

## **Distinct Food Items of Singpho Community and its Importance from the Nutritional Point of View**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The food we eat can affect our health and our risk for certain diseases. Eating healthy food is important for health. Different cultures have different dining habits. The Singpho are a tribe who inhabit parts of India, China and Myanmar. In India these people reside in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in the district of Lohit and Changlang and in Assam inhabits in the district of Tinsukia and scattered in some other district like Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. In this paper an attempt has been made to study about the food items of the Singpho Community and its nutritional contribution were also studied. Different food items of the Singpho Community are steamed ' Maytong ' rice, Pungkhong Sat, Pasa, Kumusi, Wuhkaung, Sat Sapung or Khawlam etc. No oil is used in the dishes and ginger, garlic, onion, coriander and bamboo shoot are the main spices along with traditional herbs and chillies. Through analysis of the food items it was found that the food items of the Singpho Community contains different nutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals. But low in fat as they use no oil. Their diet is found to be protein rich.

**Key Words :** Distinct food items, Singpho community, Nutritional point

### **INTRODUCTION**

Food is defined as anything solid or liquid which when swallowed, digested and assimilated, nourishes the body. Food plays an important role in human life. Food is culture and the culture is the identity of any community. Food culture refers to the practices, attitudes and beliefs as well as the networks and institutions surrounding production, distribution and consumption of food. People also connect to their cultural or ethnic group through similar food patterns. Immigrants often use food as a means of retaining their cultural identity. People from different cultural backgrounds eat different foods and have different dining habits. The ingredients, methods of preparation, preservation techniques and type of food eaten at different meals vary among culture. It is becoming obvious that an understanding of many aspects of the cultures of others including their food traditions, is indispensable in any human communication. The food we

eat can affect our health and our risk for certain diseases. Eating healthy food is important for health (Ross, 2010; Srilakshmi, 2013 and Swaminathan, 2013).

Singpho are a tribe who inhabit parts of India, China and Myanmar. In different place they are known by different names. While in North-East they are known as ' Singphos ', in Myanmar they are called ' Cachins ' and in China, ' Jingpho '. In India these people reside in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in the district of Lohit and Changlang and in Assam inhabits in the district like Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. The Singpho community comprises one of ancient communities of upper Assam. There are around 25 Singpho villages in the vicinity of Margherita.

The food habit of a region reflects its culture and traditions to quite an extent. Most of the Singpho dishes are made of naturally grown products and the spices used for preparing the dishes have several medicinal benefits and no side-effects. Tea is also heritage drink of

Singpho's.

Life can be sustained only with adequate nourishment. Man needs food for growth, development and to lead an active, productive and healthy life. Food contains nutrients essential for normal metabolic function. The basic function of food is to provide nutrients for the voluntary and involuntary activities of the body. So in this paper I am trying to examine the food items which are popular among the Singpho people and its importance.

### Objectives:

1. To study the distinct food items of Singpho community.
2. To examine the nutritional contribution from the dietaries of the Singpho community.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is certainly descriptive in nature. Both primary and secondary data like books, Journals and other various sources are used for preparing the paper.

## ANALYSIS

The food items and dishes which are usually taken by Singpho community are collected and analysed. Basic ingredients used for the preparation of the food items are examined. Nutrients present in those food items are observed and the nutritional value are studied. The food items usually taken by Singpho people and their nutritional contribution:

### Singpho Falap :

It is tea prepared at home of Singpho people which is indigenous Assam tea smoked in bamboo. The Singphos have known and drunk tea long before the Englishman discovered it. Singpho chief, Bisa Gaum helped Robert C A Bruce in 1823, to discover Assam variety of Tea plant 'Camelia Sinensis Var Assamica'. Singpho tea is a compressed fermented tea which contains large amounts of natural antioxidants (catechin) that help prevent cell damage and provide other benefits. This tea is delicious, very smoky and traditionally used by the Singpho for digestive health and emotional pleasure and mental clarity. This tea is one of the most astonishing, enticing and exotic fermented tea revered throughout Asia and world for their medicinal benefits, which range from curing hang overs to reducing bad cholesterol.

### Khawlam or Sat Sapung (Chunga Bhat):

It is a rice preparation which is stuffed in hollow bamboo and served with different dishes. It contains carbohydrate. Maytong Rice (a kind of glutinous rice) is used for the preparation.

### Pungkhong Sat (Sewa Bhat):

It is a type of dish which is prepared by steaming method. So it has a very good flavour and rich in carbohydrate. The nutrient content remains intact in this preparation. Maytong Rice is used in this preparation.

### Pasa:

It is a fish soup containing wild herbs and traditional spices. It contains ample amount of protein and also minerals.

### Punaw Shithu (Xukoti Chutney):

Xukoti is a fish preparation stuffed in hollow bamboo and smoked. Chutney is prepared from this Xukoti . It also contains protein and minerals and seems to be tasty.

### Ngashan Spung (Mas patotdiya):

Another favourite non-veg item is small fish wrapped in banana leaves and roasted. It provides typical flavour and contains high protein.

### Naidongshi, Naaishi:

It is boiled cowpea with colacasia. It contains vitamins, minerals and fibre. This item is served with rice.

### Naai Gudung Gbong (Bhapotdiyakath aloo):

Yam is steamed in this preparation. As it contains no oil it is good for health. Yam contains starch i.e.. carbohydrate in ample amount. Yam has the highest potassium levels. Yam supplies 118 calories per 100 gms and it has a lower glycemic index compared to other potato products.

