

Type of Ritual Food in Odisha: A Case Study of Eastern Odisha

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Abstract: *This paper attempts to understand the importance, situations and context in food consumption focusing on the rituals and traditions. Odisha, a state in the eastern part of India, being famous for fair and festivals shows a variety of food items that are associated to various rituals either religious or secular. The ritual foods are mainly made from the ingredients that are locally available or most popular in Odisha. Deep understanding of the ritual foods of Odisha can show its continuity with the past and reflect cultural ideas about eating for good health, nutrition and many more. This traditional food items and its making procedures are vanishing or modernizing due to introduction of new food items, ingredients and Western food. Hence the present study has tried to document and describe various type of ritual food in Eastern Odisha, the ingredients used and the way of preparation.*

Keywords: Ritual, Mahaprasad, Food

1. Introduction

Rituals of various kinds are a feature of almost all known human societies, past or present. As societies and social behaviors became complex, there emerged beliefs and faiths which governed them. One of the creations out of this was ritual. The rituals got associated to different aspects of society and are performed in different points of the year by different communities or classes of people. It is performed mainly for their symbolic value, prescribed by a religion or by the traditions of a community. Ritual (both secular and religious) strictly refers to practices connected with social or religious experiences and beliefs. It may be performed by a single individual, by a group, or by the entire community; in an undefined place, or in places especially reserved for it; either in public, in private, or before specific people, monuments, Gods etc. The purposes of rituals are varied which include not only the various worship rites and sacraments of organized religions and cults, but also the rites of passage of certain societies, atonement and purification rites, oaths of allegiance, dedication ceremonies, coronations and presidential inaugurations, marriages and funerals, but also associated with specific kind of offering as well as food preparation and consuming.

Ritual Food

Food remained an important aspect of human society as the means of survival and strength of the body, not for pleasure. Food traditions and associated rituals play an important role in human lives. There are many types of foods that are celebrated culturally and spiritually and some food rituals are born of superstition. These food items have got into society and often they are strictly followed for generations. Food and food habits directly or indirectly were influenced by the availability of food items either found in the ecological niches or often procured from available sources where exchange and contracts were established. Regional availability, the introduction of new food items with the course of time gradually got into the cuisine of the several communities living in geographical space. However, community to community, people to people the preference of food often differs. As society was getting complex, divergence in the behavior was occurring due to social,

economic and religious fields. The food habits were getting more and more attached to these systems. When the religion and rituals formed an important aspect of a particular society, the ritual requirement and associated offerings to the gods and goddesses emerged. It was believed that like human beings God and Goddess liked the food so much. So in later period *Bhogamandapa* or food offering hall and kitchen was attached to the monuments. It is during this period as and when the formalities of ritual offerings were getting prescribed the locally available and preferred food items were getting in. The availability of natural preferred palatable and fancied food items got introduced to the ritual systems. This offering remained rigid and got fixed at that particular time. Hence, any introduction of any food items in the subsequent period was not incorporated into this ritual system. This ritual food is seen in several ways in society. For example, the 56 types of food offered to Lord Jagannath do not incorporate grains, vegetables, fruits and flowers which probably got introduced to Odisha after 10th - 11th cent. A.D. This food offered can be divided into:

- a) The food offered to the Gods and Goddesses.
- b) Fasting and feasting related to religious observations.
- c) Non- religious traditional festivals and offerings.

Importance of Ritual Food

All these often do away with the newly introduced grains, pulses, vegetables, fruits and other ingredients. Keeping these in background ritual food of a religion not only can tell about the ancestry of food items available, their preparatory process, procurement, distribution, seasonality and the introduction of new food items such as vegetables, fruits, etc. appearing at the different time period. This has the rigidity of ritual food observation not only severed socio-cultural behavior of people but also tells about how they are prepared, indirectly giving idea and development of regional cuisine and preparation process, use of vessels, utensils associated with the ritual. There is also an element of understanding the social persona, status, and hierarchy and community ideology.

The foods which are prescribed/adopted by a particular group/strata/class of society reflect the availability of food/offering items either grown within the region of its

introduction or at times have percolated into the ritual system by cultural interactions. The ritual food often gets so fossilized that even if the new introduction of items comes into the system, they are not taken into the ritual food system. It also suggests the availability of wild spices and ecological impact. We may not be able to say when it began, but we can suggest when it stopped allowing the new variety which got introduced.

