



## Food, Culture and Society in Relation to the Assamese People with Special Reference to Jorhat

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**Abstract:** The study of food habits helps us to understand a particular culture of a particular community. In this regard, a fieldwork was conducted in Jorhat district, in the village Monai Maji near Malow Ali, among the Assamese people. Assamese people are predominantly Hindu people in the North Eastern state of Assam, where they are found mostly in the Brahmaputra valley. As the climate of the area is hot humid sub tropical, so the study was conducted to find out the pattern of food, which are good for health in such hot humid climatic zones. The paper is based on the research work of food habit from the perspectives of environment, society and culture, with changes at present. Based on the observation and data collection, the paper has found out the relationship between food, society and culture as a whole.

**Keywords:** Food, *pitha*, economic system, health, geography, climate, society

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### Introduction

Food habit is an important aspect of human culture and can provide valuable insights into a society's values, traditions, and economic systems. Anthropologists have long been interested in studying food habits, both from a biological and cultural perspectives. From biological perspectives, anthropologists study the nutritional and physiological aspects of food and how they impact human health and development. From cultural perspectives, anthropologists study the social, economic, and symbolic meanings of food, including its production, distribution, and consumption. Food habits can vary widely across cultures and can be influenced by a variety of factors, including geography, climate, religion, and economic systems.

Anthropologists use a range of methods to study food habits, including participant observation, interviews, and surveys. They may also analyze food-related artifacts, such as cooking tools and utensils, and examine food-related practices, such as rituals and taboos. The study of food habits in anthropology provides a rich and complex understanding of human societies and their relationship to the natural environment, as well as the cultural and economic factors that shape food production and consumption, we study food habits in anthropology for the following reasons:

**Understanding culture:** Food habits are a fundamental part of human culture and provide important insights into a society's values, beliefs, and traditions. Studying food habits can help us better to understand how different cultures relate to the natural environment and how they use food to express their identity and social status.

**Exploring human adaptation:** Anthropologists study how different cultures adapt to their environments, and food habits are an important part of this adaptation. Studying food habits can help us to understand how different cultures use food to cope with environmental challenges such as climate, geography, and resource availability.

**Health and nutrition:** Food habits play an important role in human health and nutrition. Anthropologists study how different cultures use food to maintain good health and prevent disease, and how food practices can impact individuals and communities.

**Globalization and cultural change:** As societies become more interconnected, food habits are changing rapidly around the world. Anthropologists study how globalization and cultural exchange are influencing food habits and how this is affecting local cultures and economies. Overall, studying food habits in anthropology is a way to gain a deeper understanding of human societies and their relationship to the natural environment, as well as the cultural, economic, and political factors that shape food production and consumption

## Review of literature

Food is a fundamental aspect of human life and culture, and plays an important role in social gatherings and celebrations. Different cultures have their own unique cuisines and culinary traditions, and food can be used to express identity, celebrate heritage, and bring people together. Hence, as part of this fieldwork, the relevant review of literature is discussed.

According to WHO (World Health Organization) 'food, substance consisting essentially of protein, carbohydrate, fat, and other nutrients used in the body of an organism to sustain growth and vital processes and to furnish energy. The absorption and utilization of food by the body is fundamental to nutrition and is facilitated by digestion.' ([Healthy diet \(who.int\)](http://who.int))

Various studies have been conducted into different aspects of food among populations. Some works are cited in this review as follows:

A study that was conducted at Monai Majhi of Jorhat District, Assam from 27<sup>th</sup> December to 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 showed that, most of the surveyed people commonly prefer to eat *chira* (flattened rice) with curd and jaggery, *luchi* (a kind of fried taco) with *Aloo Pitika* (mashed potato), *Puri* with vegetables, *Ghugni*, *Jolpan* and omlette for breakfast. For lunch and dinner, they commonly prefer rice with dal, vegetables, cereals and fish or meat curry, *Masor Tenga* (fish with sour like lemon or tomato), *khar* (alkali made from papaya), duck curry, fish fry with dal and rice, *Aloo Pitika* (mashed potato) with dal and rice, and bamboo shoot curry.

