made of bitter substances like Hukta tita, Bahka tita, dry Tilpaat. Such dishes are sometimes eaten as single dish without mixing fish or other stuffs. Instead, fish is boiled with added spices and pounded and dried Hukta tita, Titaful etc. are mixed with it. Hukta tita is generally cooked with pork. This dish is called Khaji.

5. **Jhal Dish:** Spicy dishes made with extensive use of ginger, garlic, chilly is called Jhal. Dried or fresh tubers and stems of Ol kachu, Bor kachu, Bor Manimuni (Centella asiatica (L.) Urban), Kola kachu (Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott), etc. are added in such dishes. Cock (specially the small one), fish (dried of fresh) are added to the dish. Serving the pregnant ladies with such dishes is a tradition in the Tiwa society. This dish is believed to have elements that can heal the pain and it also helps in recovering from wounds.

6. **Oily Dishes:** In Tiwa society, oil is used to cook meat only. Meat of cock, pig, pigeon, duck is fried in oil and later mixed with potato, kachu, pochola (Young shoots (pseudo stem) of Banana) or other vegetables. Added turmeric, ginger, garlic etc. makes it’s a delicious dish. However, different types of spices other than mentioned above are not used in the dish. Use of oil in other dishes of vegetables or fish is rare.

7. **Baking and roasting tradition:** Fish is generally preferred by the Tiwa people by baking or roasting it. Goroi (Gambusa), Kawoi (Anabas), Puthi (Punctius), Sengeli (Channa), Dorikona (Rajbora) are roasted in fire and salt, chilly and oil is applied over it. Sometimes, roasted potato, banana is mixed with it for a better taste. Roasted meat is also popular among them. It is the traditional habit of Tiwa people to cut legs of pig, duck, cock or the flesh into small pieces and roast it tactfully with smooth bamboo sticks and later eating it with salt and chilly.

8. **Boiled Hukti Dishes:** This type of food is popular among most of the tribes of Assam. It is one of the prominent foods in Tiwa tradition. Hukti is mixed with pounded rice and Kolakhar for making the dish delicious. Moreover, Hukti is cooked without other substances on it. It is boiled in pot with necessary amount of khar, salt, garlic, ginger and chilly on it. It is basically served with fermented rice and with mash of boiled banana or potato.

9. **Another Hukti dish:** Hukti can be cooked by wrapping it in banana leafs and baking it in fire. This popular dish is processed with specific amount of salt, chilly, garlic and kolakhar. It is wrapped in banana leaf with fish and fasten with tomal (string made of bamboo) and baked in wood fire.

10. **Fish Items:** Generally small fishes wrapped with banana leaf with specific amount of salt, chilly, garlic and kolakhar are cooked by baking it in fire. It is served basically with breakfast.

11. **Dishes cooked in bamboo cylinder:** This type of dish is prepared while being in forest or while being busy at paddy fields. It is also served in some special occasions. Rice, fish or other vegetables are cooked in young bamboo cylinder in this method. The open side of the cylinder is blocked with dried leaves of rice plant and kept in fire. When the cylinder is half-burnt in fire, the contained dish is served in banana leaves.
12. **Pounded and powdered rice dishes:** Pounded rice dishes are popular among Tiwa people. Applying pounded rice in most of the dishes is although common tradition, however the taste of ponded rice with khar becomes unique. This easy dish is cooked if other vegetables or edibles are unavailable. Hukta tita, bahka etc are boiled and later pounded rice is applied twice or thrice on it. Later dried or fresh fish is added on it.

13. **Liquor and method of making it:** It is a one day method for making liquor for Tiwa women. Rice is though the basic ingredient for making liquor, Dhekia, Nangal Bhanga paat (Clerodendrum serratum (L.) Spreng), Bahka, Bihlongoni (Chryseta parasitica (L). Lev. Thelypteridaceae.) And other alcoholic ingredients are pounded with powdered rice. The cake made of this mash is called Bakhor. Another old Bakhor is mixed with it. Boiled rice is applied on this mash and wrapped with banana leaves or leaves of Kachu and kept in a vessel for two-three days. The juice pouring from the fermented mash is called 'Jyu' or 'Chyu' in Tiwa language. This 'Jyu' is used in most of the occasions and festivals of Tiwa people. No religious or social activity is can be carried out without 'Jyu'. The fermented rice of the vessel is called 'Juguli'. The juice of this 'Juguli' is called 'Jyucha'. The juice taken out from the vessel with the help of a cylindrical and sharp bamboo device is called 'Jangitona Mod'. The bamboo cylinder used for filtering is called 'Jangi'. Liquor can be extracted from the Juguli for three-four times. After that the liquor gets diluted. The diluted liquor is called 'Tiler' or 'Tibang'. The Tiwas of plains call it 'Dorabori'. It can be preserved for a long time. Another type of liquor made basically from Bora Dhan (a species of rice). After applying Bakhor on it, it is directly kept on a vessel. After fermentation it is served without diluting it with water. This liquor is called 'Julumphu'. It is highly intoxicating which is shared only with close relatives and special guests. Instead of tea, it is the tradition of Tiwa people to serve liquor to the guest.

