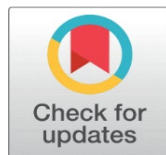


# CULINARY PRACTICES OF BODOS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CURRIES

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## DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i2.2024.5354](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i2.2024.5354)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

Every country's traditional cuisine, folk food, and kitchen are extremely important. It conveys a country's individuality and distinguishing qualities. In the northeastern region of India lies the state of Assam, renowned for its natural beauty. Assamese folk culture is very old and varied. The state of Assam is primarily an agricultural one. Its culture is primarily agrarian. Assamese cuisine, which uses regional products and age-old culinary techniques, is firmly anchored in the state's abundant biodiversity. Assamese cuisine is renowned for its distinctive use of herbs, spices, and fermented foods, and rice is the basic diet that is frequently served with fish, meat, or vegetables. In Assam, there is an ethnic group known as the Bodos. The Bodos are known for their bright handloom textiles, traditional dances, gastronomy, and festivals, all of which contribute to their unique cultural history. The Bodo people's traditional cuisine is a reflection of their way of life. Bodo cuisine uses a blend of spices to create a range of curries, including fish and pork curry, that are rich and savory. Bodo cuisines brought an extra tinge to the culinary history of Assam.

**Keywords:** Bodos, Cuisines, Traditional Ingredients, Food Practices, Fermented Bambooshoots

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Situated in northeastern India, Assam is a state with a diverse range of wildlife and cultural traditions. The diverse geography, climate, and numerous ethnic groups that inhabit this area are all intricately linked to its culinary culture. Assamese cuisine reflects the history, customs, and social dynamics of its people and is not just a means of subsistence. Local cuisines are influenced by the amount of agricultural goods produced by the state's diverse landscape, which includes hills and lush valleys.<sup>1</sup> In Assam, rice is the primary food source, forming the basis of numerous meals and representing nourishment and hospitality. It is often paired with a variety of side dishes that highlight the region's rich culinary variety, such as fish curries, meat dishes, and a selection of seasonal vegetables.<sup>2</sup> The largest tribe of Assam, Bodos are known for their bright handloom textiles, traditional dances, gastronomy, and festivals, all of which contribute

<sup>1</sup> Mondal Sandeep, *Culinary Heritage and food practices in Assam: A Comprehensive study*, Untapped Horizon: Educational Tourism in North East India, ISBN: 978-93-48091-45-1

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

to their unique cultural history. The Bodo people's traditional cuisine is a reflection of their farming way of life. Bodo cuisine uses a blend of spices to create a range of curries, including fish and pork curry, that are rich and savory.<sup>3</sup> Bodo cuisines brought an extra tinge to the culinary history of Assam.

## 2. DISCUSSION

A community's eating habits are linked to the religious beliefs and customs that have been passed down from the ancestors' generation. The local population freely develops local knowledge, also known as folk knowledge, and is exposed to the modern culture in which they live. It is found in religion and a community's traditional belief systems. Bodo eating habits are thought to be organic, less seasoned and oiled, ecosystem-based, culturally based, and a distinctive, scientifically modifiable legacy of knowledge derived from the community.<sup>4</sup> The Bodos ate a variety of ceremonial foods, such as those used in marriage, birth, and funeral ceremonies, in addition to other local cuisine. Jwnwm Achar (the birth ritual), Dwisarnaini Achar (the water-prinkling ritual), Haba Achar (the marriage ritual), Gwthwi garnai Achar (the funeral ritual), and Bandra Achar (the bandra ritual) are the five categories of rituals that are covered.<sup>5</sup> Food is presented in all of the aforementioned rituals.<sup>6</sup> Fish from wetlands, domesticated animals, and non-vegetarian products are all part of their diet. The community simply gathers the necessary amounts of its food materials from nature, and they have interesting methods for obtaining food. They have a custom of seeking permission from the forest deity before gathering ecological food items. The custom of feeding the gods, deities, and ancestors is a unique community practice. Ritual actions relating to food are part of the Bwisagu, Magw, Kati Gasa, and other agricultural festivals. They celebrate festivals and ceremonies to honor their ancestors. They offer food items to the deceased members of their home at the Magw festival. Prior to the feast, an offering ceremony is arranged. Invoking the new herb-eating ceremony, Baisagu bids the previous year farewell.<sup>7</sup>

