

Traditional/Folk practices of Kerala Case studies - Part 4 : Traditional food articles

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Abstract

Traditional food/dietary articles are in vogue since thousands of years, used by the traditional communities of respective countries in the world. The adoption of food is based mainly on the locally available bioresources, knowledge of which is handed over generations or through trial and error method and may get modified from time to time according to the need, climate, suitability and environment. India is one among the mega diversity countries, holding rich bioresources, associated traditional knowledge and cultural expressions. Ancient scholars of Ayurveda developed and designed diverse food items, specific according to season, age and even body constitution. They have also explained the properties of each food article, used either alone or in combination and also formulated guidelines and principles for the consumption of food and medicine with a view to lead a healthy and productive life. In continuation to the earlier communication, the authors highlights three case studies exclusively on steamed food articles locally known as *Kooman kudukka appam* of the Muthuvan tribe, preparation of *Paala ada*, demonstrated by Karuppan and his family of Malappuram district and preparation of *Pathra ada* of Konkani community in Kasaragod district, Kerala.

Keywords: *Kooman kudukka appam*, *Paala ada*, *Pathra ada*, Ethnic food.

Introduction

Food and medicine are inseparable companions not only to human beings but also to all living beings in our planet. Through hereditary or trial and error method, the early man explored his surrounding and identified suitable flora and fauna used as food and medicine for sustenance. They also knew the need for consuming seasonal food to enhance the functioning of the immune system and to prevent diseases.

Ethnic food and medicine are mostly location specific and is best suited for the local climate and environment. Such a system of food and healing practices are deep rooted among the communities in their social, cultural and religious traditions. For centuries, these practices of food and medicine helped the people to lead a healthy

and holistic life, free from most of the modern day diseases (Pushpangathan, 2011). There are 36 tribal communities living in and around forest areas of Kerala which include Kanikkar, Kurichiyans, Kadar, Paniyar, Cholanaickans, Kurumar, Malapandaram, Malarayar, Mannans and Muthuvans. The non-tribal communities living in the coastal (fisherman community), plain, hilly areas of Kerala are the custodians of diverse traditional food/dietary recipes including food for prenatal and postnatal care of mother and child, youngsters, elderly people and specific food prepared during the festivals, special occasions, rituals, etc. The studies carried out by the authors through various projects, among the different tribal and non-tribal communities of Kerala documented 2883 information on Traditional

food/ dietary prescriptions that include 708 tribal and 2175 non-tribal information (Rajasekaran *et al.*, 2012).

In continuation to the earlier communication, the authors highlight three case studies (Case studies 13, 14 and 15) exclusively on steamed food articles namely, *Kooman kudukka appam* of the Muthuvan tribe, preparation of *Paala ada*, demonstrated by Karuppan and his family of Malappuram district and preparation of *Pathra ada*, a traditional preparation of Konkani community of Kasaragod district in Kerala.

CASE STUDY 13

Preparation of *Kooman kudukka appam* (Steamed food article of Muthuvan tribe)

This is a Muthuvan tribal information initially documented by Vasudevan Vaidyar, aged 47 residing at Edavanna Gramapanchayath of Malappuram district. It is an unique, steamed food prepared using green fruit shell of a tree, locally known as *Kooman kudukka*. The term *Kooman* denotes the nocturnal bird (owl) and *kudukka* means shell of a fruit. It shows the relationship between the bird and fruit which is directly linked with the sustenance of the bird. The bird is fond of eating nutritive tissue present inside the mature green shell. Probably,

this may be the reason why the local Muthuvan tribal people called this tree as '*Kooman kudukka maram*' (tree) or '*Petta thenga*' denoting a coconut fruit. The information on *Kooman kudukka appam* was documented from Sundaram and family, residing at Urungattery near Devathumala of Malappuram district. Long ago, when there was no vessel to cook, they used to cook rice by keeping it inside the fresh/dry shell of the fruit by hanging it above the fire all through the night. In the morning, the rice would have got cooked and ready for consumption. Study related to taxonomical identity of the tree is in progress. Genus of the plant is identified as *Cochlospermum*. sp.

Muthuvan tribe have rich traditional knowledge and unique cultural expressions. As part of life, they observe many rituals and customs. Ethnically, Muthuvan tribe is close to Dravidian race but have some features of Vedoids and Negrito races. They are medium in height and the complexion varies from light to dark brown. Both male and female grow hair and use ear rings. They speak a dialect, which is a primitive admixture of Malayalam & Tamil. In the past, they lived in the interior forest areas and subsisted with forest produces like wild tubers, fruits and meat of wild animals.

Ingredients of <i>Kooman kudukka appam</i>				
Sl.No.	Local Name	Botanical Name	Part used	Quantity
1	Mulayari	<i>Bambusa bambos</i> (L.) Voss	Dried Seeds (Powder)	250gm
2	Chittadalodakam	<i>Adhatoda beddomei</i> C.B. Clark	Fresh leaves juice	30ml
3	Nalla Jeerakam	<i>Cuminum cyminum</i> L.	Dried Fruit (Powder)	5gm
5	Kooman Kudukka	<i>Cochlosternum</i> sp.	Green fruit shell with the presence of nutritive tissues (pale yellow coloured portion– the carpel wall present in each locule).	Quantity available in the fruit shell.
4	Jaggery	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> L.	Processed stem juice	200gm

Knowledge providers - Muthuvans of Urungatteri hills



Unneeran and Family



Sundaram



Koran's Family



Muthuvan hut



***Cochlospermum religiosum* (L.) Alston** Preparation of Pettathenga/Koomankudukka Appam

Method of preparation

Koran & family residing at Urungattery explained the method of preparation of *Kooman kudukka appam*. Ingredients are mixed well, made into a batter form and filled in the four grooved fruit shell of *Kooman kudukka*. Then it is kept in an earthen vessel and steamed for 15 to 30 minutes. Subsequently, the prepared *appam* is removed from the shell and kept in a plate, ready for consumption. This *appam* is very nutritive and delicious.