14. **Cake and other beverages:** The Tiwa people, especially the communities living in foothills are used to drink tea with salt instead of sugar. It is made in earthen pots. Sometimes the hot tea is mixed with cold water for a different taste. In some occasions cake or other items are cooked from pounded rice, although this is not a regular practice which is quite different from the Tiwas living in plains. The Tiwas of the plain makes various cakes from pounded rice like ‘Khola Sapori pitha’, ‘Tekeli pitha’, ‘Urohi pitha’, ‘Bogoli pitha’, ‘Kolpaatot diya pitha’, ‘Kothal pitha’ etc. The pounded rice is fried and kept in bottles for several months. ‘Koraiguri’ is another such item that can be preserved for a long period of time. The guest is served such items along with liquor. Liquor, as is a mandatory item for the guests, is even brought from the neighbor if not available in home. It seems that they don’t pay much interest to cakes. Tiwa people were not in habit of drinking milk, as the belief prevails among them that milk reduces the capacity to consume liquor. However, with the changing passage of time, they have adopted the habit of using pitha (cake) and other Assamese foods.

15. **Medicinal folk-foods:** The Tiwa people use some wild plants and other edible plants growing on the homestead as medicine. Pregnant ladies are served with kachu, meat and other vegetables with Jhal dish. It increases the strength and heals pain. In summer season, Manimuni, Narasinha and Vedailota are given as medicine to sick one. To keep the body temperature cool or at normal level, dishes of Thekera, Gaj or Khorisa tenga is cooked. In stomach pain, Hukta tita or seeds of Titvakuri (Solanum indicum L.) is fried or mashed to serve as medicine. To prevent Chickenpox, dish of Ou tenga and Mowa fish is served. Chiken with Ol kachu is also served to prevent such diseases. To prevent the germs of Malaria, Hukti is applied on Jhal dishes. It is believed that dishes of fresh turmeric increase the glow of skin. It is also believed among Tiwa that Doron shak (Leucas plukenetii (Roth) Spreng.) helps in efficient working of the digestive system.

Some works or activities are prohibited among the Tiwa people after having specific dishes. For example, after having bitter substances, going to paddy fields is restricted. Again in same case, plucking paan (Piper thomsonii Hook. f.) is prohibited. It is the belief among them that it can lead to unproductivity. That is why, the hardworking Tiwa people prefers bitter dishes in the dinner only.

Serving the devotees (Bhakat) is a tradition among them. The occasion is called Bhakatak Saul Khuwuwa (serving rice) in which black fish and vegetables, white vegetables and fish is served. The
dishes are served depending upon the number of devotees. If they are seven in number, they are served with black dishes. If the number is nine, then pork of pig is used to feast them. These dishes are delicious and the Tiwas are expert in cooking and preserving these.

FOOD PRESERVATION SYSTEM:

The preservation methods and recipe of the Tiwa folk-foods are discussed below:

1) **Khar production method**: The Tiwa people generally use Kolakhar in dishes. They collect the young bamboo offshoots from the jungle in the month of Ahin (September) and after slicing it, they keep it in piles on the foothills for sun-drying. On the month of Magh (January), they go back to the place and set fire to the heaps of bamboo. On the very next day, the ashes are brought to home and preserve carefully for a long time. In plains, it is prepared from Bhimkol. The stem of the Bhimkol is sun-dried and burnt and then the ashes are filtered for using as khar. Variety of dishes are cooked with khar.

