Food Culture in the Socio-Religious life of the people in coastal Odisha: With special reference to *Pitha*

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Abstract: The article focuses on *pitha* (a traditional cake) culture in the context of socio-religious practices in Odisha, India. It makes an attempt to show the way *pitha* are offered to Lord Jagannath and how it is also enjoyed as a household food by the people during festivities at the household or at community level. An attempt is made to emphasize on the traditional socio-religious practices related to *pitha* that still continue with availabilities of ingredients in the local niche. The Sree Jagannath temple of Puri being one of the four *Dhams* of Vaishnavite culture is also known as *Bhojana Kshetra* or *Anna Kshetra* for the gods. The presiding deity is also the epicenter for all socio-religious activities of the region and beyond. It is also an attempt to show how the populace of the region celebrates different festivities and gives due respect to nature and supernatural forces, thereby facilitating in creation of a conducive environment for co-existence.

Keywords: *socio-religious practices in Odisha, festivities at the household or at community level, traditions, Vaishnavite culture.*

Background

The state of Odisha in India earlier known by the name Utkala or Kalinga had a glorious past. After defeat in the Kalinga War to Raja Ashoka, Kalinga came to limelight during the reign of The third Chedi king Kharavela. The influence of his power was felt from Mathura in the north to Pandya Kingdom in the south and from eastern coast to western coast in India due to his extensive military advancements. The state was known for its navigational expertise and spread of its trading relationship to Southeast Asia. Located on the eastern coast, it is known for its rich stone carving skills, handloom, lacquer craft, filigree work, appliqués work and many other fine crafts... Odisha is surrounded by the states of Chhattisgarh in the west, Andhra Pradesh in the south,west Bengal and Jharkhand in the north and Bay of Bengal in the east. Odishais spread over an area of 155707 square kilometer. Out of the five geomorphological regions of Odisha the coastal plain is the most important one as it has the highest concentrated population.

Food plays an important role in shaping the culture of the consumers. Interestingly people in coastal Odisha observe large number of festivals. Lord Jagannath of Puri is the most revered deity of Odisha. In Hindu tradition, the food ethos of the people is greatly influenced by the Aryan beliefs and practices in which food is part of cosmic moral cycle. It may be noted that as per the Great Tradition of Odisha in general and Puri in particular, some food are considered innately pure and

some are not. For example, cow milk and its products are sacred but it is not the same with buffalo milk Chakrabarty (2011:38)

The traditional food habit of a region is eco-centric and heavily depends upon the locally available food resources. It can be said that this association is not necessarily confined to any political boundaries but had its jurisdiction in its eco-cultural boundaries. Traditionally some of these food items had a strong linkage with the socio- religious practices of the people of an area.The importance of rice ispresent in every facet of Odiya people's life and is largely reflected in their socio-religious life. Lord Jagannath takes *pakhalabhata* (soaked rice) at least twice a day and it is the habit of majority people of rural Odisha.

In a given culture it is generally observed that its members exploit the abundance of food resources of a region and adapt or tune to the food pattern emerged there in. It is observed that *pitha* of different kinds are popular in different parts of India, but in the eastern part that is among the states like Odisha, West Bengal and Assam, they have a common nomenclature *pitha* and are believed to have been originated from rice flour.

Pitha's are steamed, or baked, roasted or fried in oil or ghee. Some are prepared over a hot iron plate. Most of them are sweet in taste. In Odisha one of the most prevalent food item of the menu during festivities are the variety of *pitha*, which is a kind of traditional rice cake. They offer to deities with reverence and affection. These are then consumed and shared with near and dear ones, neighbors etc. Some of them are also offered to the members who provide them service on different occasions (the practice of *jajmani* system). Some are also prepared for the domesticated animals, like cows and bullocks. Ingredients for different *pitha*'s vary. Main ingredients are rice, black gram, coconut and jaggery. Rice is the staple food crop in the state of Odisha and people say that it is synonymous to food. The state covers about 44.4 7 lakh hectares. Das (2012:1.) stated that Jeypur track in South Odisha has been identified as a putative secondary centre of origin of cultivated rice. Age old social customs and festivals of the state have strong relevance to different phases of rice cultivation. Akshaya *Tritiya* (in May to June) marks the sowing of seed of the rice. *Raja Sankranti* in mid-June marks the completion of sowing. *Garba Sankranti* symbolizes the reproductive phase of rice. *Nuakha*i (August – September) and *Lakshmi puja* (October – November) coincide with harvesting of upland and lowland rice respectively. Therefore, paddy culture in Odisha is unique in many ways. And in brief the evolution of various socio-religious functions of the region will be discussed to show how food is an integral part of any culture and how cultural values are associated with it. Paddy having been processed in different ways has different cultural value attached to it. Rice processed from paddy is broadly of two kinds. While the *aruachaula* (raw rice) has a sacred value in Odisha, the boiled *ushnachaula* rice does not get the same cultural sanction. Similarly the bi-product of *aruachaula* (raw rice) has a sacred stamp while boiled rice does not. Normally puffed rice is not offered to the deities in Odisha as it is made from boiled rice while *khai* i.e. puffed paddy is prepared directly from paddy and is offered as it is considered pure. In the earlier times variety of paddy by the name *Ratan Chudi, Haladia, Magura, Bhutia, Dhala Pakhia, Kala Pakhia, Baula Bankui, Gola Bandi, Biali* etc. were cultivated. But then in the coastal districts like Puri, Cuttack and other adjoining districts rice named as, *Pathara Mukuta, Naandi, Dhala Pakhia* were preferred for making the *pitha* since the rice is coarse and very whitish in colour.

