

Ankamthu: Traditional mustard leaves fermented food preparation of Churachandpur District, Manipur

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Abstract: Leaves of mustard *Brassica juncea*, *Brassica campestris* which belong to the family cruciferae is the most common vegetable food consumed all over the world. Mustard leaves cannot be preserved in the fresh form as the leaves are highly perishable. During the season particularly during winter it is available in sufficient amount. So, in Churachandpur Manipur preservation of the surplus mustard leaves is done through traditional fermentation and the fermented product is locally known as Ankamthu. It is mainly prepared for off season use and also to supplement their economic income. Ankamthu is mainly prepared by women and the knowledge is passed down from generation to generation in words of mouth and no written record is found so far. The present study aimed at documentation of traditional knowledge of this fermented food preparation and to identify the raw materials used and the mode of consumption and its economic importance to the local producers.

Keywords: Traditional knowledge, fermented food, Ankamthu Churachandpur district.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Fermentation as a method of food preservation is being practiced in many parts of the world. In addition to preservation fermented foods provides the bio nutrients minerals and fortified with bioactive compounds enhancing the flavor, aroma and exert health promoting beneficial (Darby 1979, Cambell-Platt 1994, Steinkraus 1998). Most of the fermentation process is related to the acts of mystics, arts and science (Vandamme, 1982). The Orient countries such as Japan, China and Phillipines produced a very popular fermented food soy sauce from soyabean and wheat fermented Indonesia produce tempeh from soybean fermented, Bongkrek from coconut press cake and Onjom from peanut press cake. Kimchi a fermented vegetable food with characteristics taste and several physiological effects including antioxidants, antimutagenesis and fibrinolytic activity is a famous Korean traditional food (Lee, 1997). Traditional fermented foods and beverages have been reported from Darjeeling and Sikkim Hills (Tamang et al., 1988, Tamang 1996), Himachal Pradesh (Navdeep and Bhalla 2004) and Naga tribes of North-eastern India (Ashiho and Odyuo 2009). Different fermented foods such as Hawaijar (Jayeram et al. 2008), soibum, soidon (Giri and Janmejay 2000), ngari and hentak (Thapa et al., 2004) are important fermented foods of Manipur. Churachandpur district which lies to the southern part of Manipur is inhabited by various tribes namely, Chiru, Chin, Gangte, Hmar, Kom, Mate, Lushai, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou which belong to the Kuki-Mizo community. These different communities share similar food habit, culture,

tradition and language they are economically poor but rich in traditional knowledge they are largely depends on wild edible products for their livelihood. Their main occupation is basically cultivation. Besides wild products they grow different kinds of seasonal vegetables such as mustard, pumpkin, chilly, cucumber, beans, and different varieties of spice etc. They also grow rice which is the main staple food. Most of these vegetable food of different plant origin is available in sufficient amount during their respective seasons as a result most of these vegetables are wasted. From time immemorial the women folk of these tribes are engaged in preparing the traditional fermented food as a means for preservation, supplement their nutrients and source of income. These indigenous traditional fermented foods are important and inseparable constituent of food consumed by these tribes and play a vital role in their indigenous traditional life style. The traditional system of fermented food preparation is the knowledge; practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation however traditional fermented food preparation remained exist in words of mouth or oral tradition. The traditional knowledge and ideas remained undocumented and there is threat of being forgotten today as the advent of modern civilization has adversely affected the age-old tradition and the younger generations are not exposed to traditional practices. So many indigenous knowledge systems are at risk of becoming extinct. Proper preservation and documentation of the indigenous knowledge is of urgent need which otherwise may be lost for good. This research aimed at authentic documentation of traditional indigenous

method of preparation of Ankamthu, its fermentation technology, mode of consumption and economic importance to the society.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Field survey was conducted in different villages of Churachandpur district where fermentation was carried out and the sites visited were synchronized with the preparation time. Some of The sites visited were Hengkot, Teijang, , Zalenphai, , Dialkhai, Gamhuai, Pamjal, Chonghang veng, Henglep, Singhat, Gamnoiphai, Changpikot B. Salvaphai, from different sub-division of churachandpur district to where fermentation was carried out to document the traditional indigenous knowledge of this fermented food preparation. The step by step process of the fermented food preparation was recorded by observing and interviewing the practitioner.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

(i) Traditional fermentation process of Ankamthu

Ankamthu is prepared from leaves extract of mustard green *Brassica juncea*, *Brassica campestris* etc. During peak season the leaves are plucked in bulked, clean and washed in tap water and then spread over bamboo mat (locally called pheh) and wilted in the sun. The wilted leaves are then crushed in traditional wooden crusher. The mesh was then kept in an air tight fermentation basket made of bamboo with a lid. The exudates or the leaves extract was squished and collected in a pot and boiled till the extract become condensed. The extract was then transfers to hollow bamboo container and tightens the mouth and kept near the fire or under the sun to undergo fermentation for three to five days. This fermented mustard green extracted is called Ankamthu. The process of fermentation is shown in the photograph and is also represented in the form of a flow chart as below:

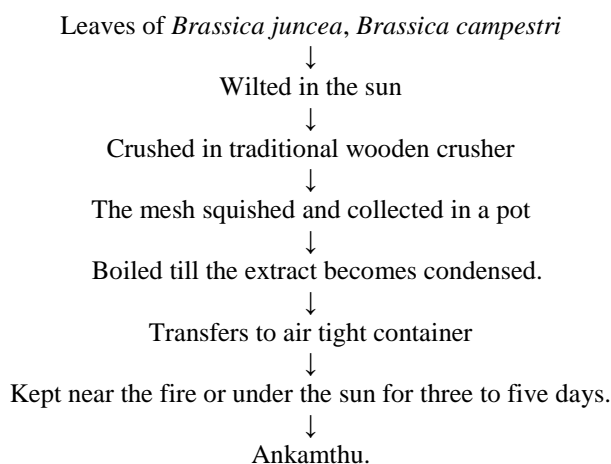


Photo1. Mustard leaves inside traditional basket Photo 2. Mustard leaves in collected in bulk photo 3. Mustard leaves wilted in the sun



Photo 4. The leaves are crush using
The fermented mustard leaves

photo 5. The exudates after squishing photo 6.
traditional wooden crusher (Ankamthu) keep in bamboo nodes

the mesh is boiled to condensed

(ii) Mode of Consumption

Ankamthu is directly consumed or mixed with salt, chilly, and onion in appropriate proportion. Green chilly gives better taste. It served as appetizer and one can consume food with this preparation only, even without other vegetable items supplement. It is consumed by all tribal community residing in the hill district but now the consumption extends to the valley communities of Manipur.

(ii) Economic importance

During the survey and field visit it was observed that Ankamthu has good marketing significance, it is prepared and sold in huge amounts in different local markets of Churachandpur district and all markets in hill districts of Manipur. The price is high comparing to other fermented foods it cost Indian rupees ranging from one hundred to two hundred per one internodes of hollow bamboo container. Since this fermented food is very popular and consumed in regular basis it is highly demanded. Ankamthu contributes substantially for family income of the people who engaged in this business.

4. CONCLUSION

Despite the advancement of science and technology the production of this fermented food still remains rudimentary. The raw material of this traditional fermented food preparation is easily and locally

available required less labour-input. If proper scientific and technical support is extended to the existing indigenous practices of this home based fermentation of Ankamthu there is a strong potential of increasing food production, improving the nutritional and economic status of the rural population.

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