



ANNALS OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY (AMRIT)

(A peer-reviewed open access multidisciplinary journal)

www.adtu.in/amrit



RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

Exploring the Traditional Cuisine and Cultural Heritage of the *Khamti*, and *Mising* Communities of Assam, India

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Article Chronicle: Received: 24/05/2023 Accepted: 08/12/2023 Published: 29/12/2023

Abstract

Culinary tourism has gained popularity in Assam, with an increasing number of tourists visiting the state to explore its diverse culinary offerings. *Khamti* and *Mising* communities have a rich culinary heritage that has remained largely unexplored. The study aims to uncover the culinary tourism potential of these communities and explore the way forward for enhancing the avenues of culinary tourism and sustainability and along with their cultural heritage. The study was made using secondary data sources to provide a broad overview of the topic, which will pave the way to go subsequently to collect the primary data through direct observation or experimentation. In order to fully realize the potential benefits of culinary tourism, proper planning, road map and strategy should be in place, to ensure that opportunities with sustainable development keeping in mind the culture and practices of the communities of Assam and environments. Additionally, it is essential to invest in the infrastructure upgradation and services to support the development of culinary tourism, such as food courts, food festival, food trails and accommodations, as well as supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the food and beverage sector.

Keywords: *Culinary Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Khamti and Mising Community*

1 Introduction

India's north-eastern state of Assam is renowned for its rich culinary traditions and cultural diversity. There are numerous indigenous populations in the state, and each has its own distinct food and cultural history (1). Assam has seen a rise in the popularity of culinary tourism in recent years, as more travelers come to the region to experience its rich gastronomic options (2). The indigenous *Khamti* and *Mising* communities in Assam have a rich culinary history that has mostly gone untapped. This study evaluates the viability of these communities' traditional cuisine and cultural legacy in addition to exploring their potential for culinary tourism. Food, along with other local products, emerges as a powerful weapon to attract tourists to a region (3). Culinary tourism is a crucial component of tourism. Traveling to different places is advised for tourists who are excited to experience the local cuisine. This provides culinary tourism a physical form. Additionally, culinary tourism experiences allow the tourism sector to enthrall a variety of visitors and finally be able to improve the local economy. However,

the culinary experiences depend on a variety of aspects, including Attractions, Food & Food Experiences, Infrastructure, Landscape, Branding, the preparation and presentation of the food, hygiene, local traditions and customs, price fairness, personnel abilities, and marketing communication. Authenticity of rural local food, quality, taste, and presentation of food and beverages, as well as other factors, affect tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. The calibre, flavour, and presentation of food and beverages have a considerable impact on this opinion. Additionally, a poor dining experience and presentation will harm both the tourist's degree of satisfaction and the perception of the location. "Inextricably intertwined are food and culture. Food is an opportunity to celebrate the present, connect with the past, and foster a sense of community." <https://www.culturetrip.com/the-importance-of-food-in-culture-and-society/>. From several angles, food offers travelers a complete experience. Domestic and foreign travelers are drawn to a destination by the variety of local cuisines. If its distinctive qualities were properly emphasized, culinary tourism could be one of the key factors driving travelers' vacation plans. Tourists are

now unaware of many of these villages' distinctive dishes, which might make the area more alluring and raise customer satisfaction levels. By utilizing already-existing tourism resources and spurring innovation, culinary tourism is the key to preserving a destination's cultural legacy. Culinary tourism supports the long-term, sustainable growth of local agriculture, food systems, local communities, culture, and tradition by raising tourist demand for locally produced food and drink (4).