Another important item in making of *pitha* is black gram (*Vignamungo L*), believed to have been originated in India. The reference of this crop can be traced to Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and in *Charak Samhita*. Interestingly India is the largest consumer and producer of black gram in the world. Odisha is one of the major black grams producing state in India. Umerkote in undivided Koraput district produces one of the best varieties of black gram. It has lot of health benefits as it contains proteins, fibers, fats, carbohydrates and vitamin. It is a boon to woman as it has iron, folic acid, calcium, magnesium, potassium which are very essential. Black gram consumption helps to reduce cholesterol and improve cardiovascular functioning.

Similarly, another important ingredient used is *jiggery* or sugar it is obtained from sugarcane which belongs to one of the species of tall perennial true grasses of the genus *Saccharum*, native to the warm temperate to tropical regions of South Asia and used for making of *jaggery*.

The study adopted all standard anthropological tools and techniques including participant observation and interview method for data collection along with survey of literature both in English and Odiya.

Tradition of *pitha* culture

Odisha from a hoary past has the tradition of preparing *pitha* especially for offering it to their deities. Mishra narrates that certain festivities have got their name from the same food items and therefore, there is a proverb (1989).

"Ayila Chitau Nani
Bara Osha paraba Sangare Gheni
Sambara Dasamira Alana Jau
Sabu Osha Bara Eithi Thau"

The above proverb denotes that the *Chitau Nani* (elder sister), arrives with 12 kinds of fasting and festivities. All this culminates with the salt less gruel of *Sambhar Dashami*. It may be noted that *Chitaunani* is nothing but *Chitaupitha* popular in coastal Odisha.

The consciousness about traditional food is gaining importance in the recent past. At first it gives us that rich cultural information, which makes us proud that the food items which were looked down upon as a rural food habits are realized to be the wealth of our time-tested food tradition for a better health. Secondly, the desire to hunt for our traditional food habit, by members of scientific fraternity has emphasized the need to fall back to such food as it is advantageous to a given environment for a healthy living. In Orissa, as narrated above, *pitha*s are important food items whose socio- religious significance can be supplemented by the present-day research findings. Roy (2007) has narrated the importance of fermentation in pulses found in food items of Odisha especially in the *pithas* of Odisha as it has many scientific advantages like pulse digestibility, detoxifying pulses by reducing haemaglutinin, phytate, oligosaccharides and trypsin inhibitor, etc. He further narrated that it can significantly improve flavor, nutritional value, and appearance and reduces cooking time.

Lord Jagannath and *pitha*

The influence of Lord Jagannath culture has a strong impact on the people of Odisha and vice versa. So, the cultural practices of the people are many a times based upon the observations from

the rites and rituals of their most beloved and revered deity i.e., Lord Jagannath. It is even said that lord Jagannath in Puri Temple is the highly humanized deity. In the daily rituals Lord brushes his teeth and takes bath, he changes his clothes and wears new clothes robes and ornaments.

From hoary past, the Jagannath Dham is known to be the place of dining for the Gods. It is otherwise popular for its rich and elaborate *Mahaprasad* which is offered to the deity. Mishra (1971),classifies them as *Samkhudy* and N*isamkhudy bhogas*. The former is prepared inside the *rosaghara* or temple kitchen and are prepared from rice, blackgram and other vegetables. The latter category of *bhoga* are prepared outside the kitchen but inside the temple complex and include *bhogas* made out of flour, wheat, ghee, candy etc.

Chakravarti (2011), narrates that offerings of food occupies the central position in the act of worship, at this sacred central point. It is said that food prepared for the god is called *bhoga*. After the ritual offering of the *bhoga to Jagannath* and other deities, it becomes *Prasad. Bhoga* is classified as *Kotha Bhoga* and *Mandap bhoga*. While the former is the scheduled offering by the king and temple trustee, the latter is for public and different *Matha's* (Hindu monastery). Here the discussion will be confined to *kotha bhoga* only as the later is flexible with prefixed conditions and is mostly based upon demand and supply.

The menu is exhaustive. Mishra (1971), narrates a popular proverb that

"Sada rasa vyanjan Nana yati
Chapanabhoglagedinarati"
"Multifarious dishes of six fold tastes
fifty six Bhogas are offered day and night".

So, it is said that lord is offered *Chhappan Bhog* (fifty six kinds of food items which includes rice i.e., *mahaprasada, dal*, different kinds vegetables and cakes, sweets, etc.) everyday. During the feudal regime everyday all the fifty six varieties were made and offered. At present, the same menu is followed but at times some items are dropped.