At the global level, anthropologists have long been interested in food, food ways, and nutrition. Their contributions in this area have been substantial. The International Conferences on Ethnological and Food Research have tried to bring out various food habits in different parts of the world. The objectives of ethnological food research include alleviation of hunger and improvement in dietary conditions all over the world, more particularly in the developing countries. The anthropologists have also worked as consultants in the formulation of governmental policy on food and nutrition. For instance, in USA, during the Second World War, ethnological food researchers led by Margrate Mead worked with the government to formulate policy on national nutritional and agricultural programme. During this period, the US government appointed a committee of anthropologists on food habits. The committee is credited to have published two widely used and impressive books: Manual for the Study of Food Habits Committee on Food Habits, National Academy of Sciences Bulletin, III, Washington, D.C., 1945, and The Problem of Changing Food Habits [Report of the Committee on Food Habits, (1941-1943), National Academy of Sciences Bulletin, 108, Washington, D.C. 1943.].

Food is the most visible and frequently encountered cultural manifestation of a community. Though not strictly artifact in the sense that it is the most luminal of categories and continuously responds to cultural realities, food provides an idea about the values and mode of life of a community (Dutta, 2008).

Food habit of a community is influenced by geographical as well as social environment. Food procurement and its preservation are conditioned by the climate, varying seasons, community size, economic condition, infrastructure and technological knowledge. Traditional norms, religious belief and societal values also influence consumption pattern (Saikia, 2013).

Malinowski (1944) argued in his study of Trobrianders that the main function of food in a society is for human survival. He has pointed out that human body's need for food has done much to shape society through all the activities concerned with food production, distribution and utilization.

Harper and Spencers have developed a scientific approach to the study of food in culture. Surely, foods are for the survival of human species. But there are certain elements in the culture of a group which condition the acceptance or rejection of particular foods. The authors while formulating the approach identified four aspects of food-culture analysis. These aspects constitute the conceptual framework for looking into the food habits of a community.

S L Doshi (1995) Food in any society is basically an indispensable means of survival. The human need for food has done much to shape society in a particular way through all the activities concerned with food production, distribution and utilization. Food, therefore, is not only a source of satisfying innate biological instinct or a bio-chemical process but is also social and cultural. The identity of each ethnic group can be known or established through its food habits, food- ways and food ideology. The quality of food is also a sign and symbol of wealth or status. Each ethnic group has its prestige foods, food fads and food avoidances. And then, all the foods are characterized as either 'cold' or 'hot'. The increased interaction among diverse ethnic groups, the process of urbanization, various changes in the crop pattern and above all, the implementation of five year plans have changed food ideology to a great extent. There is a class perspective on food though the consumption of various kinds of foods is rooted in the ethnicity of a group or a community. Food habits and food ideology of a society, therefore, are the result of ecology, changing food commodities, food processing and use, as well as of historical processes. The present study has a specific thrust: it is to analyze food habits of the tribals in terms of culture. More specifically food is analyzed in the context of the ethnicity of a group. Thus, it is a study of food in the context of ethnicity or culture.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To understand the traditional food practices of the Assamese people.
2. To analyze the impact of influence from other communities on food habits
3. To Promote the preservation of traditional food practices of the Assamese people.

## Methodology

The methodology was anthropological. I used a variety of research methodologies to collect data on the cultural significance of food and the ways in which food practices were influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors. Data were collected from 600 families. In the case of anthropological fieldwork research on food habits in Jorhat, Assam, the methodology outlined includes three main techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic mapping.

I also used archival research to gain historical perspectives on food habits in Assam. I conducted a literature review of relevant academic articles, books, and government documents to understand how food practices have evolved over time and the factors that have influenced these changes.

