Edible Molluscs Preferred By Manipuri Community of District Cachar, Assam

Dr. Nilam Basumatary
Assistant Professor, Department of Zoology, Cachar College, Silchar, Assam.
Email: nilambasumatary@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Protein is an important part of foodstuff. Since animal protein is typically "complete", so molluscs may play a role in our life. Molluscs are preferred at different areas of north-east India. Many communities use them as an alternative source of food. A number of diverse species were collected from road side by the people and sell them in local wet markets. The study of edible mollusca is important for understanding food sources, biodiversity of an area and cultural significance and similarities amongst indigenous community. Molluscs are a delicacy in north eastern part of India. It creates unique, flavorful dishes; however there are differences in preference and preparation levels. Now it's the time for concern about sustainability and overfishing of molluscan species as their availability has become less now a days. In Cachar district, molluscan species are collected from natural resources and are not cultured. Studying molluscan diversity and distribution, one can add awareness towards sustainability of species and benefits local communities. Edible molluscs can be great sources of protein, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals. In the context of Global scenario octopus and sepia cuisines are preferred.

Keywords: Edible molluscs, Biodiversity, Octopus, Sepia, Overfishing, Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The North-East India (22.30° N and 89.97°E) is in a transitional zone between the Indian, Indo-Malayan and Indo-Chinese biogeographic regions, characterized by varieties of biological species. Assam is one of the prominent state of this region and the place of various ethnic communities with distinctive food habits. Assam includes two valleys ie Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. The state has various ethnic groups like Bodo, Dimasa, Rabha, Hajong, Garo, Karbi, Mising, etc. The Barak valley also has ethnic groups like Naga, Hmar, Kuki, Manipuri etc. Distric Cachar of Southern Assam has its district headquarter in Silchar. The Manipuri community of Cachar has several villages attached to the vicinity of the Silchar town and thus the study was conducted in these villages to find out their preferred molluscan species and their inclusion in their diet.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

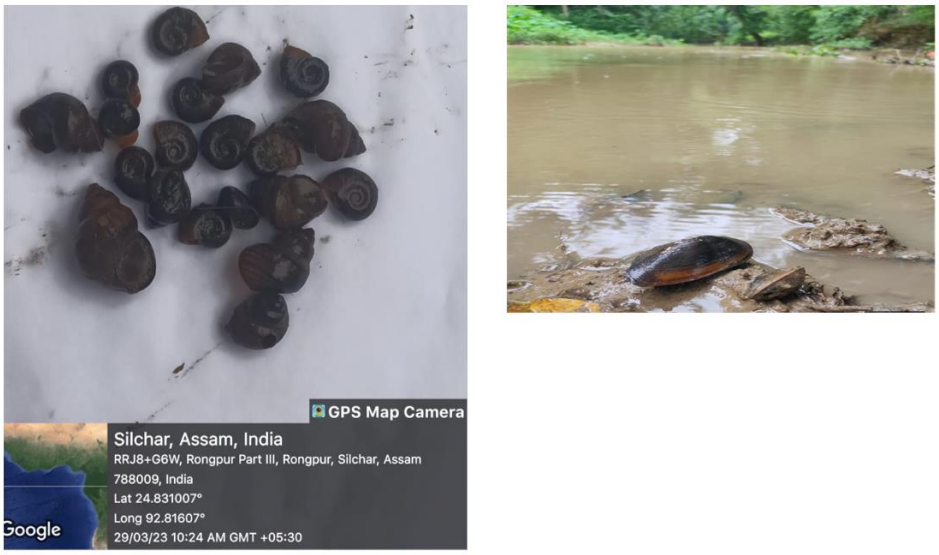
The study was conducted in the year of 2022-23. Primary and secondary data is used in this study. Primary datas were collected through questionnaire fill up, interviews and discussions with community people. Collection time and sources were recorded in discussion with elderly people and nearly 20 people responded. Ladies came out in response to our questionnaires and demonstrated the procedure of cooking the dishes. My questionnaire included questions like 1) Do you consume "Tharoi"? 2) Which type of "Tharoi" you prefer to consume? 3) How to collect "Tharoi"? Where to collect "Tharoi"? 4) How many varieties are available in your locality? 5) Is the availibily of "tharoi" decreasing from earlier years? 6) Can you assume the reason of their decreasing population? 7) What you you feel about their conservation? 8) Suggestion (if any) etc. Secondary datas include shell and cuisine photographs. The mass information received is exemplified here. Molluscan species are not cultured anywhere in the southern Assam. Molluscs are collected from natural resources. Since Manipuri community of Cachar District and the people related with agriculture collect molluscs from agricultural fields in summer season. During winter season they are collected

