

## DAHI

(Jyoti Prakash Tamang\*)



*Dahi of India*

### **The fermented food:**

*Dahi* is a traditional fermented milk product of Indian subcontinent, which is thick, dense, sweet-slight sour in taste and similar to curd and yogurt. *Dahi* is also used for the preparation of several other milk products in Indian subcontinent such as *gheu* (butter), *mohi* (butter-milk) and *chhurpi* (cottage-cheese).

### **Where is it found?**

*Dahi* is predominantly made and used on the Indian sub-continent (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka).

### **What are its ingredients?**

The milk of cow, buffalo, yak

### **How do we make it?**

Fresh milk of cow, buffalo or yak is boiled in a vessel to kill off all microbes present that could spoil the fermentation, cooled to room temperature, and transferred to a hollow wooden vessel or container. A small quantity of previously prepared *dahi* serves as a source of inoculum (beneficial bacteria) and is added to the boiled and cooled milk (this process is known as the *backslopping* method). The inoculated boiled milk is left to ferment at room temperature for 1-2 days in summer and for 2-4 days in winter. The duration of fermentation depends on the season as well as on the geographical location of the place.

### **The microbiology of the process:**

Many beneficial microorganisms, mostly lactic acid bacteria which include *Lactococcus lactis*, *Lactococcus raffinolactis*, *Leuconostoc mesenteroides*, *Leuconostoc pseudomesenteroides*, *Lactobacillus helveticus*, *Lactobacillus gasseri*, *Enterococcus italicus*, and few acetobacter species like *Acetobacter*

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*pasteurianus*, *Acetobacter syzygii*, *Acetobacter lovaniensis* and *Gluconobacter cerinus*, ferment the raw milk into *dahi*.

### **How/when do we use and enjoy it?**

*Dahi* is consumed directly as a non-alcoholic beverage in meals. It is also consumed after mixing it with rice or beaten rice.

### **Variations, regional variations:**

*Dahi* is a generic name in India, and is known by different Indian languages. In Eastern states of India, and Bangladesh, *dahi* is mixed with sugar syrup or jaggary, and called *misti dai* or *lal dai*.

### **Beneficial properties:**

*Dahi* is nutritive and considered to have health benefits. The pH of *dahi* is acidic in nature due to the lactic acid fermentation. *Dahi* contains high protein, fat and calorific value. It has probiotic (probiotics are live beneficial microorganisms which provide health benefits) properties which stimulate our immunity and prevent many diseases such as diarrhea, gastric ulcers, and also improves bone health.

Some children are lactose intolerant, i.e., cannot digest lactose (which is a carbohydrate) present in milk, as a result of which they suffer from diarrhea, gas and bloating after drinking milk. However, the lactose is digested by bacteria present in *dahi*, hence consumption of *dahi* by lactose intolerant children is always recommended.

### **Cultural roots and importance**

Besides consumption, *dahi* is considered as a sacred food item by the Hindu and the Buddhists. *Dahi* is also used as non-food items such as to make adhesive coloured spot called 'tika' mixed with rice grains and coloured-powder to be applied on the foreheads of the family members by the elders during the festivals and marriage ceremonies in the Himalayan regions of India, Nepal and Bhutan. *Dahi* is also offered to solemnize the marriage of Hindu and Buddhist.

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