These types of food concept have been changed drastically in our society in light of our contemporary way of life. The various aspect of traditional food system has been recorded in ancient scriptures, literature as well as in oral narratives of folk. We find numerous uncommon food things and numerous dietary assortments in Odisha. These assortments have various minimal utilized exceptional vegetables with saw medical advantages. Traditional food system assumes a critical job in keeping up the prosperity and strength of the indigenous individuals. However, proof flourishes demonstrating that customary food base and information on Indigenous individuals are being dissolved. This has brought about the utilization of fewer flavors, diminished dietary assorted variety because of family unit food weakness, and subsequently unexpected frailty status. The information on the ritual food system can change this situation. Mindfulness made on ritual food system can add to make a sound society. The traditional knowledge of food is viewed as the best for the specific topographical condition. Changing food examples can harm the great soundness of the general public. So it is crucial to realize the significant ritual food like a staple, exceptional, occasional, district explicit, and their technique.

The present article is intended to document the different types of ritual food on different occasions as well as offered to gods. Odisha is cultivating paddy and Rice is the staple food, hence almost all the food are made of rice in mix of legumes. Among the various food items associated with rituals, the most dominating one is called *Pitha* (cake).

Area of Study

The article is limited in eastern part of Odisha. It is predominantly a rice producing and consuming region. It is surrounded by Eastern *Ghats* where rainfall has considerably 1200 to 1500 mm. There are several types of food, legumes, vegetable are grown. Some of them have wide ancestry still present in this region. Moreover the temples specially Jagannath temple at Puri, Kendrapada retain the ritual food system which was introduced with the beginning of the urbanization of temples. Besides this there are several temples like Anata Vasudeva, Lingaraja which also serves ritual food. There are several religious centers in the rural settings where typical rural food items still continued to be served. Besides this there are several festivals where elaborate preparation of food items takes place and they are different in different occasion. They are so fixed and rigid that the ingredients are procured and stored over the period and only to be used during the festivals. For example-during *Sambadasami* (associated with religious observation) or during *Raja Sankranti* (cultural festival), where absolutely different types of food are prepared and exchanged with near and dear ones, neighbors and relatives. Similarly the ritual practiced by widows is strict ritual food to be consumed

during certain festivals which may not be palatable but are prescribed. There are several occasions from child birth to death ceremonies. The food prepared for ritual purposes vary significantly. Hence an attempt will be made to document rapidly vanishing this socio cultural aspect of the region with the advent of urbanized society, coming from different ethnic groups.

Type of Ritual Foods

- Pithas* (made during religious and secular occasions)
- Habisana food/Dalma
- Mahaprasada (Food offered to Deity Jagannath)
- Khiri* (Food offered in birth ceremony)

a) *Pithas*:

'*Pitha*', an innate part of the food traditions of Odisha is essentially cereal based steamed cake. *Pithas* are prepared and served in the Odia homes specially on the occasion of festivals such as *Raja Parba*, *Dasahara*, *Manabasa Gurubar*, *Kumar Purnima*, *Prathamastami* and many more. The dish has many variants. In the olden days such *pithas* were prepared on the conventional *chullah* by using the firewood or coal. Now in the modern households these are prepared on the gas stoves often with the use of ovens or micro-ovens. A number of varieties *pithas* are made in Odisha in different occasions. The main ingredients used for various *pithas* are rice and Black gram. Most of the *pithas* are made out of batter of Rice and Black gram (Fig 1). Batter is made grinding soaked Rice and blackgram. Sometimes rice flour is also used instead of rice batter and mixed with batter of Black gram only (Fig.2). Many a cases only rice or suji is used for pithas. Most of the pithas are either made plain or made with stuffing made out of coconut powder (Fig. 3), dahi chhena (cake made of curd) (fig.4) and jiggery or sugar. The details are described below:



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 6



Figure 4



Figure 5

Though the main ingredients for *pithas* are Rice, but way in making pithas are different. Broadly the process can be divided into two broad types.

- 1) Pithas made of batter made of soaked rice and black gram
- 2) Pithas made of rice flour only.