2 Role of Cultural Heritage in the Promotion of Culinary Tourism

Cultural heritage plays a significant role in the promotion of culinary tourism, as it helps to showcase the unique and authentic flavours and ingredients of a particular place. Culinary tourism can be a means of promoting and disseminating cultural heritage, as it encourages the discovery and appreciation of traditional dishes and their ingredients, as well as the cultural practices and rituals associated with their preparation and consumption. In addition to showcasing traditional dishes and ingredients, cultural heritage can also play a role in the promotion of culinary tourism through the preservation of traditional cooking methods and techniques. The preservation and promotion of traditional cooking methods can attract tourists interested in experiencing the authentic flavours and cultural traditions of a destination. Furthermore, cultural heritage can also be promoted through the creation of culinary events and festivals that highlight the unique and diverse culinary traditions of a particular place (5). Overall, the promotion of cultural heritage through culinary tourism can help to boost the local economy, support small businesses, and preserve traditional culinary practices and techniques. Culinary tourism can provide an important source of income for local communities and contribute to the preservation of traditional culinary practices and ingredients, ultimately supporting the sustainability of a destination. Food is an integral part of any culture, and can be a powerful way to connect with others and learn about their traditions and values. Eating and sharing food together can bring people together and build a sense of community (6). Adapting a food heritage; changing ingredients, recipes, and cooking methods to suit international tourists' tastes; matching the natural and cultural heritage in order to enhance the appeal of the local food; and maintaining as much as possible the original look and feel of a food heritage are important (7). Local authorities, cultural associations, holders and practitioners have made efforts to preserve and promote elements, since local authorities understand that not only can such elements enhance their cultural identity, they may contribute to tourism and economic development. People that contribute to the development of a receiving society, and in order to preserve and protect, for present and future times, the tangible, natural, intangible and mixed cultural heritage, the indigenous species, the environment, and food and economic security of the place, the community, locality, region or nation. There have been several studies on the relationship between cultural heritage and culinary tourism.

2.1 *Khamti* and *Mising* Communities of Assam

The *Khamti* and *Mising* communities are two of the major indigenous communities of Assam with a long history and rich cultural heritage. According to the 2011 Census of India, the *Khamtis* are community, with a population of around 32,000 in the state of Assam. The *Mising*, also known as the *Miris*, is a community with a population of around 1.2 million in Assam. Both communities have a rich cultural heritage and are known for their unique cuisine, which is influenced by their local ingredients and cultural practices. The *Khamti* and *Mising* communities have a strong connection to the land and their food is an integral part of their cultural identity. One of the unique aspects of the *Khamti* and *Mising* communities' traditional cuisine is the use of local ingredients and traditional cooking techniques. For example, the *Khamti* community is known for its use of fermented bamboo shoot, which is used as a condiment in many of their dishes. The *Mising* community, on the other hand, is known for its use of locally grown vegetables, such as elephant foot yam and taro, in their dishes. These ingredients and cooking techniques give their traditional cuisines a distinct flavor and aroma that is not found in other regions of India. In addition to the use of local ingredients and traditional cooking techniques, the cultural practices and rituals associated with food and cooking play a significant role in the culinary traditions of the *Khamti* and *Mising* communities. For example, in the *Mising* community, food is an important aspect of their social and cultural identity. It is served during festivals and celebrations as a way of bringing people together and strengthening community bonds. In the *Khamti* community, food is also an important part of their cultural identity, with traditional dishes being served during important events and ceremonies. This paper aims to explore the traditional cousins and cultural heritage of the *Khamti* and *Mising* communities, by exploring the sources of this tradition and examining the impact of outside influences on their culinary practices.

3 Methodology

The methodology involved for the work are review of existing literature besides a comprehensive search of online databases and other published materials, relevant articles, reports, and other sources related to culinary tourism in Assam in reference to traditional cuisine and cultural heritage of the *Khamti* and *Mising* communities.