The methodology used in anthropological fieldwork research on food habits in Assam is designed to be comprehensive and flexible, using a range of techniques to gather rich qualitative data that can be used to answer complex research questions about the social, economic, and environmental factors that influence food practices in the region.

Food habits in Jorhat, Assam are heavily influenced by the region's geography, climate, and diverse communities. Assamese cuisine, which is the dominant cuisine in Jorhat, is known for its use of local ingredients and unique cooking techniques.

Rice is the staple food of Jorhat, and it is usually served with a variety of side dishes, including *dals* (lentils), *pasoli* (vegetables), and fish or meat dishes. Vegetarian food is also quite popular in the region, with dishes like *khar* (a traditional dish made with papaya and pulses), *pitika* (mashed potato dish), and various types of *pithas* (rice cakes).

Tea is another important aspect of not only of Jorhat but also of entire Assam's food culture. The region is known for its tea plantations and produces some of the best tea in the world. Many people in Jorhat start their day with a cup of tea, and it is also served as a refreshment throughout the day.

## Traditional Assamese Food

Jorhat, being a district in Assam, is known for its unique cuisine which is influenced by its geography and diverse communities. Here are some examples of popular Assamese dishes and sweets:

### *Assamese Traditional Dishes*

**Fish curry:** Assam is known for its fish curries, and Jorhat is no different. Rou, catfish, and ilish are some of the popular fish used in Jorhat's fish curries, which are usually cooked with tomatoes, onions, ginger, and garlic.



Figure 1: Fish curry

***Aloo Bengena pitika:*** *Aloo bengena pitika* dish is made by mashing boiled potatoes and roasted eggplant (*bengena*) together and mixing them with finely chopped onions, green chilies, mustard oil, and salt.



Figure 2: Aloo Bengena Pitika



***Khaar:*** *Khaar* is a traditional Assamese dish that is made with pulses, vegetables, and raw papaya. It has a unique taste and is usually served with rice.



**Figure 3: Khaar**

**Bamboo shoot pickle:** Bamboo shoots are a popular ingredient in Assamese cuisine, and the pickle made from them is a popular condiment in Jorhat. It is usually made by fermenting bamboo shoots with mustard oil, salt, and spices.



**Figure 4: Bamboo shoot pickle**

***Masor tenga:*** *Masor tenga* is a sour fish curry that is a staple in Assamese cuisine. It is made by cooking fish in a tangy tomato and lime-based gravy.



Figure 5: *Masor Tenga*

***Koldil bhaji:*** *Koldil bhaji* is a dish made from banana flowers that are cooked with potatoes, onions, and a variety of spices. It is a popular vegetarian dish in Assam.



Figure 6: *Koldil Bhaji*

**Duck curry:** Duck curry is a popular dish in Jorhat, especially during festive occasions. It is usually cooked with a variety of spices and served with rice.





Figure 7: Duck curry

***Kol posola aru bhaji:*** *Kol posola aru bhaji* is a dish made from banana stems and leaves, which are cooked with onions, ginger, and a variety of spices. It is a nutritious and delicious vegetarian dish.



Figure 8: Kol Posola Aru Bhaji

***Doi Sira:*** *Doi Sira* is a traditional dish from Assam, India, which is made by combining curd (*doi*) and flattened rice (*sira*). The dish is often served as a breakfast or snack item and is especially popular during the summer months as it is cooling and refreshing.



Figure 9: Doi Sira

### ***Assamese Traditional Sweets***

***Pitha:*** *Pitha* is a type of rice cake that is popular in Assam, and Jorhat is no exception. There are different types of *pithas*, including *til pitha*, *narikol pitha*, and *ghila pitha*. *Til Pitha* are kind of pancakes made with rice flour and filled with sesame seeds and jaggery. *Narikol Pitha* are pancakes made with rice flour and filled with grated coconut and jaggery.