1.1 Pithas made of Batter of Rice and Black Gram

1.1.1 Chakuli Pitha

It is a round, fried pancake, which is eaten in Odisha daily as snacks. It is prepared from varying proportions of rice and black gram. The popular variant is prepared by grinding black gram cereal and leaving the batter to ferment for quite a while, at that point, it's meagerly spread in a pan and fried with minimum oil till it's crispy (Fig.6). It is made in practically all occasions. Other than it is additionally eaten by the individuals of Odisha in their day by day way life.

1.1.2 Poda Pitha

It is a slow-cooked *pitha*. During the preparation of *poda pitha*, batter of rice and black gram dal with addition of common salt is allowed to ferment for 2 to 4 hours. The mixed batter is wrapped in a banana or *Sal* leaves and roasted in an oven or earthen oven with help of charcoal. The *pitha* is slightly burnt from exterior, while the inside is soft and white (Fig.7). It is prepared during different festivals including *Bijaya dasami* and *Raja* festivals.



Figure 7

1.1.3 Enduri Pitha

It is a steamed flavored cake, prepared by taking the fermented batter (as done for making *chakuli*) in turmeric leaf and folding the leaf through mid-vain for which is locally called as *haladi pitha* (Fig.8 & 9). This is arranged customarily in the province of Odisha during the event of *Prathamstami*, a celebration to commend the wellbeing of the oldest kid in the family. It is additionally stuffed with coconut, boiled green gram, and sugar fillings. The batter-filled folded leaves are then cooked over steam. *Enduri pitha* is a traditional delicacy and showcases the therapeutic properties of the turmeric plants. A large portion of the Ayurvedic doctor has said that by eating the concentrate of turmeric leaves through this conventional food in winter helps in the reinforcing of the insusceptible framework (Roy et al., 2007).



Figure 8



Figure 9

1.1.4 Munha pitha

This particular *pitha* is made out of rice flour and black gram paste mixed with sugar or jaggery and crushed coconut. Sufficient water is loaded in a *handi* or dish (large mouthed pitcher), and a piece of cloth is tied over its mouth keeping a shallow opening (Fig.10). At the moment water starts boiling, a thick batter is poured over the cloth. An empty *handi* is kept upside down over the previous one to capture the steam. The continuously generated steam cooks the material (Fig.13). This traditional *Pitha* is prepared during various festivals, particularly during *raja* (harvest) festival in June.



Figure 10

1.1.5 Chitau Pitha

It is made out of batter prepared from rice, milk, grated coconut and added with salt. And the batter is left for 2 hours for fermentation. The batter is simply poured in a round utensil and spread it to give the shape of a pancake (Fig.11). This *pitha* is offered to Lord Jagannath in *Puja* on *Chitalagi Amabasya* or *Chitau Amabasya* in the month of *Shraban* or *Shravan* month in Orissa.



Figure 11

1.2 Pithas made of Rice Flour

1.2.1 Sijha Manda

This particular *pitha* (Fig.12) is made of boiled rice dumplings with filling made of stuffing (grated coconut,

jaggery) and is cooked by steam. It is a popular dish during major festivals of Odisha like *manabasa guruvar*, *laxmi puja*, *savitri amavasya* etc.



Figure 12

1.2.2 Kakara Pitha

There is almost no difference between *Manda Pitha* and *Kakara Pitha*, only the difference is instead of cooking by steam it fried in oil. This type of *pitha* is prepared both with stuffing (Fig.13) and without stuffing (Fig.14).



Figure 13



Figure 14

1.2.3 Gaintha Pitha

Gaintha pitha, sometimes called as *Attakali* is a special *pitha* that is usually prepared on Thursday during the *Oriya* month of '*Margasira*' which is celebrated as *Manabasa Gurubara* (the worship of a vessel filled with rice grains that symbolizes Goddess Laxmi). This *pitha* is made out of rice flour only. Rice flour is poured in the boiled water and cooked it turns into stiff dough (Fig.15). After cool down dough is made with addition of ghee into it. A small lump out of the dough is rolled into small balls (Fig.16) and is put on boiled milk. Finally, the milk along with small balls is cooked for some minutes (Fi.17).



