

CASTE WISE GASTRONOMY PRACTICES AND INGESTION MANNERS OF ANDHRADESA

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Abstract

India is land of exotic and amorous puzzle to outside the world. It is the symbol of unity in diversity which consist multi- cultural, multi- regional, multi-lingual and multi- religions. From many countries of the world the travellers visited for varied reasons to India in general and Andhradesa in particular to know the traditions and customs. They stayed, they saw and they recorded the typical conditions of Andhradesa had been elucidated by travellers in their travelogues. The records of travellers are very useful to have a thorough understanding of the social history especially the indigenous habits, customs, cultures, division of the society, the life styles of the natives, their food habits and intoxicants. Food is the essential substance to all living things and also part of culture. For that reason while writing the travel accounts the travellers recorded the cuisines, food manners and victuals which are available in this geographical region. The present paper has been made an endeavour and focus the light on travel accounts which referred the culinary practices, common eating habits, eating manner of Kings and Princes, Brahmins mode of eating, food restriction of Vaishyas, eating system of other castes, food habits of Dalits, items of vegetarians and non-vegetarians, food for charity, chewing of betel with areca nut, curries of Moors and Hindus, food restrictions, intoxicant beverages, the regional variations in the consumption of food stuffs.

Key words: Gastronomy, Ingestion, Amorous, Victuals, Intoxicants

Introduction

Generally people inherit many things from the past; one among them is food and cuisine. Indian Food and cuisine is incredibly rich and had various dishes reflecting its region, culture,

tradition and climate conditions. India civilization is one of the oldest and by passing of time which amalgamated with many cultures and traditions. The diverseness in food consumption comes with varied cultures in the society therefore the 'Indian food and cuisine has been called as the blend of many- cultures and available in a one platter. The gastronomy of India is different from region to region, religion to religion and culture to culture. Food is being used often tried as retaining the cultural identity by immigrants. The travellers they came, they saw and they wrote about the food habits which were mentioned in their accounts as per the ladder of the caste. The travellers state that the consumption of food was not uniform to all castes in India and differs from one community to other community.

Brahmins are usually vegetarians. At a later date, some communities which claimed Vyshya status in South India also took to vegetarianism maybe to elevate their status in the hierarchical ladder. Kshatriyas, Sudras, cultivators and other caste people are non- vegetarians. The so-called untouchables did not have any food restrictions and they consume many kinds of meat including pork, beef and even carrion. The present paper focused on caste based culinary practices, common eating habits of native people, eating system of castes, food items are used in their dining had been noticed and recorded in the travel accounts by the travellers from late medieval to early modern period. In this backdrop, an attempt is made as to how various travellers recorded their impressions on the food etiquettes as they viewed or heard in India in general and particular in Andhradesa.

Area of study

The study area consists of the three Telugu speaking geographical regions namely Coastal Andhra or Northern Circars, Rayalaseema or Ceded Districts and Telangana or Nizam territory are traditionally known as Andhradesa. The study is concentrated mainly on the accounts of the travellers to explain the food etiquettes and practices of Andhradesa as preserved in their accounts from the late medieval to the early modern period.

A brief introduction on Travelogues

From all over the world the foreigners visited India for varied reasons from the ancient time. Especially during late medieval and early modern period many travellers from European

nations like Dutch (Netherlands), Portuguese, Scotland, Italy, Spain, Danes (Denmark), France and England came to India, particularly from the last two countries number of travellers landed here and travelled through Andhradesa. They visited India with varied positions as traveller and traders. The aim of their tour intended for trade, religion, employment and a host of other reasons. Veeraswamy's personal narrative records maybe the first travelogue from the land of the Telugus. His impressions of India are of great historical value and as the author he has done a service to the Indian community by recording his impressions on his tour to Kasi (Varanasi). He maintained his travelogue in Telugu which is an authentic mine of information on the social, political and economic conditions of the first half of the 19th century. During the travellers stay and journey observed the native customs, traditions and practices which were recorded in their travelogues. Such travel records were very much useful source to India in general and particularly in Andhradesa for the reconstruction of past history and to know food prescripts of native people.