Figure 10 : Til Pitha, Narikol Pitha, And Ghila Pitha

***Ghila Pitha:*** Pancakes made with a mixture of rice flour, coconut, and jaggery, folded into a half-moon shape.

**2. *Xutuli pitha:*** *Xutuli pitha* is a sweet rice cake that is shaped like a cone and filled with sweet coconut and jaggery filling. It is a popular snack in Assam and is usually served during festivals.



Figure 11: Xutuli pitha

**Pani pitha:** *Pani pitha* is a type of deep-fried rice dumpling that is usually served with a sweet and spicy chutney made from tamarind and jaggery.



Figure 12: Pani Pitha.

**Narikol Laddu:** Also known as coconut laddu, these are sweet balls made with grated coconut and sugar or jaggery. They are often enjoyed during festive occasions.

These are some of the traditional foods of Jorhat, Assam. The cuisine of the region is diverse, flavored, and reflects the culinary traditions of the various communities that call it home.

## Types of Rice

Assam is known for its rich diversity of rice varieties, with many unique and indigenous types of rice grown in the region. Here are some of the popular rice varieties in Assam:

1. **Aijong:** A variety of aromatic rice grown mainly in the Upper Assam region, with a distinctive fragrance and flavor. It is usually used for preparing traditional Assamese dishes like *pitha*, *payas*, and pulao.

2. **Hali:** A short-grain, sticky rice variety that is commonly used in Assamese cuisine for preparing dishes like *pitha*, *doi chira* (curd and flattened rice), and *xandoh guri* (ground rice powder).
3. **Lahi:** A medium-grain rice variety that is cultivated in the floodplains of Assam. It is used for making dishes like *xaru bhoja* (a traditional Assamese thali) and *payas* (a type of rice pudding).
4. **Sokua:** A non-aromatic, long-grain rice variety that is widely grown in Assam. It is used for making dishes like *bhaat* (boiled rice) and pulao.
5. **Joha rice:** Joha rice is a fragrant and flavorful rice variety native to Assam. It is usually used to prepare traditional dishes like *pitha*, *payas*, and pulao.
6. **Bora saul:** *Bora saul* is a short-grained, glutinous rice that is used to make traditional Assamese sweets like *doi jolpan*, *xutuli pitha*, and other snacks.

## Types of Spices

Jorhat, Assam, is known for its rich biodiversity and agricultural practices, which includes the cultivation of a variety of spices. The region's fertile soil, favorable climate, and cultural heritage contribute to the production and use of various spices in the local cuisine. Here are some of the spices found in Jorhat, Assam:

**Bhut Jolokia** (Ghost Pepper): *Bhut Jolokia* is one of the hottest chili peppers in the world and is native to Assam. It is known for its intense heat and is used sparingly in dishes to add a fiery kick.

**Ginger:** Assam is known for its aromatic and flavorful ginger. Assam ginger has a strong and pungent flavor, which adds depth to various dishes and beverages.

**Kala Jeera** (Black Cumin): *Kala Jeera* is a small, crescent-shaped seed with a distinctive flavor. It is often used as a spice in Assamese cuisine to enhance the taste of curries, pickles, and chutneys.

**Black Cardamom:** Black cardamom, also known as "*Elaichi*" in Assamese, is a robust and smoky-flavored spice. It is used in both savory and sweet dishes, providing a distinct and earthy aroma.

**Khar:** *Khar* is a traditional Assamese spice mixture made from sun-dried banana peels and ashes. It is used as a key ingredient in many traditional dishes and acts as a natural alkaline agent, giving a unique flavor and taste.

**Turmeric:** Turmeric, or "*Halodhi*" in Assamese, is widely used in Assamese cuisine. It adds a vibrant yellow color to dishes and imparts a warm and earthy flavor. Turmeric is also known for its health benefits and is used in Ayurvedic medicine.



**Panch Phoron:** *Panch Phoron* is a blend of five spices commonly used in Assamese cooking. It consists of fenugreek seeds, nigella seeds, cumin seeds, mustard seeds, and fennel seeds. This spice mixture is used to temper dishes, providing a unique flavor and aroma.