Uses

It is recommended for anaemia, palpitation and heart diseases. It also relieves stress and tension and is a remedy for insomnia.

CASE STUDY 14

Paala ada (Steamed food prepared in the green sheath of arecanut tree)

This is an unique preparation named '*Paala ada*' prepared in a traditional container made of the green/partially dried sheath of arecanut tree. The method of preparation of *Pala ada* was demonstrated by Karuppan and his family at his residence located in the Kavanoor Gramapanchayath, Malappuram district of Kerala. This is one of the traditional house hold preparations commonly practiced among the people settled in the rural villages in Kerala. It is highly nutritive and enhances stamina and vitality.

Ingredients of Paala ada				
Sl. No.	Local Name	Botanical Name	Part used	Quantity
1	Pachari (raw rice) or Tina	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L. or <i>Setaria italica</i> (L.) P. Beauv.	Rice powder	250gm
2	Thenga	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L.	Grated coconut kernel	150gm
3	Jaggery	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> L.	Processed stem juice	250gm



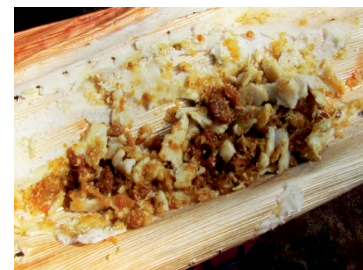
Interview with Sri. Karuppan Knowledge provider



Preparation of Pala Ada



Preparation of Pala Ada



Pala Ada – Ready to eat

Method of preparation

The first ingredient is prepared in the form of paste by adding sufficient quantity of lukewarm water and the same is to be applied inside the *paala* (green leaf sheath). Subsequently, the mixture made out of jaggery and grated coconut kernel is uniformly spread over the paste. Then it is folded into the shape of a hand bag. Three sides of the folding are stitched with a thread obtained from the green sheath to prevent fire from outside. Then it is held over the fire for a period of 10-15 minutes. After that, stitches are to be removed and the roasted food article is taken out and put on a plate. Usually, this dish is prepared during the paddy harvest festival.

Uses

This provides adequate energy to the body and also enhances stamina and vitality.

CASE STUDY 15

***Pathra ada* (Traditional steamed food of Konkani community of Kasaragod district)**

Pathra ada is considered as a favourite food item offered to Lord Ganesha, by the Konkani community residing in Kasaragod district, Kerala State. Konkanis are an ethno-linguistic

community located in the Konkan coast of south western India and speak a dialect known as Konkani. Their origins are from coastal Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa. Among them, a group of people migrated to northern part of Kerala and settled. The term '*Konkan*' denotes the region where they originate. '*Kon*' means top of the mountain, which shows that they once lived in the mountainous region of south western India, now known as Konkan. The majority of Konkanis residing in Kerala belong to Gauda Saraswata Brahmin community.

Pathra ada is a traditional food item made by Konkani brahmin community of Kasaragod district. It can be used as a side dish for lunch and also taken along with tea as snacks. It is nutritionally well-balanced food item strongly flavoured by asafoetida. In taste, it is salty, sour and pungent. This information related to ethnic food of Konkanis was recorded from Smt. Bharati Sheoney and Ganesh Sheoney residing at Kasaragod town, during the survey on systematic documentation of traditional knowledge related to plants used for food and medicine.

Ingredients of Pathra ada				
Sl. No.	Local Name	Botanical Name	Part used	Quantity
1.	Kattuchembu	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> (L.) Scott	Leaf	250 gm
2.	Pachari (Raw rice)	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L.	Rice powder	300gm
3.	Thenga	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L.	Grated coconut kernel	150gm
4.	Red chillies	<i>Capsicum annum</i> L.	Fruit and seed (Powder)	Sufficient quantity
5.	Turmeric	<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Dried rhizome (Powder)	3 gm
6.	Asafoetida	<i>Ferula asafoetida</i> L.	Latex (Powder)	3 gm
7.	Cumin powder	<i>Cuminum Cyminum</i> L.	Seed (Power)	3 gm
8.	Tamarind pulp	<i>Tamarindus indica</i> L.	Fruit pulp	Sufficient quantity
9.	Salt			Sufficient quantity

Preparation of Pathra ada



Pathra ada is prepared by using the leaves of *Colocasia esculenta*, widely distributed in different parts of Kerala, especially along the side of streams, banks of ponds and in wastelands. *Colocasia esculenta* is popularly known as Coco yam in English or *Kattuchembu* in Malayalam language. The rhizome of *Colocasia* is used against internal haemorrhages, adenitis, somatalgia, otalgia and general debility. Tender leaves are used as food article to cure piles. The fresh stem is prepared in the form of vegetable curry and taken along with rice to eliminate toxins from the alimentary canal.

Method of preparation

Grind the soaked rice coarsely and rest of the ingredients are put together and grounded well separately. Then, all the ingredients are mixed together, prepared in the form of a batter and pasted on the fresh leaves (3 numbers). It is folded in a cylindrical shape (6-10cm length), cut into pieces (3cm length) and put in a vessel

(steamer) and steamed for 1-2 hours. The *Pathra ada* is then ready for consumption.

Uses

It is used as a digestive, carminative and for general debility. It is considered as a nutritional food by the Konkani community.

References

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