Food item used by Natives

The people of India were not particularly scrupulous in eating and 'due command of their appetite both as to time and the matter they feed on' as attested by the travelogues.¹ They mainly subsisted on rice, millets, pulses, vegetables, roots, herbs/ greens, fruits apart from the consumption of milk and milk products and avoid eating the food stuffs that would 'likely to produce vital heat'.² The travellers also noticed the regional variations in the consumption of food stuffs. While rice was the staple food of the richer classes, the common people used millets like cholam, the minor millet *Arika* etc.³ Benjamin Heyne observed that the natives of Juggampetah (East Godavari District) eat coarse rice unlike the finer and whiter sorts of rice used by others, whereas the principal food of the natives of Guntur *Circar* (more precisely Palnadu region) was *jonnalu* (Cholam). Heyne opines that the people of the region were sturdy and healthy 'owing to the superior nourishing qualities of *jonnalu*'.⁴ Veeraswamy observes that the Telugu people consume old rice (*pata biyyam*) unlike the boiled rice used at Madras.⁵ From the travelogue of Enugula Veeraswamy we can understand that the travellers can safely procure edible items to cook food in any medium sized villages and there were resting places at appropriate distance to cook their food.⁶

Eating manners of Telugu People

The South Indians eat food sitting on the ground. The floor that was used to take food would be pasted with cow dung without which 'no person of quality sits down to eat'. They put their cuisine into large leaves of trees, which they throw away when they are empty⁷ or smaller leaves of other trees stitched together, not with needle and thread, but with ruches.⁸ Niccolao Manucci complains that the Telugu people did not use tables or chairs, table-napkins, table-cloths, knives, spoons, or forks, salt-cellars, dishes or plates.⁹ They all eat with the right hand and will not touch anything with the left, not even the plate or leaf. But a vessel of cold water they lift with the left hand, at the same time never putting the vessel to the mouth. They hold their mouth open and raised to catch the liquid they pour into it.¹⁰ The travellers identified the food stuffs are used by different castes in the society and every caste had their own specific rules and regulations for the eating manners.

Brahmin Food

Brahmins observe strict and severe rules in eating with respect of what and what not, where, when and how to eat. They were hesitant to consume whatever that was alive including eggs and even red vegetables that look like blood.¹¹ Thevenot mentioned in his travel account quite contrastively and states "in that country one certain day of the year the Brahmins eats hogs flesh but they do it privately for fear of disgrace because the rules of their sect direct them so to do". He also further stated that "I believe it is the same all over the Indies".¹²

Thomas Bowrey mentioned the victuals of the Brahmins food as rice, peas, bread, butter, sweetmeats, potatoes, yams and vegetables salads which were very good for health. They drink any liquor save water, milk and gruel *congee*, which is nothing but fresh water boiled with a little rice in it.¹³ Tavernier informs that "as they have a special care not to eat anything but what is dressed by a Gentile of their caste, so they seldom eat anywhere but at home".¹⁴ They purchase rice and other provisions in the shops of the vegetarian merchants only, for they will not buy anywhere else.¹⁵ Tavernier felt that all other communities accept food and drink in the houses of the Brahmins.¹⁶ Dubois stated that Brahmins did not permit stranger to enter into their kitchens.¹⁷

Niccolao Manucci graphically described the Brahmin habit of eating. The monks, ascetics, Brahmins and the learned wash their hands and bodies before food. Then they smear their foreheads, stomach, shoulders, and knee a little ash (*vibhudi*) or sandal paste, according to their caste or the faith they follow. Next they enter the house, finding its floors all rubbed over with cow dung. They bind round their body a piece of cloth and sit down with their legs crossed upon a small mat. First of all a pinch of salt and two drops of butter to rub the leaf was served in a leaf before them. Then the cooked rice was served followed by a little vegetables and some green stuff. When that was eaten, they throw upon the rice left on the said leaf a little sour curds or some whey. When all this food has been swallowed, they rise from the place and move to a courtyard or garden, if there was one in the house where they live, otherwise, they go into the street and there wash their hands, mouth and feet.¹⁸

Vyshyas food habits

The mercantile community also professed vegetarianism like the Brahmin community. Tavernier informs that people of the community were rigid and they dislike using dishes from outside for fear some body of another religion or caste might have made use of the dish. They eat alone without their wives or off-springs.¹⁹ They would not eat or drink in the house of Kshatriyas as they were non-vegetarians.²⁰

Kshatriyas food consumption

Niccolao Manucci, maybe after seeing the dining of a king and princes, describes their method of food consumption. They are seated on the ground on a piece of fine cloth. As per him, a great platter of enamelled gold was placed on the ground in front of the diners. After that some small dishes were placed around and then the food would be brought from the kitchen in bowels or vessels of silver and decorated in the shape of cooking-pots. First of all, from these bowls they place cooked rice on which they put some stew. ‘Then the rajah takes whatever pleases him, throwing it with his hand into a plate of rice, where he mixes it and rolls it into balls, which he throws into his mouth with the right hand. The left hand is not allowed to touch any food.’ Then, before finishing the meal, they send as much as they think sufficient to their wives.²¹