**Cinnamon:** Cinnamon, or "*Dalchini*" in Assamese, is a common spice used in Jorhat. It adds a sweet and woody flavor to both savory and sweet dishes, including curries, desserts, and teas.

### Role of Religion in Food

Assamese people are moderately religious, and in everyday life, religious issues don't matter in the society. However, during the days of certain socio economic festivals like *Bihu* or any worships, especially in the months related to Lord Krishna or the Great Shankar Dev, use of vegetarian food is usually observed. In case of child birth in the *naam kirtan* in 21 days (in case of boys) or one month (in case of girls), vegetarian food is usually served. Other than this, no specific food restriction is found among them except the edible food described above.

### The Role of the Environment in Food

The role of the environment in shaping the food system of Jorhat, Assam is significant. The region's unique geography, climate, and natural resources have a profound impact on the availability of ingredients, agricultural practices, and culinary traditions. The role of the environment in the food system of Jorhat, focusing on agriculture, local ingredients, and sustainability.

Jorhat, located in the northeastern part of Assam, is blessed with a fertile land and a favorable climate for agriculture. However from the last 2 years, there is a tendency of extreme hot climate observed from August to December. The months of September and October covers the hottest months in the area with dry hot summer with temperature ranging upto 40 degree Celsius and feeling like 46 degree at present. The region is characterized by its rich alluvial soil, abundant rainfall, and moderate temperature. These environmental factors create ideal conditions for the cultivation of a wide variety of crops, including rice, tea, vegetables, fruits, and spices.

Rice is the staple food of Assam, and Jorhat is known for its high-quality rice production. The fertile soil and ample water resources allow for the cultivation of multiple rice varieties, including the aromatic *Joha rice* and *Bora Saul*, a glutinous



rice variety. The availability of rice as a staple crop shapes the dietary patterns and culinary traditions of the people in Jorhat.

Tea cultivation is another significant aspect of Jorhat's agricultural landscape. The region is renowned for its tea gardens, producing some of the finest teas in the world. The favorable climate and topography, combined with skilled labor and traditional tea processing techniques, contribute to the unique flavor and aroma of Jorhat's tea. Tea cultivation not only provides a major source of income but also influences the tea-drinking culture in Jorhat and the surrounding regions.

The natural resources of Jorhat, including its forests, rivers, and wetlands, also play a vital role in the food system. The region is blessed with a diverse range of flora and fauna, which contribute to the availability of various ingredients used in Assamese cuisine. The forests yield wild edible plants, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and medicinal herbs that are incorporated into traditional dishes. The rivers and wetlands are a source of fish and aquatic resources, which are a significant part of the local diet. The environmental factors also shape the sustainability practices in the food system of Jorhat. Assam has a long history of agroecological practices, where traditional farming methods, such as organic farming and mixed cropping, are employed. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of sustainable agriculture and the importance of preserving the environment. Efforts are being made to promote organic farming, conserve indigenous crop varieties, and adopt eco-friendly practices. Local organizations and communities are working towards preserving the biodiversity, conserving water resources, and promoting agroforestry to enhance the resilience of the food system in the face of environmental challenges.

Furthermore, the environment also influences the food culture and identity of the people in Jorhat. The connection between nature and food is deeply rooted in the cultural practices and traditions of the region. Folk songs, rituals, and festivals celebrate the relationship between the environment and food, emphasizing the symbiotic connection between humans and nature.

### **Changes observed in Food Habit at present**

Jorhat, Assam, traditional food continues to hold its significance, but the influence of some foods from other cultures and other communities are changing the dietary preferences. It has also made an impact on the local culinary scene. With globalization, urbanization, and increased connectivity, Jorhat has witnessed the introduction and adoption of various foods from foreign and other foods.