Like in many other temples where cooking for the god is considered to be a *seva* (service), the right to cook is hereditary at Jagannath Temple. The temple administration has structured arrangements to perform different duties by different community members. The only difference is that in the earlier days it was under the patronage and control of King of Puri, but at present it is the Temple Trust which coordinates the age-old tradition under the patronage of Government of Odisha. The *sevakas*, are traditionally assigned the duty of cooking food for the gods and are called *Supakar* or S*uar*. Since the present paper is an attempt to understand the *pitha* culture of Odisha the *pitha* tradition in Jagannath temple will be discussed only and therefore, an attempt has been made to highlight how much importance is given to *pitha* in the sacred complex of Puri and how *pithas* are not just offered on daily basis, but it also shows the different *Pitha* offering in different festivals.

Through an elaborate system, the traditional varieties of *pithas* are prepared every day for the God. Even on special occasions special *pithas* are prepared and offered. There are special and dedicated *suar* for cooking *pithas*. In folk belief it is said that *Suar*is Lord Jagannath's wife. And *Puja Pandas* are his mother, while Daitas are his brother (Misra and Nandi 2007). Again, different kinds of *Suar*

are involved for different roles. The *Pitha Suara* prepares the *pitha, and bindua* are those group of people who prepare the *binda*, and provides the same to *pitha Suar*. They are also involved in kneading dough from *atta* (wheat flour), black gram powder/paste, etc. The c*hanapua* prepares small size *pithas* like *Parijata. Paguas* are those people who make *paga. Paga* is the base material for *pitha*. They also prepare the *pura* that is the stuffings for *pithas*. The *Tolabadus* are involved in counting and arranging, what has been prepared by *Pagua* and *Sevakas*. They cover their face with a piece of long cloth, usually a thin towel locally called *gamcha* tied around the face, lpcally known as *baghamuhan*. The face and mouth is covered for maintaining purity. The *Birhibuha* are those servitors who carry the paste of black gram to *Kotha Ghara* to hand them over to *Kothaghara suara.* The responsibility of making the same in an environment of sanctity and purity lies with *Mahasuar*.

There are some *pithas* in the fifty-six kinds of *Mahaprasad* that are offered to Lord Jagannath. The nomenclature of some of the *pithas* is not directly related with the word *pitha* for each item, but they are *pithas* prepared for the lord. *Pitha*un like *Mitha* (sweet meat) has a subtle difference. While *Mithas* are purely sweet items, *pithas* could be both sweetish and saltish. Some of the *pithas* are as follows: *Arisa, Badapitha, Chanda Puli, Chakuli, Saru Chakuli, Chandra Matho Puli, Hansapuli, Enduri, Jhilli, Gaintha, Kakera, Bada Kanti,Sana Kanti, Bada Kakera, Sana Kakera, Tata Kakera, Goti Kakera, Manda, Matho Puli, Antariksha Manda, Lahuni Manda, Pitha Puli, Parijata, Pura Pitha Sana Pitha , Saptapuri Pitha* etc.

It is said that the *Kothabhoga* is offered five times a day to Lord Jagannath at different times. It is known by different names. In the early morning the *bhoga* is called *Gopal Ballabhbhoga* which is followed by *Sakala Dhupa offered at* at11a.m., *Madhyana Dhupa* is offered around 2 p.m., the *Sandhya dhupa* that is the evening meal is offered at around 6 p.m., and finally *Bada Sinhari Dhupa are given* around 11 p.m.

In the *Sakala Dhupa,* lord is offered *Bodo Kanti, Matho Puli, Hansapuli, Pitha Puli, Chandapuli, Jhilli, Enduri* along with other items. It is said that *Enduripitha* is one of the favourite items of Lord Jagannath. *Arisa, Matho Puli* along with *Parijatha* and *Pura Pitha* or *Suora Pitha* is offered in the *Madhyanha Dhupa*. The *Sandhya Dhupa* comprising *Pura Pitha, Arisha ,Kakera, Matho Puli* are offered to the Lord. *Chhota Kanti* a kind of *pitha* made of black gram paste is offered to the Lord Jagannath finally in the *Bada Sinhari Dhupa*.

Table No. 1: Types of *pitha* offered to Lord Jagannath in Puri Temple through *kothabhoga*

Sl.No.	Name of the *KothaBhoga*	Time	Name of the *pitha*and offered along with other items
1.	*SakalaDhupa*	Around 11a.m	*(1)Badakanti, (2)Matho Puli,(3)HansoPuli (4) Chanda Puli, (5)Jhilli, and(6)Endusi*
2.	*Madhyanhadhupa*	Around 2p.m.	*(1) Arisa, (2) Parijata, and (3) Pura pitha*
3.	*Sandhya dhupa*	6p.m	*(1)Arisa, (2) Pura pitha, (3)Kakera (4)Matha Puli, and (5)Parijata*
4.	*BadaSinhariDhupa*	Around 11p.m.	*(1)Chhotokanti*