### Glanaai, Kumrupshi:

It is a dish prepared with boiled potato and broad beans. This dish is full of vitamins, minerals and also carbohydrate. It also contains fibre.

### Singkhangshi Mukung Gbow:

It is a type of salad made from Mustard greens (Lai Xak). It is an excellent source of many vitamins including vitamin K, vitamin A (in the form of beta - carotene).

Mustard greens are packed with energy - boosting, heart - healthy, disease - fighting nutrients. These greens are a delicious source of calcium, magnesium, folic acid and vitamin E, important for bone health. It is a very good source of dietary fibre.

#### **Kumusi:**

It is a dish of wild mushrooms, potatoes and a sticky kind of rice cooked inside the hollow of a bamboo. Wild mushrooms and the species of bamboo in which the rice to be cooked are available only between March and August. Mushroom is rich in protein and this dish also contains carbohydrates and minerals.

#### **Rice Beer or Beer made from fermented boiled roots:**

It is not merely favourite drink of the Singpho, but also a sacred libation for the spirits. It is highly aromatic, alcoholic and has a sweet taste.

#### **Khowpuk:**

It is made of Sesame seed (Til) and glutinous rice. This is a type of pitha and prepared at the time of Sangken (Pani Bihu). Sesame seeds are excellent source of copper, a very good source of calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, iron, zinc, molybdenum, vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, selenium and dietary fibre. It may help lower blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides. Also reduces inflammation and support healthy bones. Glutinous rice is a source of carbohydrate.

#### **Tongtep:**

It is a type of pitha cooked by wrapping with Kowpaat. It is also healthy from nutritional point of view. It contains carbohydrate. It is prepared during Sangken.

#### **Khowmun:**

It is also prepared during Sangken and a type of pitha made with jaggery. Jaggery has many health benefits. It contains iron, calcium and is a rich source of carbohydrate.

#### **Faa:**

It is a type of Khichiri made with sesame seed, coconut and sugar. It is usually prepared during Sangken. This dish contains many nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, fats, sugar and carbohydrates.

#### **Sat Makai:**

It is usually called Topola Bhat prepared during marriage ceremony. It is prepared with sticky rice using kowpat. It is a rich source of carbohydrate.

#### **Ngasan Shingkhong Mikhi:**

This dish is prepared during marriage ceremony. It is a boiled dish prepared with fish and mustard greens. It is sour in taste. This dish contains proteins, vitamins, minerals and also fibre.

#### **Pasa khu:**

This dish is also prepared during marriage ceremony. Roasted fish, tenga leaf, different spice leaves are grinded together and a soup is prepared. This dish is rich in protein, minerals, vitamin C and other vitamins.

The Singphos use the most basic ingredients in their food preparations. Pork, fish and chicken cooked in various styles with indigenous herbs are served with rice dishes. So their food is full of high quality protein and also contains various minerals. The flavour of Singpho food comes from two main herbs, Mazegyapaat and Machangpaat. These are thorny herbs found locally. The seeds of Mazegya called Mazegyaguti are grounded and used in different dishes. The spices used for preparing the dishes have several medicinal benefits and no side - effects. No oil is used in the dishes and ginger, garlic, onion, coriander and bamboo shoot (both wet and dried) are the main spices along with traditional herbs and chillies. Bamboo shoots are rich in fibre and also provides vitamin. Ginger reduces pain and soreness and can treat many forms of nausea. Onions are good sources of vitamin C, vitamin B6, thiamin, potassium, calcium, phosphorus, copper and manganese. They lower high blood pressure, reduce high cholesterol and a natural antibiotic. Coriander is a wonderful source of dietary fibre, manganese, iron and magnesium as well. Coriander lowers bad cholesterol and increases the levels of good cholesterol (<https://m.telegapindia.com>; Saikia and Sen).

#### **Summary and Conclusion:**

From the above analysis of the distinct food items and dishes taken by the people of Singpho community I can summarize that Singpho people are fond of eating non - veg foods such as pork, fish and chicken. All those items are highly protein rich and can provide first class protein *i.e.* complete protein which helps in the growth and repairment of tissues. All those items are also an

excellent source of vitamin B complex and iron.

Among cereals mostly they prefer Maytong rice which is glutinous in nature. They usually prefer steaming method of cooking rice. They use Kow pat and also bamboo for rice preparation. During Sangken (Pani Bihu) they used to prepare different pitha. From those items ample amount of carbohydrates can be derived which provides energy to perform different activities.

Some fermented food such as Singpho Falap and beer from fermented roots are popular among Singpho community. Fermented products are easily digestible. It decreases the pH and inhibits the harmful micro - organisms.

Bamboo shoots is generally used in many preparations. It contains vitamins such as vitamin A, vitamin B6, vitamin E, vitamin B?, vitamin B2, niacin, folate and panthothenic acid. It is also a good source of dietary fibre.

Different leafy vegetables like Mustard greens, colacasia etc. are used in some preparations which increases the vitamin and mineral content of the food items mainly calcium and iron. They also consume other vegetables like broad beans, cowpea etc. which are rich source of vitamins and minerals. They mostly use different spices and herbs in most dishes which seems to be very healthy and nutritious.

The methods of cooking mostly used by the Singpho people are boiling, roasting and steaming which are

seemed to be nutritionally adequate as nutrient loss is less in those methods.

To conclude, I can say that the food items taken by the people of Singpho community is adequate from the nutritional point of view as it contains all the nutrients necessary for healthy living.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Food practices of Singpho community can be practised by other communities of Assam, India and abroad.

2. Youngsters should be encouraged to practise those food practices instead of running after junk foods or fast foods.

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