Figure 15



Figure 19



Figure 16



Figure 17

1.2.4 Tala Pitha

This *pitha* is made of *tala rasa* (Palm pulp) (Fig.18) and rice flour in addition to other ingredients like jiggery or sugar, salt, ghee etc. Palm pulp is boiled for some time and then rice flour is added to it. The whole item along with other ingredients as mentioned above is cooked to make it stiff dough. Then the item is cut into pieces in cake size (Fig.19) and deep fried on oil. This is a special item in *Raja* festival. It is a typical traditional *pitha* which is made now a day very less especially it can be seen in the rural villages only.



Figure 18

1.2.5 Arisa Pitha

This *pitha* is made out of jaggery and rice flour. Jaggery is boiled in hot water and then rice flour along with ghee is mixed to it until it becomes stiff dough. Then a small ball of the dough is prepared and flattened with use of ghee and is fried in oil (Fig.20). This is most popular *pitha* that is used especially in the marriage ceremonies. The most benefits of this *pitha* that it can be stored for a month.



Figure 20

b) Dalma

Dalma is essentially dal (lentil) cooked with an assortment of vegetable. There are restrictions in using of vegetables for the preparation of traditional *dalma* or the *dalma* offered to God (Jagannath). The vegetables are pumpkin, brinjal, raw banana, potato (Fig 21). Sometimes there are certain restrictions are followed in the preparation of the ritual food. Like any kind of spices as well as some of the oil especially mustard oil is not used in the ritual foods. It suggests either the oil or oil seed was not introduced to the area or the social restrictions in offering the food to the god/goddesses. Similarly tomato and potato is never used for traditional *dalma* (Fig.22) item



Figure 21



Figure 22

c) Mahaprasada/Abhada

Mahaprasada is the term applied to the 56 food items offered to Lord Jagannath in the holy Temple of Puri, located in Odisha, India. In Odisha Lord Jagannath is regarded as the Prime god to be worshipped. Everyday throughout the year fifty six varieties of dishes are prepared and offered to the Deities. The food is cooked in earthen pot inside the temple kitchen and medium of food is fire wood only in accordance with prescribed procedures, and is offered first to Lord Jagannath and then to Goddess *Vimala* after which it turns into *Mahaprasada or Abhada*. While 56 items are prepared for the offering food of *Mahaprasada*, certain restrictions are also followed. For *Mahaprasada* no garlic or onion, boiled rice is used and no foreign vegetables like potato and tomato is offered to deities. *Masala* (spices) as are also not added to it before it is offered to the god. All the food offerings are made either in clay pots or copper plates called *Kansa thali*.

The 56 items (Fig.23) offered to Lord Jagannath can be broadly divided into 5 categories:

- Rice Item
- Sweet Item (Made of Wheat, Ghee, Sugar)
- Pitha* (Made of Rice and Lentils)
- Milk Item (Made of Wheat, Milk, Ghee Sugar)
- Dal* Item and other (Made of lentils and vegetables)

a) Rice Item

- Sadha Anna* (Simple Rice).
- Ghia Anna* (Rice mixed with ghee).
- Kanika* (Rice mixed with ghee and sugar).
- Khechedi* (Rice mixed with lentils).
- Dahi Pakhala* (Water rice mixed with curd).
- Mitha Pakhala* (Water rice mixed with sugar).
- Adda Padkhala* (Water rice mixed with Ginger).
- Oriya Pakhala* – (Water rice mixed with ghee, lemon and salt).
- Thali Khechedi* – Rice mixed with lentil, and ghee).

b) Sweet Items

- Khaja* (Made of Wheat).
- Gaja* (Made of wheat, sugar).
- Ladu* – Made of wheat, sugar and ghee.
- Magaja Ladu*.
- Jira Ladu*
- Jagannath ballava* (Made of wheat, sugar and ghee).
- Khuruma* (Made of wheat, ghee and salt).
- Mathapuli* (Made of ghee, ginger, and a kind of beans ground into a thick paste).