On various *tithi,* indifferent seasons, certain special foods are also offered to Lord Jagannath at the inner sanctuary, apart from the offering made throughout the day. On *Makara Sankranti, Lord* Jagannath is offered as many as 84 varieties of food items. The *pitha* items include *Chena pitha, Gainthapitha, Enduri, Khei Manda, Khanda, Manda, Kanti, BandaKanti, Kakara, Hansa Keli, Chandra Kanti, Vasanta Arisa, Paga Arisa, Parijataka, Matha Puli, Sankranti Madhopuri, Antriksh Munda, Munda, Saru Chakulipurapitha, etc.*

Nabannatithi comes in the month of *Margashirsha* i.e., on the 8th month, according to the local calendar, which is equivalent to November to December of the English calendar. Among the special food prepared, *pithas* are offered which includes items like *Badapitha, Sana pitha, Bada Kakera, Sana Kakera, Bada Kanti, Sana Kanti, Arisha,* etc.

The occasion of *Aruna Adhibaso* is observed on the 6th day of *Margashirsha* month, i.e. mid November to mid-December month. Lord Jagannath is adorned in a special dress and offered special food, which includes *Sana pitha, Sana Kanti, Sana Kakera, Sana and Bodo Arisa.*

During *Pusabhiseko,* that is on the occasion of *Pusa-Purnima,* the full moon day in the month of *Pausa* (December to January), the *Abhisheka* that is the coronation ceremony of Lord Jagannath is observed. The ritual is associated with offering of special food items to the deity which includes *Sana Arisa*.

During *Basant Panchami,* the offering includes S*ana kanti and Bada Arisa.* In S*aptapuri Amavasya, tatokakera* is offered along with *Satapuripitha*. During *Badu Ekadashi,* various kinds of *pithas* are offered to the Lord. It is said that during *Jatabhoga,* 56 varieties of *pithas* are offered. It may be noted that apart from the above narratives, *pithas* are also offered on different occasions. Mishra (1971), writes that at Jagannath temple *pithas* are also used in the sacrifice rituals. It is stated that non animal sacrifices are performed according to *Tara Rahasya,* a mediaeval *tantric* treatise, Lord Jagannath is conceived as Kalika or Durga.

*"Kalau Kali Kalau Krishna Kalau Gopal Kalik*a"

In the Kaliyuga *Kali* and Krsna (or Gopal), are predominating deities and Gopal (Krishna), himself is Kalika.

As per the tradition, vegetable or food sacrifices are performed on two Sankranti that is on the *Makar Sankranti* and the *Daksinayana Sankranti*. The sacrifice constitutes of*enduri* cake,made up of black gram mixed with ginger and *hing* (asafetida) or curd with candy. But on *Makar Sankranti*day, 8 sacrifices are made after mid-day meals. Sankranti is the end of planetary positions. Misra and Nandi (2007) have given an elaborate description of *Mahaprasad* offered to the Lord from which the author has selected some *pitha*s only which are offered to the Lord Jagannath.

Bada Kanti*:* This *Mahaprasad* is prepared by soaking the black gram and making a batter for *bara/ vada*. This is added to raw rice powder, beaten ginger and *jeera* (cumin seeds). All the above mentioned items are properly mixed and then pressed and flattened with the palm of the hands and fried in pure ghee.

Sana Kanti*:* This is prepared in the same way as the *bara* or *Bada Kanti,* but the difference is that it is shaped like slightly elongated human waist and then fried in pure ghee.

Sarapuli: In this item the main ingredients are the black gram, raw rice powder, pure ghee, etc. Soaked black gram is ground and the batter is made in the same way as that of *bara / vada.* To the paste rice powder, beaten ginger, salt, asafetida, etc. and are mixed well. Then ghee is applied on the palm of the hand and paste mixture is shaped like Puri. The puri is fried in pure ghee at a very low temperature.

Suar Pitha: Soaked black gram is ground and raw rice powder is added to it together with smashed ginger, salt and asafetida. The mixture is made in such a manner that the paste is very thick in its concentration. Pure ghee is applied on banana leaf and kept aside. Themixture is placed on the leaf in oval or egg shape. This is then fried in ghee. After sometime this is brought out and with the help of knife holes are made on the leaf. These holes are made for the better boiling and for percolation of the ghee inside the cake. Again this is fried in the ghee. Seven of such cakes are offered to the deity.

Arisha: This can be made from both sugar and jaggery. Either of them is boiled till a sticky solution is obtained. To this is added the raw rice powder, cardamom and stirred well. The pan is brought down from the hearth and then little by little the mixture is taken in hand or on a banana leaf. It is tapped and fried in pure ghee.

Bada Kakara: Initially wheat flour and *jaggery* are smeared with required amount of water. Then little by little the mixture is taken and made into balls, which are fried in pure ghee.

Jhadei Lada *(Chadhai Lada)*: Soaked black gram are *grinded* just like making up of batter for *vada* and then to it is added little amount of salt and raw rice powder. This is then mixed manually for a good spell of time. Then this is fried in ghee like *vada*. Subsequently, this is mixed thoroughly and then fried in ghee.