One of the significant shifts in modern food consumption in Jorhat is the increased availability and consumption of processed and packaged foods. With busy lifestyles and changing dietary habits, these convenient food options have gained popularity among the urban population in Jorhat. Brands like Maggie, Lays, and various packaged food items have become readily accessible and are often consumed as quick snacks or on-the-go meals. The influence of Indian metropolitan cities can also be seen in Jorhat's modern food scene. Dishes like dosa, idli, pav bhaji, and chaat have found their place in local restaurants and eateries. These South Indian and North Indian delicacies have gained popularity and are now commonly consumed by Jorhat's residents. Additionally, fusion food, combining elements of Assamese cuisine with flavors and techniques from other regional cuisines, has also gained traction among the food enthusiasts in the city. International cuisine has made its way to Jorhat, reflecting the global food trends and the evolving tastes of the population. One such example observed was the presence of KFC in Jorhat town. Chinese, Thai, and Italian restaurants have emerged, offering dishes like fried rice, noodles, curries, pasta, and pizzas. These international flavors have become a part of the dining experience in Jorhat, catering to those seeking a diverse culinary experience. The influence of modern food is not limited to eating out or packaged foods. It has also seeped into home cooking practices. Modern kitchen appliances and gadgets like microwave ovens, blenders, air fryers, and electric grills have become common in households, facilitating the preparation of various modern dishes.

The introduction of modern foods, there has also been a shift in the consumption patterns of traditional Assamese dishes. While traditional foods like rice, fish, and vegetables continue to be a staple, their preparation and presentation have evolved to incorporate modern techniques and flavors. For example, traditional fish curry may be given a twist by using different spices or cooking methods. Assamese thalis, which traditionally consisted of a variety of dishes served on a banana leaf, are now also available in modern buffet-style setups in restaurants, catering to larger gatherings and events. However, people take these foods occasionally, while going out, while traveling or in case of some parties like birthday party.

It is worth noting that while modern foods have found their place in Jorhat's food scene, traditional Assamese food remains deeply rooted in the local culture and is cherished by the people. Traditional sweets like *pitha* (rice cakes), *payas* (rice pudding), and *laru* continue to be made and enjoyed during festivals and special

occasions. The preparation of these traditional delicacies often involves using locally available ingredients like rice, jaggery, coconut, and sesame seeds.

## Case Studies

Several case studies were collected, but only one is added here.

### A Case Study of Rani Mamai and Family

**Introduction:** This case study aims to examine the food habits of Binu Borah and her family, residing in Monai Majhi, Jorhat, Assam. The study explores their dietary preferences, cultural influences, meal patterns, and the incorporation of modern foods into their traditional eating habits. By analyzing these factors, we gain insight into the complex relationship between food, culture, and family dynamics.

**Background:** Name: Binu Borah

Age: 37

Binu Borah and her family primarily consume a diet consisting of rice, dal, and various meats such as chicken, mutton, and fish. Furthermore, Binu Borah observes fasting on Wednesdays (in memory of her deceased husband) and Thursdays (as a devotion to Sai Baba). These fasting days influence the food choices.

**Food Habits:**

**Breakfast Habits:**

For breakfast, Binu Borah and her family usually indulge in traditional items such as *sira* and *muri* with *doi* (puffed rice and flattened rice with yogurt). However, her children have a preference for more contemporary breakfast options, including eggs, bread, and roti.

**Lunch and Dinner:** Binu Borah prepares rice, dal, and meat for both lunch and dinner. This demonstrates a consistent pattern in their meal choices, showcasing the importance of these staple foods in their daily diet. The inclusion of meat, especially chicken, mutton, and fish, highlights the family's emphasis on protein-rich foods.

**Fasting Practices:** Binu Borah observes fasting on Wednesdays (her husband's death anniversary) and Thursdays (devoted to Sai Baba). This showcases her religious and personal beliefs, where she refrains from consuming any food or specific ingredients during these designated fasting days.