from pond, river, streams, “Anuwa”(ox-bow lake) and “Haors”(submerged area). The valley is enriched with “Haors” and “Anuwas” where occurrences of flood are frequent. The river Barak crosses the southern part of Assam covering a length of 134 km showing a highly sinuous pattern in the region (Das Pulak, 2012).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Snails were an extra food source for ancient humans, important for their survival and adaptation (Maria Dasi-Espuig, 2014). In some cultures, snails are considered a delicacy and are often served as a gourmet dish. Besides, molluscs help to ensure that the ecosystem remains healthy and diverse. Despite their importance, many species of snails are threatened by habitat loss and over-harvesting (Raj and Hazarika, 2020). Use of pesticide and chemical fertilizer in paddy fields may be a possible reason for the reduction of molluscs. All snails are not edible and safe for Human consumption. Some species of snails can be toxic and cause harm to human if ingested. So, traditional knowledge is an important factor for identifying the harmful species. The showcases of ethnic culture through festival are gaining popularity and traditional cuisine/dishes are one of the important parts of it. Festival of Manipuri communities **(**Ningol Chakkouba, Manipuri Youth Festival, Yaoshang, and Manipuri Get Together cum Cultural Fest etc) reflects such delicacies. Traditional cuisines are reflected throughout Assam in various festivals like Dwijung Festival, Jatinga Festival, Judima Festival, Falcon Festival etc. In Cachar, molluscs are collected from natural sources and either used for own consumption or sell in the assigned market (separate market exists in and around Silchar town). A total of 7 edible mollusca were recorded from different water bodies/markets of Cachar District. It recognizes the traditional consumable molluscan species of Manipuri community of Cachar district of Assam.

SL No	Scientific Name
1	*Sinotaia aeruginosa* (Reeve, 1863)
2	*Melanoides tuberculata* (O. F. Muller, 1774)
3	*Anodonta sp.* (Linnaeus, 1758) Unio/ (Mussels)
4	*Pila globusa* ((Swainson, 1822)
5	*Littorina sp.* (Common periwinkle)
6	*Cipangopaludina chinensis* (Gray, 1834)
7	*Viviparus viviparus* (Linnaeus, 1758)



Pic. ***Sinotaia aeruginosa* (Reeve, 1863) and *Unio sp.* (Freshwater Mussel)**

Pic: ***Melanoides tuberculata*** and ***V. Viviparous***

Pic: ***Pila globosa*** and ***Littorina sp.***

Pic: ***Pila globosa***

Other than food, the Molluscs are also beneficial to human and play role

i) As fish bait.
ii) In duckery.
iii) As Ornamental elements in aquarium
iv) In Pearl culture

The belief related to consumption of "Tharoi" is highlighted herewith (Meitei Community)

1. Snail meat is helpful for high sugar patient as it has capability to control sugar.
2. Snail meat is beneficial for patient suffering from high pressure.
3. Snail meat improves blood circulation system.

The study advices that corroboration of the indigenous knowledge and development can promote food production and as a result there can be income and farming amalgamation. It also reveals that traditional knowledge along with innovative action may help to attain the objective of sustainable agriculture and food security. This paper assesses the nutritional and cultural significance, culinary use of molluscs in addition to traditional harvesting. Further, it may help in opening the door of future prospect of farming practices. Molluscs have lost much of their historical usage as medicine, tools or religious symbols but their economic value as a source of protein, calcium, ornaments or decorations is possibly greater now than ever before. Molluscs have great economic value in terms of protein, ornaments or embellishment; although their usage as medicine, tools, holy symbols may have been lost in meager amount as a matter of time and cultural changes. Freshwater molluscs participate in playing an essential role in the ecosystem, chiefly in food chain involving edible fishes, which are major resources of protein for human. Since molluscs have varied usages and role, there is an urgent need to create mass awareness through seminars, workshops, symposium, and training programmes to make the commom people aware irrespective of culture or community about conservation of it. Supremacy of comprehension exerted by the common people can aptly become a way to conserve nature and its natural wealth.

Acknowledgement: I acknowledge Mr. Zaheer Khan Mazumder for his support, cooperation and accompanying me during the period.

REFERENCES

1. **Bohm Monika**. The conservation status of the world's freshwater molluscs. J. Hybrobiologia. Pages 848 DOI: 10.1007/s10750-020-04385-w

2. **Das Pulak.** Study of Barak river Meander and Associated Hazard around Silchar Town, Assam, using Remote Sensing and GIS. International Journal of Environmental Sciences. J. Volume 2, No 4, 2012 ISSN: 0976 – 4402 pages:37-52. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pulak-Das-3/publication/267774592

3. **Krishan Soumya, Chakraborty Kajal** and **Vijayagopal P**. J. Nutritional profiling of selected species of edible marine molluscs from the south-west coast of India. Indian Journal of Fish. 66(1): 56-63, 2019 56 DOI: 10.21077/ijf.2019.66.1.80079-08

4. **Maria Dasi-Espuig.** https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-28873899, 21 August, 2014

5. **Devi. Oinam Sunanda, Komor Puspa** & **Das Dhritiman**. A checklist of traditional edible bio-resources from Ima markets of Imphal Valley, Manipur, India ISSN 0974-7907 (online) | 0974-7893 (print). JoTT Short Communication 2(11): 1291-1296

6. **Rabha H.P., Mazumdar. M, Baruah U.K.**, Indigenous Technical Knowledge on Ethnic Dishes of Snail in Goalpara District of India. Scholars Academic Journal of Biosciences (SAJB) 2014; 2(5): 307-317. www.saspublisher.com

7. **Raj. Manideep**, and **Hazarika Rabindra** (2020).Book. Non- Chordates- II (Coelomates). Dibrugarh Universi

8. http://www.snail-world.com/snails-as-food/