Khaira Chula: The rice powder (raw rice) is smeared with required amount of water and then small pieces are fried in ghee. Then these are made powder by breaking them thoroughly. This is then mixed with the sweet solution which is prepared over fire which when achieves sticky status, few ingredients are added, viz. *jai phala* (nutmeg) powder, *juani/ajwain, (*Carum *copticum)*, black pepper, half broken cloves etc. is considered appropriate. This mixture is well mixed and then by palm smaller ball shaped items are made in such a manner that it gives the appearance of hair on top of it.

Mandua: The ingredients include sugar, cottage cheese, cardamom, clove, wheat flour and camphor. At first, sugar is ground and kept aside. Then clove and big cardamom are half broken and kept aside. The cottage cheese is nicely squeezed and kneaded. After this little- by- little wheat floor is added into it and kneaded again. While doing so clove and cardamom powder is added and kneaded. On an oiled leaf, the mixture is taken and given the shape of small balls and fried in ghee. While it gets slightly reddish it is taken out of the pan and powdered sugar is sprinkled over it and placed one above the other.

Hansakeli: At first the kernel of the coconut is peeled and kept aside. Syrup of sugar or *jaggery* is made and peeled coconut is added to it along with camphor and powdered big cardamom. Soaked black gram is ground with very little water. To it raw rice powder is added and mixed well. Now some amount of the mixture is taken and to it, the coconut is stuffed and this is then fried in ghee.

Gaintha: At first water is made to boil to which required amount of grated coconut and raw rice powder is added and mixed well. After taking the mixture down from the oven these are taken in the palm of the hand and the mixture is divided and given shape with the hand. Some amount of water is put in a wide mouthed vessel, a cloth is tied on the mouth of the vessel and on it the *Gainthapitha* are placed and then covered. The pot is placed on a wood o fueled hearth. The water boils and the steam coming from below cooks the pitha.

Darasua Badi: Soaked black gram is ground without water to which the raw rice powder is added and stirred well. Required amount of salt, asafetida, shredded coriander leaves, half friedcumin seeds are mixed properly and smaller balls are made from the mixture and fried in pure ghee. This is fried with due care to prevent reddening.

Pitha in the socio-cultural milieu in Odisha

People from the coastal region, have a tradition of offering different *pitha*s first to plants and animals on festive occasions. Certain glimpses of the socio-cultural life amongst the people of Odisha on different festivities reflect how after such offering people enjoy the delicacies. As per Odiya calendar, in the month of *Jyestha, Raja* festival is celebrated along with *Siva Bibhaha* during which *pithas* are prepared. *Chittau Amavasya* and *Gamha Purnima* are celebrated in the month of *Bhadra*. Other functions celebrated include *Janmashtami* (birthday of Lord Krishna) and *Sasti Osa*. There is the tradition of sending *pithas* especially the *Arisa pitha* with other *pithas* and sweets with newly married bride just after marriage is followed even today. *Arisa pitha* is considered as auspicious. It is normally given in *Sasuoliki* (gift for mother-in–law). Also, these are sent in bulk for distribution among friends, relatives and neighbours. In the traditional villages landlords and other members of the village offer *pithas* during different festivals to members belonging to barbers, *dhobi* (washer man) and other communities who provide them the service during life cycle rituals and other occasions. Similarly, the landless labourers working for their landlords or even the share croppers etc. are offered *pithas*. In the cultural milieu of Odisha in different Odiya months, different festivals are celebrated. An attempt is made to narrate only some festivals in selected months associated with *pitha* making, due to paucity of space.

Raja: It is the most important and unique festival of coastal districts celebrated during the mid of June especially for unmarried girls. Spanning over three days, during the *Jyestha* month girls are treated with undue care by brothers and parents. During the traditional days, girls were adored so much for these three days that they even do not walk bare footed on the mother earth. Swings are erected for them to relax and play. Normally they do not eat rice, so special *pitha* called *podapitha* are prepared for the occasion. This is made by adding rice powder to the boiling water on the hearth. It is constantly stirred so as to prevent clot. To this are added sufficient amount of grated and cut pieces of coconut, sugar or *jaggery*.

Chitou Amavasya: It is a unique festival in which *Chitoupitha* is prepared. It is celebrated during the new moon day of *Shravan* month. On this day Lord Jagannath is decorated with *chita*on his forehead also called *chitrapa. Lord* is offered *Chitoupitha*. In the rural areas,a type of mollusc known as *pilla* is offered by girls. It is believed that by offering small pieces of *pitha* to Gandesuni,

a female form of evil power will be pleased. The girls pray, "*O Gandesuni* please accept our offering and stop biting the feet of our brothers and father while working in the field. Nanda (1989) narrates that scientifically there is an advantage in consuming such items as it is very simple for digestion, as no oil is added and is steamed. During this period of the year, heavy rain occurs and it is a practice to consume simple diets as there is a folk belief to eat simple diet during monsoon.