Food Habits of other Communities

Benjamin Heyne describes the food of the cultivator, the labourer of the class of sudras with intricate details. They boiled the rice or millets or *aruqa*, the coarsest of all grain was boiled. They prepare their curry with salt, chilly and onions, the vegetables his garden affords for which a few leaves of the tamarind tree (*chinta chiguru*) were added to give the whole a relish. The *congee* or water in which his food has been boiled constitutes his beverage at meals. They also mixed butter- milk to the food to make a refreshing draught.²² Veeraswamy informed that the Indian reed (*Tamara*) could be found in every pond and tank right from Ganjam to Vizianagaram. Their fibres were eaten; it was used in preparing curry and other dishes also.²³ In villages the husbandman scarcely tastes animal food oftener than once a year, probably at the time of goat sacrifice. Sometimes, indeed, his flock may happen to be visited by sickness and death; in such cases even the best of sudras does not hesitate to feed on the carcasses of his sheep and goats.²⁴ The elite class eats the meat of goats, sheep, chicken etc. and if other men eat of these, it was solely at their festivals and at marriages. The important common man's non vegetarian was dry and salted fish.²⁵ Tavernier informed that in Golconda Kingdom there were numerous tanks and available there abundance of good fish which had one bone in the middle and devoured very delicate flavour. Some sections of population consumed shrimp and all the other accepted meat as the 'most delicious fare'.²⁶

The Hindus were forbidden to eat beef. If anyone eats beef, it was regarded as an abomination. Untouchables were entirely contrary to the Brahmins in matters of food. They ate beef without restraint even if it is died of disease; it was a feast for them.²⁷ Niccolao Manucci informed that "none of those I have hitherto spoken of ever eat cow's flesh. To do so it is a very low thing, a defilement and sinful beyond all imagination." Similarly shell-fish was classed among the most impure of things. However, the untouchable population only consume the so-called impure food.²⁸

Muslims food

Heyne observes that the curries of the Muslims were made of meat and were highly seasoned with spices and 'swimming in ghee', whereas those of the Hindus were made chiefly of vegetables and contain more turmeric and tamarinds than the former.²⁹ Anonymous authors informed that the Muslims when they found a dead horse which was feast for them.³⁰

English dining hall

The Europeans were quite opposite to the Indians at food manners. They never sit on the ground for eating food and using fork, spoons and knives at dining table. John Fryer states that the domestic servants of Europeans wait at dining table with obedience to serve the scattered food items in plate of China to the royal leaders. The servants used fan for air which made of peacock feathers set in silver handles for keeping away the house flies would cover the table.³¹

Charity food

There is a common faith and adage among Hindus that charity food is the greatest than all other charities. If the donors do so, immediately the persons will attain a place in the heaven after the death. The Hindus commonly believed in charity food and offer in the form of alms to the ascetics, travellers and needy people. Tavernier informs that at holy places food was supplied on charity to the pilgrims. He informed about charity food at Vontimitta in Cuddapah district. He states that here the Hindus are very generous for charity and provide to eat and drink to the travellers whatever they have. There are women who have vowed to serve the food to the travellers from a period of seven or eight years. Many women on the road side cook Khichdi (a dish of boiled rice and dal flavoured with spices and onions) and others boil beans with water which helps to reduce overheat and inflammatory deceases. Some women provide bean water, congee (rice water to drink) and two or three handfuls of cooked rice to eat to the travellers.³²

Food restrictions

A Hindu would not eat nor drink water in a house belonging to anyone of a different caste other than his own, unless it was nobler and more high-ranking than him. Abbe Dubious mentioned that the Hindus commonly have their food cold and drink hot. The married women would desist whatever the food her husband dislikes.³³ Vyshyas will not eat or drink in the house of Kshatriyas because they kill the victuals and consume.³⁴ As by the rule of Hindus are forbidden to eat beef if anyone eats beef is regarded as an abomination. Therefore especially the servants in the factories dare not touch it when it is ready to be served as the dish.³⁵ Abbe Dubious informed that an untouchable who hide his caste identity and join with Brahmins or Sudras would dare to eat with them or touch their food could be danger and losing his life.³⁶ Navarette informed that ‘my heathen ox-driver was one of these, he would never eat anything from my hand, nor drink

out of any vessel of mine; he broke the pot because it had been touch' by me. At one point of time he opined that the Hindus are harder than, steel in the observation of their barbarous customs.”³⁷