**Generation Gap in Food Choices:** A significant observation in the family's food habits is the difference in preferences between the older and younger generations. The older generation tends to prefer boiled foods, while the younger generation shows a preference for fried foods. This generation gap highlights the influence of

evolving tastes and the adoption of modern cooking methods.

Occasional Outside Eating: Binu Borah's family occasionally indulges in eating outside the home, particularly enjoying dishes like momo, chowmein, and other new and modern foods. This signifies their liberal attitude to embracing new culinary experiences and incorporating them into their traditional food practices. This change also reflects the influence of urbanization and the exposure to diverse cuisines.

The case study of Binu Borah and her family's food habits shows the interplay between traditional and modern dietary practices. The family's reliance on rice, dal, and various meats demonstrates the significance of these foods in their daily meals. The inclusion of fasting days and cultural beliefs further influences their food choices. Moreover, the generational gap in preferences highlights the impact of evolving tastes and preferences within the family. Finally, the occasional indulgence in outside eating reflects the family's openness to incorporating new and diverse culinary experiences into their traditional food habits. By examining and understanding these food habits, we gain valuable insights into the complex dynamics of culture, tradition, and family influences on dietary preferences and choices.

## **Analysis**

The exploration on traditional food, modern foods, spices, and the role of religion and environment in the food system of Jorhat, Assam, several key themes emerge. These themes shed light on the cultural, historical, and social aspects of the region's food habits.

## **Traditional Food and Spices**

The exploration on traditional food and spices in Jorhat reveal the deep-rooted culinary traditions of the region. The use of local ingredients such as rice, fish, vegetables, and spices like ginger, black cardamom, and turmeric showcases the reliance on locally available resources. This not only reflects the region's agricultural practices but also highlights the connection between the people of Jorhat and their natural environment. The inclusion of traditional dishes like *aloo bengena pitika*, *doi sira*, and various sweets in the discussions emphasizes the cultural importance of food in Jorhat. These dishes are not just nourishment but also a means of celebrating festivals, social gatherings, and everyday life. They contribute to the preservation of

cultural identity and are passed down through generations, reinforcing a sense of community and belonging.

### **Modern Foods and Changing Dietary Patterns**

The introduction and adoption of modern foods in Jorhat indicate the influence of globalization, urbanization, and changing lifestyles. The popularity of processed and packaged foods, fast food chains, and international cuisines reflect the evolving tastes and preferences of the population, especially the younger generation. These foods offer convenience, variety, and exposure to new flavors and culinary experiences.

It is important to consider the potential impact of the increased consumption of modern foods on health and traditional food practices. While modern foods can provide convenience and novelty, a balance must be maintained to preserve the nutritional value and cultural significance of traditional Assamese cuisine. Efforts to promote locally sourced, organic, and sustainable food options can contribute to maintaining the link between food, culture, and health.

### **Role of Religion and Environment**

The discussions highlight the role of religion in influencing food habits in Jorhat, Assam. The observance of religious practices and rituals often dictates dietary restrictions and preferences.

The environment plays a crucial role in shaping the food system of Jorhat. The region's fertile soil, favorable climate, and diverse natural resources contribute to agricultural practices, availability of ingredients, and sustainability. The use of traditional farming methods, preservation of indigenous crop varieties, and the incorporation of wild edible plants and herbs in dishes demonstrate the integration of the environment into food practices.

### **Health benefits of Assamese food**

As per observation in the fieldwork, based on the food habit, certain health benefits have been observed from Assamese food habit. Certain features of Assamese food habit are as follows:

1. The food is simple in terms of recipe
2. Minimalistic use of spice
3. Use of some medicinal herbs almost everyday in food, especially *methi*, *azwain*, *ginger*, and various other herbs like *mosondori*, *bhedailota*, which are beneficial for gastric and/or stomach troubles.



4. As the area is located in a hot humid climate, use of cold juicy vegetables like *jika*, *bhol* used along with lemon or tomato provide another delicious and healthy food in the scorching heat of summer. Normally, Assam experiences very hot climate in the months of September and October where the temperature rises up to 40 degree Celsius, but feels like 46 to 50 degree Celsius. So, during this period, people usually eat food with low spiced with lemon or tomato, or prefer to eat curd with flattened rice.