Gamha Purnima: Celebrated in the memory of killing of the demon Gamha by Balabhadra. The demon was killing the cows. Mohanty (2021) narrated in Paralakhemundi, Nayagarh and other rural areas a special jumping event called "Gamha Diyan" (Gamha jump) is organized for remembering Balarama. For this the nameof the festival is *Gamha Purnima*. But today it is popularly famous by the name *Raksha Bandhan* in pan Indian context. It is uniquely celebrated in rural Odisha. On this day cattle are given bath and are garlanded. Oil is applied to their horns and *pithas* are offered to them. These *pithas* are specially prepared traditionally in large brass vessels, locally called *handas*, and are also offered to agricultural labourers.

Khudurukuni Osa: It is a popular community- level festival among the unmarried girls in the coastal Odisha during the month of *Bhadraba* (mid August-mid September). In this festival, they worship *MaaMangala* on Sunday and it is observed for four consecutive Sundays. This is observed for safety, welfare, and long life of their brothers. It has been a practice from time immemorial when the male members used to travelby boat to South East Asia, especially to Java and Sumatra for trading. The occasion is based on the story of *Tapoi*, a girl, born to a traders' family (*sadhaba* family), in which she is the only sister to seven brothers and the story narrates how she faced the ordeal of her sisters-in-law when her brothers were away for trading after the demise of her parents. Her encounter with girls praying to *MaaMangala* in the forest prompted her to join them in worshiping *MaaMangala*. This resulted in safe return of her brothers and punishment to their wives. Even today it is observed with great pomp and reverence by girls at community level in team spirit. At the beginning of the *puja*, each girl offers a coconut, and after four weeks or sometimes on the fifth week it is broken and five *Manda pithas* are made and offered to *MaaMangala* by every girl. It is then taken by their family members.

Sasti puja: It is observed on the sixth day of the *shuklapaksha* of *Bhadra* month and is dedicated to goddess *Sasti*. She is considered as benefactor and protector of children. Also, people believe her to be the deity of vegetation and reproduction. It is a regular *puja* observed at household level for a child especially after its birth either on the 6th day or on the 21st day since birth. Annually on a child's birthday, this *puja* is performed to worship the goddess for safety of a child. Various *pitha's* like *Chakulipitha*, *Kakerapitha*, and specially, the unique *Budha Chakulipitha* (pan cake) as a birth day special item unique to the state of Odisha. These are offered to the goddess. It is a typical folk performance where the role of Brahmin does not exist.

Dussahra: It is observed in Cuttack town with grandeur during September/October (Ashwin month), which is said to be as old as 1100 years. On this occasion, various *pitha*s are made but then*Manda pitha,kakarapitha* occupies the prime position.

Badaosa: This festival is celebrated in honour of Lord Shiva during the Kartika month (October-November) primarily at Dhabaleswar temple in Cuttack district. In this festival special *bhoga*, i.e. *Prasad* locally called '*gajabhoga'* and *attali* are offered. *Gaja Bhoga* is similar to *Manda pitha*

with a *Chula* or protrusion (phallus shaped). The ingredients include rice powder, sugar, gur, moong and coconut. This festival is celebrated based upon the story that Lord Indra, who had taken a holy dip here on full moon day in the month of *Kartik,* to get rid of leprosy, the dreaded disease as a result of being cursed by Lord Brahma. Interestingly, lord Jagannath is also offered special dishes on this day and after the offerings is over he is dressed in *barasinghara* which is considered very auspicious.

Prathama Astami: The festival is a prayer for a long life and prosperity of the eldest child. It also creates a unique bond between the maternal uncle and the eldest nephew or niece. In this festival, the eldest child receives new clothes turmeric leaf, fruits and sweet from the maternal uncle till his or her marriage. On the day of the festival the eldest child is offered a lamp ovation,usually by the maternal aunt in some families or any senior ladies in some other families followed by elaborate rituals and offering of *Enduripitha* to gods and Goddesses especially Lord Ganesha and Sashti Devi. The uniqueness of the *endure pitha* during this festivities is that the pitha is wrapped in turmeric leaf and prepared. Thus the pitha gives a unique aromatic smell of turmeric leaf.

Samba Dashmi: It is observed in the *Pausha Masa* (mid December-midJanuary) on the tenth day of *Shukla Paksha.* This festival enjoys a distinctive position in preparation and offering of *Pitha* unique to the state of Odisha. It is observed in honour of Lord Surya the *sun god,* as he had cured Samba (the son of Lord Krishna) from the dreaded disease leprosy after penance to Lord Surya for 12 years near Konark temple. In the coastal districts, mothers usually pray to *sun god* for better health of their children. They promise a *pitha* to be offered to the *Sun God* after the birth of a child. This *Pitha* is offered to *Sun god* on the date of observing *Samba Dasami*. On this day, women get ready for starting the preparation before sunrise after taking bath. In the early morning a variety of of *Pitha*s are prepared in the name of each member of the family especially the children. *Khichudi, Ghadaghadia Tarkari* (a curry) are prepared and offered to the *Sun god*. The *pitha* may include *Manda pitha, Kakerapitha, Podapitha, Enduripitha, Chunchi Patarapitha, Arisa pitha* or any other *pitha* as chosen by mother or head of the house hold. It may also include sweet items. The *puja* ends with the offering of *Budhachakuli* in the evening of the p*ooja.*

Bakula Amavasya: This festival is celebrated during the *Paush* month (mid December to mid January). The main purpose of celebrating this festival is to get a better harvest of mango. During this occasion, special food and *Gainthapitha* are prepared and offered at the temples and near the mango trees.