2) **Methods of preserving fish**: Tiwa people preserves fish for a long period of time. The popular methods are baking, roasting, frying, or sun-drying etc. These methods are briefly discussed below:

   a) **Baking method**: This has been an age-old but prevailing tradition among the Tiwa people to bake the fish. Khol, Goroi, Kanduli, Chitol, Puthi, Singi, magur, Barali, Bhedeni etc are processed in this method. After cleaning the fishes carefully, they are held upright in khorika (a smooth stick made of bamboo) on the ground and baked by setting fire below. These are served in scarcity.

   b) **Jaag Diya (Baking)**: It is another baking method used for the small fishes when it becomes abundant. In this method, the fishes are cleaned and put on a chaloni and held by three stands (made of bamboo) above ground setting fire below. Otherwise the chaloni is hanged over the fire at kitchen. If necessary, another chaloni with fishes is kept over it with bamboo stilts in-between. The chaloni(s) are altered at times. Such dried fishes are kept in khaloi and other pots for a long period of time which can be cooked in any season.

   c) **Sena Fola method**: This method is applied in case of big fishes like Barali, Khol etc. The fishes are dissected in long pieces and hanged for sun-drying. Then it is baked in fire and preserved in dry pots. It is considered as an incurring dish for sick people.

   d) **Sun-drying method**: In this method the fish is kept in chaloni and dried in sunlight. The chaloni is wrapped by net to keep the fish safe from birds and insects.

   e) **Hukti fish making method**: The most popular fish among the Tiwa people is Hukti fish which is called "Nangflang" in Tiwa language. Hukti made of small fishes like Puthi, Dorikona, Chanda are tasty. The sun-dried fishes are pounded with small pieces of dried Kachu and kept in air-proof bamboo cylinders. It becomes ready to be eaten after two-three months. Generally, the Hukti made of Puthi fish is delicious. In any season, this Hukti can be cooked with necessary amount of mashed Khar, turmeric, ginger, garlic. It can be applied in variety of dishes.

3) **Methods of preserving vegetables**: Ronga lau (pumpkin) and Boga Komora are preserved for a long time and used in scarcity of vegetables. Again it is used in some special occasions. The fruit is hanged by tomal in kitchen. It is applied in dishes of duck and chicken. Thkerja tenga can also be sun-dried and preserved for a long period of time. Leaves of Jute are also preserved by the Tiwa people for using it with bitter substances like Hukta. Dishes of chicken, pork are cooked with hukta applied on it. Manimuni, Bali-babori, Tilpaat, Bahka are dried and kept to be mixed with dishes of fish.

4) **Methods of preserving meat**: Flesh of pig and Deer is mainly preserved by the Tiwa people by boiling or drying. To preserve for a short period of time, the meat is pieced and half boiled. By applying salt and turmeric it can be preserved for several days. The meat can be fried to eat. Besides, as per Tiwa tradition, the meat can be preserved by sun-drying.

5) **Method of making Khorisa**: Khorisa is one of the major foods among the Tiwa people. It is prepared in two different methods by them. In the first method, the young bamboo-shoots are sliced equally and kept in bamboo cylinders. This type of khorisa is called ‘Poka-khorisa’. On the other method, the slices are dried in sunlight which is called ‘Hukan-khorisa’. The Tiwa of the hills
usually takes much time to prepare khorisa. They put the slices in bamboo cylinders and bury it in banks of river or stream for almost one week. Then again the same thing is done after extracting the water from the cylinders. This time the cylinders are buried for several months. Then it becomes perfect stuff to be eaten. It can be served by frying or by applying it on fish. Mainly khorisa is produced from Bholuka (Bambusa balcooa Roxb.) or Jati (Bambusa tulda Roxb) bamboo. Khorisa made from bamboo growing at swamp land are said to be very tasty.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, it is found that although the food habits of Tiwa people are almost similar to that of the tribal communities, but somehow they have their uniqueness in methods and preservation of the traditional foods. The use of fish in almost every dish is interesting. Fish is an indispensible ingredient for dishes of pounded rice to alkali dishes. In most of the religious or social occasions, pork or chicken is a mandatory recipe. Liquor is used as major drink among them. Likewise no social activity is carried out without meat and fish. However, with the changing passage of time, tendency for using of traditional and folk-food among the Tiwa communities is decreasing. Now a days, instead of liquor, wild vegetables, flesh of pigs and goats in occasion; use of modern recipes like tea, Maah-prasad, potato, dal is seen among the Tiwa people.

REFERENCE BOOKS


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