Health benefits as observed among the people among the Assamese community are the following:

1. People don't age with their numerical ages. It is difficult to find out the people above 40s and 50s, and often, they are found to be in their 30s.
2. Obesity is non existent.
3. Grey hair is also non existent among the people of the age range of 40 to 55.
4. Various diseases like thyroid, arthritis and diabetes are also very low, all credits go to the light food habit of the Assamese people.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the discussions on traditional food, modern foods, spices, and the role of religion and environment in the context of Jorhat, Assam provide valuable insights into the local food culture. Traditional food and spices showcase the rich culinary heritage of the region, while the adoption of modern foods reflects changing dietary patterns influenced by globalization and urbanization. The role of religion is evident in the dietary restrictions and preferences observed by individuals, while the environment contributes to the availability of ingredients and sustainability practices.

It is important to recognize and appreciate the significance of traditional food in preserving cultural identity and fostering community bonds. Efforts to promote and sustain traditional food practices, such as using locally sourced ingredients, supporting small-scale farmers, and preserving traditional recipes, can help maintain the authenticity and nutritional value of Assamese cuisine.

The discussions also shed light on the role of the environment in shaping the food system of Jorhat. The fertile soil, favorable climate, and diverse natural resources in the region contribute to agricultural practices and the availability of fresh produce. Emphasizing sustainable and environmentally friendly food practices, such as

organic farming, can further enhance the resilience of the local food system and protect the region's natural resources.

In conclusion, the discussions on traditional and modern foods, spices, and the influence of religion and environment in the food system of Jorhat, Assam, provide a comprehensive understanding of the region's food culture. Balancing the preservation of traditional food practices with the integration of modern food choices, promoting sustainable and locally sourced ingredients, and respecting cultural and religious beliefs are important factors in shaping the future of Jorhat's food landscape. By appreciating and valuing the cultural and environmental aspects of food, we can ensure the continued celebration and enjoyment of Assamese cuisine in Jorhat and beyond.

In summary, Jorhat, Assam's food culture is a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity. Traditional food holds a significant place, rooted in the local culture and culinary practices. The introduction of modern foods and flavors has added diversity and convenience to the local food scene. Spices play a crucial role in enhancing the flavors of Assamese dishes and reflect the region's rich biodiversity.

Preserving the traditional food practices, promoting sustainable agriculture, and embracing new culinary trends are key factors in maintaining a vibrant and diverse food culture in Jorhat, Assam. It is essential to strike a balance between preserving the rich culinary heritage and embracing the changes brought about by globalization. By doing so, Jorhat can celebrate its cultural identity while also adapting to the evolving needs and preferences of its residents and visitors.

Efforts should be made to promote awareness and appreciation of traditional Assamese dishes and their importance in the local culture. This can be done through culinary festivals, cooking workshops, and the documentation of traditional recipes. Additionally, supporting local farmers and sustainable agriculture practices can ensure the availability of fresh and locally sourced ingredients, further promoting the preservation of traditional food practices.

As Jorhat embraces modern foods, it is essential to strike a balance that considers the health implications and sustainability of these food choices. Encouraging the consumption of locally sourced, organic, and seasonal ingredients can contribute to a more sustainable food culture. Furthermore, incorporating traditional food practices into modern dishes and adapting them to changing tastes can create a unique fusion of flavors that honors the heritage of the region while catering to contemporary preferences.

The abundance of spices in Jorhat presents opportunities for the development of culinary tourism. Highlighting the unique flavors and aromas of Assamese cuisine can attract visitors who are interested in exploring diverse food cultures. Local restaurants and food establishments can play a crucial role in showcasing traditional dishes and using locally sourced spices, thus supporting local farmers and preserving the authenticity of the cuisine.

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