Table No.2:Some Festivalspopular for *pitha*in selected months.

Sl.No.	Odia month	English equivalent	Name of festival	Name of the *pitha*
1.	*Baisakhe*	Mid April-mid May	*Akshaya Tritiya*	*Baisakhe*
2.	*Jyestha*	Mid May-mid June	*Siva Bibhaha, Raja*	***PodaPitha(Main)*** with other*pitha*
3.	*Shravana*	Mid July-Mid August	*ChitouAmavashya*	*Tala Manda*
			Jagulai Panchami	-
			Gamha Purnima	*Enduri*

4.	*Bhadraba*	MidAugust-Mid September	*Khudurukuni* *SastiOser* *BudheiOsa*	*Chakuli* *Varieties of pitha*
5.	*Aswina*	MidSeptember-Mid October	*BijayaDasami*	*Kakara*
6.	*Kartika*	Mid October-mid November	*-BadaOsa*	*-Gaja*
7.	*Margasira*	Mid November- mid December	*Prathama Astami*	*EndurisPitha*
			MargasiraGurubara *Pandu Purnima*	*Chitau* *Manda Pitha*
8.	*Pausha*	Mid December-Mid January	*Samba Dashmi*	*Arisa,Chakuli,ChunchiPatara,EnduriPitha etc.(almost all)*

Though different *pithas* are linked to different festivals, it is also prepared and consumed on other occasions. Brief narratives of some *pitha* making is given below in order to explain more about its affiliation to the people of the region.

Podapitha: During the Raja festival *Podapitha* is the most important item to relish with. *Podapitha* is prepared from the batter prepared from rice mixed with coconut cut pieces, resins, cashew nuts, and sugar or *jaggery*. In the traditional days the baking was done by using hot charcoal both at the top and bottom in an unique way. It is done in such a manner that the mixture used to be packed in Sal (*Shorearobusta*) or banana leaves. Completion of cooking is tested by inserting an iron rod after baking. It is sliced into small pieces and served. It has a lifespan of 2 to 3 days.

Chunchi patra pitha: This is prepared especially during *Samba Dashmi* festival and in some part of Odisha it is offered during *Bata Osha* festival. This *pitha* is very thin like that of *dosa* but it is made from rice paste and no black gram is added. The feelings are grated coconut, cottage cheese (prepared from butter milk and sugar or *jaggery*). Usually the *pitha* is folded in a rectangular shape.

Chitaupitha: This is specially prepared during *Chitalagiamavasya*. It is prepared from a mixture of rice and coconut. Normally, this is baked in a special bowl shaped earthen vessel. But these days everyone is using a metal utensil. At first oil is applied on the vessel then the batter prepared from rice and coconut with required salt is then poured into the oiled vessel. This is then covered for faster preparation. The *pitha* is thus one sided roasted. It is normally eaten with sugar or with some curry like *dalma (*a typical ethnic food item prepared with dal and green vegetable*s)*. Similar *pitha* consumption can be seen in Kerala by the name *Appam*.

Enduripitha: This is a special preparation relished in the *Prathama ashtmi* (in the *Pausha* month) festival. The ingredients include black gram, rice coconut and *jiggery*. The *pitha* is steamed by placing the fermented batter in a turmeric leaf and folding the leaf in the midbrib. Normally the turmeric leaves are not around the year, so tender banana leaves are used when turmeric leaves are not available. The stuffing is done with a mixture of coconut and jaggery or sugar. Sometime the cottage cheese prepared from butter milk along with sugar or jaggery is also stuffed.

Gainthapitha: This is offered during *Bakula Amavasya (in Pausha* month) for a better harvest of mango. It is observed in December- January as mango blossoms during this period. So, women

carry the *Gaintha pitha* to their mango tree, and offered near it. The *pitha* is prepared by boiling water to which the required amount of salt is added and slowly and steadily raw rice powder is added while doing so it is stirred well so that no clump is formed in the prepared mixture. When it is ready the mixture is then taken away from the hearth. Now a wide mouth vessel is placed on the hearth with half-filled water. The mouth is now tied with a cotton cloth. The prepared mixture is kneaded by hand to create a flat oval safe *Gainthapitha* and placed on the cloth tied at mouth of the vessel. After placing the *Gaintha* it is covered to catch the steam for faster cooking.

Muanpitha: It is prepared on various occasions like *Gamha Purnima (Shravana month),* and other festivities. It has a large sized Idli like structure and tastes the same as it is prepared from same combination of rice and black gram. The only variation is that, it is sometimes prepared without any stuffing and sometime it is stuffed with a mixture of coconut and sugar. The mixture is given a rounded shape. A vessel having wide mouth is taken and filled with water. A fine cloth is tied over the mouth of the vessel. The *pithas* are placed on the cloth and the vessel is placed on fire. The *pithas* are prepared by steaming.