- Kakara* (Made of ghee, wheat, and molasses)..
- Marici Ladu* (Made of wheat, sugar).
- Luni Khurama* (Made of wheat, ghee, and salt).

c) Pithas/Cakes/Pancakes

- Suara Pitha* (Made of wheat and ghee).
- Chadei Ladda* (Made of wheat, ghee and sugar).
- Jhilli* (Made of Rice flour, ghee, and sugar).
- Kanti* (Made of Rice flour and ghee).
- Manda* (Made of Rice flour, ghee, and sugar).
- Amalu* (Made of wheat, ghee, and sugar).
- Puri* (Made of wheat and ghee and deeply fried like a small thin pancake).
- Luci* (Made of Rice, flour, and ghee).
- Bara* (Made of Ghee and black gram).
- Dahi Bara* (Made of black gram, ghee, and curd).
- Arisa* (A flat cake made of rice, flour and ghee).
- Tripuri* (Another flat cake made of rice, flour and ghee).
- Rosapaik* (Cake made of wheat and ghee).

d) Milk preparations

- Khiri* (Made of rice, milk and sugar).
- Papudi* (Made of only from the cream of milk).
- Khua* (Made from pure milk slowly boiled over many hours to a soft custard).
- Rasabali* (Made of milk, sugar and flour).
- Tadia* (Made from cheese, sugar and ghee).
- Chhena Khai* (Made from fresh cheese, milk and sugar).
- Papudi Khaja* (Made from Cream of milk, sugar and ghee).
- Khua Manda* (Made from milk, wheat and ghee).
- Sarapuli* (Made from pure milk which is boiled slowly for hours and spread into a large pan in thin sheets).

e) Curry with Vegetables

- Sweet Dal*
- Biridali*
- Urad Dal*
- Muga Dal*
- Dalma* (Made of lentils, vegetables, coconut etc)
- Mahura* (Mixed vegetable curry)
- Besara* (Mixed vegetable curry with black mustard seeds)
- Saaga* (a spinach dish)
- Potala Rasa*
- Goti Baigana*
- Khata* (Soar side dish)
- Raita* (Yogurt dish with Kukumbar)
- Pita* (Fried flower of Neem)
- Bagini*



Figure 23

d) Khiri

Kheer otherwise called Khiri (in Oriya) is a typical dish which is well known and arranged at various functions, celebrations, and festivities of Odisha (Fig. 24). The inception of this thing can be followed back to twelfth century since the time of Jagannath temple was built, as it had been served to the deity Jagannath as Prasad for centuries together. Originally, it was prepared as an offering to the gods. The practice spread to other temples of Odisha as well as India with a slight change. Gradually, it was made a significant dish in numerous festivals like wedding, birthday and so forth. Today, it is said that a wedding is not fully blessed if *khiri* is not served at the wedding celebration, and the tradition is still being practiced by the modern populace. .



Figure 24

2. Discussion & Conclusion

Study of rituals, and especially rituals around food and drink, has the potential to deliver positive change in a number of ways. At the level of the product or good, it can help to increase consumer enjoyment and satisfaction (Dohle et al., 2014; Vohs et al., 2013; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). At an individual level, consumption rituals based around food and drink can be harnessed to change mood and the way individuals think, especially about their self-identity (Belk, 1988; Hobson et al., 2018; Lupton, 1994). At a social and societal level, such rituals can also be used to develop bonds between small-group members, to establish order or group culture, and even to affect public health (Dietler, 2010; Hobson et al., 2018; Thomson & Hassenkamp, 2002; Wansink & van Kleef, 2013). In these ways, consumption rituals around food and drink can add important psychosocial value to daily life, and we encourage further study from psychological, design, and consumer research perspectives in order to facilitate these goals

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Collection of Data is the key aspects of any research. The present study is based on many secondary sources that have been extracted from few of the articles and concerned website as the work on the topic is very limited.

The study of Ritual especially rituals related to food is an important aspect to understand the value and foresights hidden behind it. The various types of ritual foods in Odisha as discussed in this paper show many more aspects for the introduction and continuity of these items in the name of tradition. The above ritual foods tell about the importance in the way it is prepared like earlier all the items used to be prepared in earthen pots on *Chulah*. Though this method has been changed in the modern day's society, yet it is live in the form of *Mahaprasada* in The Lord Jagannatha temple where it is prepared exactly in the traditional way. Moreover these items also tell about the nutritional value by having it. The present article focused on various types of foods associated to Rituals in Odisha. There are many more aspects like nutritional value; importance of food prepared in earthen pot etc, will be discussed in the further research.

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