Different varieties of the customary curry recipes are prepared and used throughout the year by the Bodos. These curries are not only unique in preparation but also in nature, which provides Bodo cuisine a different texture. Curries based on rituals are eaten with natural ingredients found in a variety of environments. Their food-gathering behavior is intriguing; they only obtain the necessary amount from the neighboring forests and marshes. They provide the forest deity with areca nut and betel leaf in exchange for the collection of natural food. From the local wetlands, they gather fish, veggies, and other aquatic insects. They enjoy hunting and gathering food from woodland creatures such as deer, pigs, rabbits, and so on. In order to prepare a curry recipe, components must be combined in a timely manner.<sup>8</sup> The mixing of food ingredients in a linear fashion also results in a wonderful curry. Curry making has a profound impact on human mind. The curry recipe is divided into several sections based on their sizes and forms. Curry recipes include *wngkhri*, *lao lao*, *bathwn*, *eonai*, *hangnai*, *menai*, and *saonai*, among others.<sup>9</sup> In the following we have discussed some of the popular curries of the Bodos

**1) Ondla:** One of the Bodo community's distinctive traditional foods is ondla. This curry is of the cereal variety and is eaten with rice. Alkaline and rice flour are used to make the Ondla dish.<sup>10</sup> The word "on" suggests rice flour.<sup>11</sup> Ondla curry can be prepared as vegetable and non-vegetable. Ondla curry, sometimes called "Ondla Dao," is typically made with chicken.<sup>12</sup> The Bodo people show their guests their love by serving them Ondla with chicken. The Bodo ethnic group has

<sup>3</sup> Basumatary Bhanumati, *Indigenous food habits of Bodo Tribe*, International journal of research in Academic World, E-ISSN-2583-1615

<sup>4</sup> Baro Maneswar, *A Study on The Food Habits And Traditional Knowledge System of Bodos*, An Unpublished Thesis, Bodoland University.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Baro Maneswar, *A Study on The Food Habits And Traditional Knowledge System of Bodos*, An Unpublished Thesis, Bodoland University.

<sup>8</sup> Baro Maneswar, *A Study on The Food Habits And Traditional Knowledge System of Bodos*, An Unpublished Thesis, Bodoland University

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Daimary Dr. Rahul, *Food System Of The Bodos Of Kokrajhar District, Assam: A Nutritional Benefit (With Special Reference To 'Ondla' Curry)*,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

a well-known custom of raising castrated cocks and serving the curry to a special guest.<sup>13</sup> Another well-liked custom of the Bodo people is to give their guests pork-based Ondla curry, which is called "Ondla Oma." The Bodo people's favorite and traditional dish is pig. The pig is typically raised at home by the Bodo women. Pork is served in Bodo's communal meal and further festivities

## 2) Samo Sobai (Snail with Black Lentils)

Snails are harvested from freshwater by Bodo people. After that, wash it with lemon and salt. A popular meal in Bodo civilization is snail with black lentils. Although they are accessible starting in July, Bodo people typically eat snails from October through December. Black lentils and snail are mixed to make a tasty and distinctive dish. In order to make it, Bodo women sauté snails with black lentils and flavorful herbs and spices. Snails' delicate flavor is complemented by the earthy taste of black lentils.<sup>14</sup> To improve the overall flavor, add components like garlic, onion, and a mixture of spices including cumin, wild coriander (kata masala), and paprika. Before adding the lentils to the snail preparation, Bodo women cook them separately until they are soft. Rice is served with this meal.<sup>15</sup>

## 3) Owa Meoyai (Bamboo Shoot)

The edible shoots of numerous bamboo species found in Northeast India are known as bamboo shoots or bamboo sprouts. With its vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber, bamboo shoots are a low-calorie and nutritious complement to any diet. Cut them into little pieces after removing the sheaths. In order to eliminate the bitterness, Bodo women soak or boil it. It can be prepared in a variety of ways. Bodo women just add kharwi without using oil after frying it with some garlic. It is crucial to add fresh wild coriander leaves, turmeric, salt, and paprika for flavor. It is a fairly simple method to preserve its unique flavor.<sup>16</sup> Adding rice powder to the sauce is another method of cooking bamboo shoots. Additionally, Bodo women cook fish or fowl using bamboo shoots. It adds a pleasant and zesty touch to Bodo dishes when served with steamed rice. Bamboo shoots are also used to create pickles. Remove the bitterness, then heat the mustard oil in a skillet and allow it to cool a little. According to taste, Bodo women add vinegar, salt, and red chilli powder. They then stir in the bamboo shoots and thoroughly combine them with the spices. Give the pickle a few days to settle so the flavors can combine. People from Bodo like to use it as a seasoning with rice or other foods.<sup>17</sup>