4 Observations and Findings

4.1 Exploring the *Khamti* and *Mising* Tribes Culinary Heritage

Tribe is a social group with local associations, endogamous with no specialty functions ruled by tribal officers inherited or combined in language or dialect identifying social distance with other tribes or castes. Among the various tribes of Northeast, the Tai are the major tribes, who are culturally very rich. They were the inhabitants of Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar. India particularly the North-

east Region is the home for the Tai *Khamti*, Tai Ahom, Tai Phake, Tai Khamyang, Tai Turung. The various sub groups of *Khamti* are - Namsom, Mongpong, Simit, Manlong, Longkeng, Manchuj, Khankeu, Mannoi, Mannow etc. As they belong to Tai origin, therefore, Tai Mongoloid features are found in them like other section of Tai or Shans. They behold a wide variety of knowledge about the herbal remedies which are prepared from plants and species. The knowledge about the medicinal plants are learned from their ancestors and from Tai Buddhist literature. Various studies have highlighted that in 1751 the *Khamti* tribes migrated to India from Irrawaddy valley, Myanmar. The culinary skills of this community's cooking is a jerrybuild style of cooking that allows too much scope for creativity. This offers tremendous varieties with huge variations in a particular dish by offering a diverse choice to the customers to satisfy their taste buds. *Khamti* food is an aromatic mixer of various ingredients like their diverse and colourful traditions. Their recipes and preparation methods are passed from generation to generation. The youngsters learn looking at the elders while preparing or serving the ethnic delicacies. *Khamti* community's secret ingredient are the herbs available in their kitchen garden like makat, po-hoihom, pi-chim-khim, plo-ching, pi-ki etc. The *Misings* are the other major community of Assam in Brahmaputra valley. The word *Mising* is a recent term meaning "pure man or real man". They belong to Tibeto-Burman group and categorized as schedule tribes by the constitution of India. As per their literature they migrated to Assam in 12th and 13th century A.D. *Misings* are considered as the hilly tribes and they always look for mountain ranges and river sides to reside. *Mising* community also prefers boil, steam food by using lots of green leafy vegetables, locally grown herbs and species like Takuk, Takpiyang, Tazik, Jomlakhuti (insulin tree), Bihlongi paat etc. In ancient days, they use to consume beef, but due to the influence of Hinduism, they give up eating beef. Pork is their main dish which is prepared in different ways. Due to globalization the food habits of *Mising* communities are also gradually changing.

4.2 Health Secrets of Tribal People

Despite the rich tradition of food and cooking within the *Khamti* and *Mising* communities, their traditional cuisine has not always been widely recognized or appreciated. Many food critics and tourists have questioned the authenticity and credibility of these traditional dishes, citing a lack of knowledge or exposure to them. There is a need to explore the tribal food and discover the health benefits it has over modern diets. Tribal food is very nutritious and contains many beneficial ingredients that are not found in modern diets. Few of the key benefits of eating tribal food includes-

1. Improved health: tribal food is high in fibre and low in sugar, which helps to improve overall health. It also contains essential vitamins and minerals that are necessary for good health.
2. Weight loss: Unlike processed foods, tribal food is low in calories and can help people lose weight quickly and

easily. It also stabilizes blood sugar levels, preventing spikes and crashes later on.

3. Reduced risk of disease: eating of traditional foods reduces the risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. This is because traditional foods are high in antioxidants and other nutrients that protect against disease.

The traditional or indigenous communities often have a wealth of knowledge about the use of natural remedies and traditional healing practices, which are passed down through generations. These practices may include the use of herbs, plants, and other natural substances to treat a variety of health conditions, as well as spiritual and cultural rituals to promote physical and mental well-being. It is important to note that the effectiveness and safety of traditional remedies and healing practices, however, needs scientific validation and therefore it is always advisable to consult a healthcare professional for advice on health matters.