Chewing of Betel and Nut

It was a common practice to chew betel leaves and areca nuts with a little *chunnam* (lime) in South India more precisely after food. It was known as *tambulam* by the Hindus, *pan* or *supari* by the Muslims. Betel leaf was procured from a creeper which 'resemble a heart' or 'not unlike to an orange-tree leaf'. Areca nuts look 'like perfect wood' with an astringent taste.³⁸ Generally they were sold together along with *chunnam* (lime) in the shops, which the people purchased and consumed. They swallow down only the juice after long mastication and spit out the rest. As they chew it, it dyes their lips and mouths red. The people believe that the benefits of chewing were that it strengthen the teeth and as it was good for the 'stomach and for the sweetness of breath'.³⁹

Enugula Veeraswamy informed the quality and tender betel leaves were available in Madras whereas matured and ripened leaves were available in Cuddapah and Hyderabad respectively.⁴⁰ Betel leaves and areca nuts were available at the camping villages throughout the Telugu country for sale. It seems that chewing of betel leave, nuts with a little *chunnam* was an elite custom. The poor were accustomed to chew nuts only. He also noticed that from Ganjam to Vijayawada, it was a custom among the people to offer *tambulam* to the guests.⁴¹ Muslims often chewing betel areca which they call *Pan* which consists of the leaf of betel creeper, dried areca-nut and lime etc.⁴²

Intoxicant Beverages

The common Hindus were very fond of spirituous liquors. The travellers mentioned two important intoxicant beverages consumed by the Telugu people. They were toddy and arrack. Bowrey mentions vaguely these two varieties of toddy. One was extracted from Palmira tree known as palm-wine or toddy and the other was a extracted from a tree produces wild dates which Bowrey calls 'Palmito' that was locally called *Eetha*.⁴³ Describing the method of extraction, Niccolao Manucci says that toddy drawers ascend and descend the trees by clinging to the trunk and putting round it a rope of fibre and into its ends they place their feet. The rind of

the flower was cut and fixes it. Then they collect the dripping juice in an earthen pot twice a day. The fresh juice was sweet and it ferments for twelve hours 'it tastes like beer and goes to the head.' He also states that vinegar and sugar,⁴⁴ perhaps palm jiggery (*Thati bellam*) or crystalline sugar (*Thati kalkanda*) were manufactured out of it. Navarette says that on the way to Hyderabad there were 'infinite Groves of wild Palm-trees' that yield great deal of toddy. On a day he tasted it and commented that 'it was as cold as Ice, and sweeter than Honey' and did 'much good, for it purg'd us to excellent purpose'.⁴⁵ Tavernier observed that five hundred to six hundred horses and bullocks laden with toddy in leather bags entered Golconda daily as the people believe that the drink was more nourishing and refreshing. There were many shops where toddy was sold in the city.⁴⁶

The native liquor known as arrack or *sarayi* was distilled from the concoction of the *Nallatumma* bark (*Mimosa leucophlea Roxb*) and *jaggery* mixed with water which was fermented for twelve days.⁴⁷ Serjeant B mentions one such liquor which he terms as 'paria arrack' (perhaps *Gudumba*) available in a village not far away from Hyderabad which the soldiers mixed with toddy that resulted in fatal consequences on occasions.⁴⁸ Curiously, Bowrey commented that the Muslims were barred to consume any strong drink as per the religion and hence 'some of them, with any manner of strong drink they can have in private'.⁴⁹

Conclusion

India civilization is one of the oldest and by passing of time which amalgamated with many cultures and traditions. People inherit many things from the past; one among them is food and cuisine. With varied cultures the diverseness of food consumption developed in the society. So that Indian food and cuisine has been called as the blend of many- cultures and available in a one platter. Food is the essential substance to all living things and also part of culture. To know the food etiquettes the travellers came and recorded their impressions in their accounts. They also noticed the regional variations in the consumption of food stuffs. The travellers mentioned food habits of all people in the society in which Brahmins and Vyshyas were vegetarians. Kshtriyas, Sudras and other artisan classes were non-vegetarians. The natives eat their food sitting on the ground and never use spoons, forks and knives. It was a common practice to chew betel leaves and areca nuts with a little *chunnam* (lime) having after food. It was known as

tambulam by the Hindus, *pan* or *supari* by the Muslims. The travellers informed two important intoxicant beverages consumed by the Telugu people. They were toddy and arrack. The married women would refrain whatever the food disliked by her husband. In the caste ladder generally, a person belonging to a community would not accept food from another who was either lower in hierarchical order or ritually impure. Finally the travelers opined that the Hindus are harder than, steel in the observation of their barbarous customs.

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