Concluding Remarks

Continuation of age-old tradition has become a challenge in the contemporary modern age. Influenced by Mughal and British Rule and diffusion of western culture with formal education to every child, traditional norms are losing values. Since we are now in a scientific environment children have developed their scientific temperament accordingly. Nelson et.al.(2016) narrates that in USA Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee in 2015 concluded on the importance of plant based food and its lesser environmental impact. Dash (2021) narrated that Odiya world view has emerged out of an extensive rice-based culture, which gave rise to a symbolic ideology by conceptualizing rice as a symbolic representation of wealth and of Goddess Lakshmi in all socio-cultural manifestations. A different narrative emerges while visualising rice culture in the backdrop of the regionalism prevailing in religious beliefs, which is in the core of that culture. In Odisha Goddess Lakshmi has devoted followers especially amongst the women folk. At the same time Vishnu, i.e. Lord Jagannath is unique in Odisha. This is due to the inclusive nature of Jagannath cult. It has evolved from a tribal deity belonging to 'little tradition' to an established deity of 'Greater tradition' (Redfield, 1960). This has been possible due to the age -old tradition of association of the Royal families of Puri in managing the system under the guidance of spiritual leaders or saints like Sankaracharya, Ramanujam, Chaitanya, and many others. Therefore, in Odisha the unique relationship between man and divinity in the backdrop of available local resources is nicely synthesized. The emergence of Jagannath cult over centuries has been a unique inclusive religious activity spread all over Odisha, West Bengal, and other adjoining areas. It can be said that in all these rice - producing areas *pitha* has an important place in the annual food calendar of the people, and interestingly Jagannath cult is also popular in these regions. On the contrary, if we look at adjoining states like Andhra Pradesh or the southern state of Tamil Nadu which are also very rich rice producing areas, neither *pitha* (except *Idli* and *Dosa*) nor the Jagannath cult is in existence; though for establishing Jagannath cult prominent south Indian saints like Sankaracharya and Ramanujam have immense role. When we narrow down to Odisha and specifically to the coastal area, then we can see a strong connection between man and divine forces especially in the

backdrop of food, based upon available local resources. Chakravarty (2011:66) mentioned that the devotee comes to Jagannath Dham with two precise intentions one is *Darshana* another is *Mahaprasad*. For a devotee, *Mahaprasad* of the Jagannath temple is the most holy food that one must have in one's life time as it gives them profound piety (*Punya*) and washes out all their sins (*papa*) in their earthly life. Pertaking *Mahaprasad* is an act that brings the final emancipation of the soul. For the *Sevak a*s and the people living in the holy city of Puri and its neighborhoods *Mahaprasad* is an essential part of every social occasion and ceremony in the life of the people. In the life cycle rituals, that is, in birth, marriage, and death rituals, guests are served with *Mahaprasad* before the feast begins. It is believed that this gives them eternal bliss. *Pithas* originating from rice culture are offered to Lord Jagannath four times a day apart from special offerings on festive occasion, and the people of Odisha prepare *pithas* on different festivities. Emergence of *pitha* culture has been possible only because of cultivation of rice throughout the state of Odisha. It is to be noted that some varieties of rice are specially meant for preparing the *pithas*. Similarly, the cultivation of black gram is done immediately after harvesting of rice and it demands least effort and care. The cultivation of coconut in the coastal district of Odisha is common as it is the natural habitat of the plant. It is phenomenally high in Puri district which is the abode of Lord Jagannath. Good variety of *jaggery* is produced from the sugar cane fields in Nayagarh district which was part of the undivided Puri district.

Therefore *pitha* culture has emerged from rice culture and is closely knitted to the religious and socio-cultural fabric of the region. It is believed that local resources are nothing but manifestation of divine gift from almighty for consumption of not just the human beings but of others, which itself is a unique process of mutual respect for one another.

Nelson et.al.(2016) while citing FAO narrates that the food security exist when all people at all times get sufficient safe and nutritious food. This is possible only with food from local plants. And in the light of the above discussions it can be said that with few locally available resources such as rice, black gram, coconut, jaggery, oil/*ghee*, varieties of *pitha* can be prepared by many and consumed by all on different occasions round the year providing sustainable and reasonable nutritious food.

Finally it may be concluded that *pitha*s or some kind of pancakes are prepared in Odisha from the locally available plant resources. These are not for self-indulgence but it teaches people to respect nature, Gods and Goddess. *Pithas* are offered every day to Lord Jagannath and also on different occasions. The *pitha*'s are offered either to Lord Shiva in *Badaosa* or sun god in *Samba Dashami* or to mango tree in *Bakulaamavasya* or to the cows and bullocks in *Gamha Purnima* or to the mollusks in the *Chitalagi Amavasya.* Similar offerings are made to other deities. It is also shared with near and dear ones and the needy who may not be able to afford to enjoy such delicacies. This is done through the age-old *Jajmani* system which still exists at rudimentary stage in rural Odisha.

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