

## Gundruk or fermented leafy greens

Fermented food stuffs of umpteen numbers have been quite popular across various parts of the world and commonly practised to balance resource crunch in lean season. Or put differently, these you can save wisely at the time of plenty for later when there is not much in hand. Fermented leafy greens of India do not have many in their reserve. But the Nepali and Gorkha community of northern part of West Bengal and elsewhere evolved and fine-tuned their unique way of saving juicy and leafy foliage for off-season. Mustard greens or rayo or rai shaag are the main element, that could be accompanied by others, such as radish or cauliflower leaves or even fleshy underground roots. From which they prepare their signature fermented foliage or adorably called as ‘Gundruk’.



Mustard greens or *Brassica juncea* is one of their favourite crops which grows in abundance along with many others in sunny winter or pleasant summer of this region.

Almost every household of the montane villages or foothills even with a small patch of land cultivate greens and the harvest is often far more than that can be consumed at a time. So, an elaborate process of processing through fermenting, drying and storing for leaner seasons has been evolved and perfected: the leaves are allowed to sundry for a couple of days followed by smashing, squeezing and tightly packing in closed glass jars for days for fermentation to take place in warm place. Lastly, slightly acidic fermented leaves are taken out and again dried under the sun. Although there are local variations suiting one's taste the recipe remains more-or-less the same. And if moisture is prevented, Gundruk can be used for months so one can enjoy them during incessant rains as well as in chilly and foggy winter. *Pediococcus* and *Lactobacillus* species remain fully functional during the fermentation process - so says the underlying science.

However, Gundruk is not merely a fermented food that supplements nutrition in hard times, it does have another spicier story. Mixed with heavy flavouring and seasoning agents, its tangy

taste often lures taste buds and elevates one's mood in soggy weather. Some even says it acts like magic when appetite dies after days of continuous fog or rains common in hills. A hot and peppery soup of mouthful of Gundruk (Gundrukjhol) aids in digestion and stimulates bowel movement. There is another avatar which is also a sought-after, i.e., its pickle called as Gundruk achaar, favourite among Nepali or Gorkhali diaspora.

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