4.3 Traditional Food Evolving as a USP to Tourism

The cuisines of *Khamti* and *Mising* belongs to the ethnic groups whose ingredients and cooking methods are influenced by the local climate, agricultural practices and cultural traditions of the region. In both *Khamti* and *Mising* cuisines, it is likely that traditional ingredients include locally grown and produced items such as rice, maize, vegetables, beans, and leafy greens, watercress, white basil, etc. The *Misings* are known for their love of non-vegetarian dishes, with a particular focus on fish, pork, and chicken. Both the communities are known for its use of fermented and dried food, such as dried fish and fermented bamboo shoots, which are used to add flavor to dishes. Spices and different types of herbs are used to add flavor to dishes. Some of the popular dishes from the *Mising* community include "purakho", a dish made with fermented bamboo shoots and pork, and "khar", a dish made with locally grown vegetables and spices. "Namsing" is another very popular dish amongst *Misings*. In making Namsing, they add some herbs such as Colocasia leaves, Long Coriander, Small River fish etc. The *Khamtis*, on the other hand, are known for their vegetarian cuisine, with a focus on local vegetables and grains. Some of the popular dishes from the *Khamti* community include "kharupi", a dish made with boiled beans and spices, Paa-Saa is a seasonal soup dish made of fresh river water fish, different herbs, and seasonings. The basic ingredients are dried cooled fresh pieces of reddish-brown fish, garlic, juice from the bamboo shoots, and salt. Home grown spices and herbs including ginger, chillies, garlic, white basil, and bamboo shoots are used to give a spicy flavour to the cooked dishes. There will be rice, a meat or fish curry cooked with different vegetables to go along with the rice, and a chutney of some sort which brings the heat of food along since it is prepared with lots of chillies. The type of bamboo used is a soft bamboo with a thin membrane covering the rice as it is being cooked, which allows for easy removal of cooked rice into one cylindrical piece. When the fish is barbecued using bamboo skewers,

it is called paaping, while when cooked with bamboo, it is called paa laam. Dry, ground fish is also popular with the other ethnic groups in Assam, but they call it hukoti (8). The traditional cooking methods used in *Khamti* and *Mising* cuisine may include boiling, steaming, frying, and roasting. It is likely that dishes are often cooked over a wood or charcoal fire. The ethnic foods of Assam are heavily influenced by the local climate and geography, as well as traditional cultural practices.

4.4 Amplitude and Horizons of Tribal, Forests and Indigenous Culinary Skills

Indigenous peoples, including tribal, have a deep knowledge and understanding of the forests that they have lived in and depended on for generations. They have developed a complex relationship with their environment, based on a deep understanding of the ecological processes and the interdependence of different species (9). There is a growing body of research that highlights the importance of studying the traditional ecological knowledge of tribal and other indigenous people in order to better understand and conserve the forests they inhabit. According to (10) the importance of the traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous peoples in conservation efforts. They argue that traditional ecological knowledge can be used to identify and protect important habitats and species, as well as to develop sustainable land-use practices. They also point out that the knowledge held by indigenous peoples can provide valuable insights into the ways in which different ecosystems function and change over time, which can be used to inform the management of protected areas. (11) highlights the importance of traditional ecological knowledge in understanding the relationship between tribals and the forest (12; 13). It's important in all cases to respect the sovereignty and autonomy of the indigenous peoples and their knowledge, and seek their free, prior, and informed consent before engaging in any development activities that could impact their lives and livelihoods. Some instances are-

1. Sustainable land use: Tribals have developed sustainable land use practices that have allowed them to live in harmony with the forest for generations. They have a deep understanding of the ecological processes and the interdependence of different species, which they use to make decisions about how to use the forest resources. By studying the traditional land use practices of tribals, we can learn about ways to use natural resources in a sustainable manner.
2. Biodiversity: Tribals have a deep knowledge of the biodiversity of the forest and the importance of different species. They have a keen understanding of the different ecological roles played by different species, and they have developed traditional management systems that have helped to conserve biodiversity. By studying the traditional ecological knowledge of tribals, we can learn more about the different species in the forest and how they interact.
3. Climate Change: Tribals have been living in the forests for a long time and have observed the changes

in the forest over time. They have a deep understanding of how the forest responds to climate change, which can be useful in developing conservation and management strategies.