## 4) Oma Jwng Narjwi (Pork with Dry Jute Leave):

In the Bodo community, Oma Jwng Narjwi is the most well-liked. Vitamins A, C, and E are abundant in jute leaves. A green leafy vegetable with many health benefits, jute leaves can be prepared in a variety of ways.<sup>18</sup> During the wet season, it is accessible. Jute leaves can be preserved and their flavor enhanced for culinary purposes by being dried in the sun. Bodo women frequently cook jute leaves with pork, resulting in a tasty dish that blends the distinct flavor of jute leaves with the depth of pork.<sup>19</sup> The addition of salt, turmeric, ginger, garlic, paprika, onion, and wild coriander enhances the overall flavor of the pork dish with jute leaves. To get rid of the bitterness, Bodo women soak or boil the dry jute leaves. Kharwi is a key component in this meal. The dry jute leaves are sometimes cooked with chicken or fish.<sup>20</sup>

## 5) Napham Bathwn (Fermented Fish Chutney)

One of the most important activities for the Bodo people is fishing. Fishing prospects are frequently improved during the wet season. In the Bodo community, drying fish is a prevalent habit. Fish is fermented with vegetables and spices to create the acrid condiment known as fermented fish chutney. The Bodo community loves this dish. As a preservation technique, fermented fish is frequently kept in a jar both during and after the fermentation process. The glass jar's airtight closure keeps the fish safe from outside contamination while preserving the conditions required for fermentation. By using this technique, the fish can go through the fermentation process, giving it a distinct flavor and

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Basumatary Bhanumati, *Indigenous Food Habit of Bodo Tribe*, International journal of research in Academic World, E-ISSN-2583-1615

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Basumatary Bhanumati, *Indigenous Food Habit of Bodo Tribe*, International journal of research in Academic World, E-ISSN-2583-1615

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

prolonging its shelf life. The fermented fish is ready to cook and consume after approximately one month. It is cooked by adding paprika, kharwi, salt, and wild coriander.<sup>21</sup>

#### 6) Mwitha Na (Roselle Leaf with Fish)

During the rainy season, roselle leaves, a green leafy vegetable, are present in every Bodo home. It's simple to make and tastes great. Roselle leaves are rich in vitamins and nutritional fiber. Fish is cooked with roselle leaves by Bodo women, particularly with small, wild fish. The natural, somewhat sour taste of roselle enhances the delicate flavors of the fish, therefore cooking roselle leaves with wild fish improves the overall flavor. It gives the dish a distinctive and zesty touch. It can be cooked with or without oil by some Bodo women. Some ladies also use kharwi to prepare it. In the Bodo family, it is regarded as a delicious dinner during the rainy season.<sup>22</sup>

#### 7) Khangkhrai Bathwn (Crab Chutney)

Crab chutney has long been a cherished dish among the Bodo people. It usually consists of a mixture of crab meat combined with local spices and herbs, resulting in a distinctive and delicious chutney.<sup>23</sup> Crabs are commonly found in the lakes and ponds of Assam, particularly during the monsoon season. The rising water levels create an ideal habitat for crabs to flourish. Numerous communities in Assam, including the Bodo community, partake in crab fishing and use their fresh catches in various traditional recipes such as crab chutney. Additionally, some Bodo women prepare crabs with roselle leaves.<sup>24</sup>

#### 8) Awua mewai jwng magur na

The curry magur na with auwa mewai is a traditional food rarely prepared. It is a valuable recipe. It is prepared with a bamboo shoot by boiling. This curry is consumed to recover smallpox or large pox diseases by drying up scar marks of the body. For curry spices like ginger, curry Patta oil and salt added. Mustard seed is used instead of oil for the medicinal purpose of the curry.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. CONCLUSION

In summary, it can be said that the culinary practices of the Bodos are rich in cultural heritage. Their cuisine combines seasonal dishes with special recipes for different occasions. While Bodo dishes may not be elaborate, they are both flavorful and nourishing, providing adequate amounts of essential components for a balanced diet. Bodo cuisine is noted for its sparing use of spices, yet it remains rich in flavor, drawing upon local vegetables and herbs, with wild coriander being particularly significant in Bodo cooking. Culinary practices are closely tied to cultural identity, and each community possesses its own unique identity along with a specific array of ingredients, cooking methods, and flavors and Bodos are no different in that.

<sup>21</sup> Basumatary Bhanumati, *Indigenous Food Habit of Bodo Tribe*, International journal of research in Academic World, E-ISSN-2583-1615

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Basumatary Bhanumati, *Indigenous Food Habit of Bodo Tribe*, International journal of research in Academic World, E-ISSN-2583-1615

<sup>25</sup> Baro Maneswar, *A Study on The Food Habits And Traditional Knowledge System of Bodos*, An Unpublished Thesis, Bodoland University.