4. Forest governance: Tribals have developed traditional systems of forest governance that have helped them to manage and conserve the forest resources. These systems are based on community-based approaches and are focused on ensuring that the forest resources are used in a sustainable manner. By studying the traditional governance systems of tribals, we can learn more about how to effectively govern and manage forest resources.
5. Holistic understanding: Traditional ecological knowledge of tribals provides a holistic understanding of the forest ecosystem. They understand that the forest is not only a source of livelihoods but also a place of spiritual significance, and that humans are a part of the forest. Their understanding of the forest is built on generations of living in and with the forest, which is vital for its conservation.

5 Culinary Tourism

Culinary tourism, which refers to the phenomenon of travelling to a destination specifically for the purpose of experiencing its food and drink, has been identified as an important area of opportunity for the development of a state's economy. The rich and diverse food culture of Assam is an important aspect of the state's heritage and identity, and it has the potential to attract visitors from all over the world. The culinary tourism has the potential to create employment opportunities, stimulate economic growth, and promote development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the food and beverage sector. The development of culinary tourism can help to diversify the state's economy. The state has a diverse food culture and has the potential to attract both domestic and international tourists. However, there is a need to develop infrastructure and services such as food courts, food festival and food trails to promote culinary tourism in the state. The traditional food festivals can play an important role in promoting the unique food culture of the state and attracting tourists to the region. Various studies indicated that certain areas as stated below could be considered to enhance the economy of the region through culinary tourism.

1. Promotion of local cuisine: culinary tourism provides an opportunity to promote and showcase the unique and diverse food culture of Assam, which can attract visitors from all over the world. By highlighting local cuisine and traditional dishes, culinary tourism can help to increase the visibility of the state and position it as a destination for food lovers.
2. Creation of Job opportunities in culinary specialization: The development of culinary tourism has the potential to create jobs in various sectors such as restaurant, hotels and tourism services, which can lead to a more robust economy. Tourism can create jobs in

various sectors, particularly in hotels, restaurants, and transportation.

3. Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development: culinary tourism has the potential to promote the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the food and beverage sector. This can include traditional food-based businesses such as restaurants, food stalls and street vendors, and food processors such as pickle and fruit preserves production.
4. Branding of the State: Culinary tourism can help to develop and promote the image of Assam as a destination known for its rich food culture and heritage. This can help to position the state as a unique and desirable destination, and can be a powerful tool to attract tourists and investment.
5. Preservation of cultural heritage: Culinary tourism has the potential to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Assam by highlighting traditional dishes and food preparation techniques. This can help to preserve and pass on traditional knowledge, customs, and skills related to food and food culture

It is important to note that, in order to fully realize the potential benefits of culinary tourism, it's necessary to have a proper plan and strategy in place, to ensure that opportunities are developed in a sustainable and responsible way, keeping in mind the culture, environment, and community of Assam. Additionally, it is essential to invest in the necessary infrastructure and services to support the development of culinary tourism, such as food courts, food festival, food trails and accommodations, as well as supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the food and beverage sector.

6 Conclusion

The studies referred in this paper demonstrate that culinary tourism has the potential to make a significant impact on the economy of Assam and the tribal communities. It can create employment opportunities, stimulate economic growth, and promote the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Additionally, promoting the diverse food culture of the state through events such as food festivals and food trails, the development of food courts, and emphasizing on ethnic foods can be powerful tools to attract tourists and boost the state's economy. However, these opportunities need to be properly developed and implemented to fully harness the potential benefits. In order to fully realize the potential benefits of culinary tourism, proper planning, road map and strategy should be in place, to ensure that opportunities with sustainable development keeping in mind the culture and practices of the communities of Assam and environments. Additionally, it is essential to invest in the infrastructure upgradation and services to support the development of culinary tourism, such as food courts, food festival, food trails and accommodations, as well as supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the food and beverage sector.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this reported communication.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their thanks to Assam down town University for providing the facility for the work.

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