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Analysis of Indigenous Food Items of *Monpa* Tribal Community in Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

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There had been cumulative learning from generation to generation among the tribal societies living in close vicinity of the nature. They process and prepare several type of peculiar food and beverage items which are location specific and made with the help of traditional knowledge. Keeping these issues in mind, current study was conducted among the *Monpa* tribe of Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The sample size of the study comprised of 120 respondents from this tribe. Personal interview method with a pre-tested structured schedule and focused group discussion were used for data collection. Results revealed that *Monpa* tribe had mastered the method of preparation of a range of food items and beverages. These food items include Thukpa, Momos, Khura, Zan, Puta, Khazi, Bresi, Khapse, Chhurpi etc which are prepared with the help of crops like rice, wheat, maize, barley, finger millet, buckwheat, vegetables and yak meat as well as milk. The beverages locally known as Sing-chang, Baang-chang, Aarak, Marchang, *Monpa* tea etc were prepared from fermentation, distillation and brewing of foodgrains. These kinds of cultural diversity needs to be preserved in India to have a distinctive feature which can be very good potential for tourism industry.

Introduction

Human is a social animal. Human behavior varied from place to place and sometimes too complex to analyze and understand. Most of us behave in a particular manner because of our habits, ideology or predominant thought at the moment. Tribal communities have close relation with the environment where they live. They know how to identify and observe their food and biological responses to the particular area. Such knowledge can be acquired from the old man or head of the family/ societies. Arunachal Pradesh is a hilly state of North-eastern India where shifting cultivation is a major practice in agriculture.

The state is very rich in traditional food and beverages and tribal communities process agricultural produce using various methods (Singh and Sureja, 2005). The *Monpa* tribe of Arunachal Pradesh inhabits at higher altitude ranging between 3,500 and 22,500 feet from mean sea level in Tawang District. The *Monpas* have generally three meals in a day. The first meal taken in the early morning before going out to the fields, forest or other business. While going to the forest fields, cooked items to be taken for lunch in a bamboo basket. Third meal is taken at home in the evening. The main food of *Monpa* is

rice and millets. Although men and women have equal options and opportunities to use and conserve the biodiversity for sustaining their livelihoods under challenges of climate change and socioeconomic inequalities, they like duck meat, chicken and fish (Singh, R.K *et al.*, 2013). *Monpas* are traditionally dependent on nature and natural products for food and medicines. They have rich knowledge about processing of food, medicine and edible plants which is generally used for welfare of the societies.

Tawang district having varied physiographic and agro-climatic conditions, the agricultural practices and prospects of this area differs in some extent from other districts of the state. Diversity of this district is congenial for commercial cultivation of both tropical and temperate fruits, Orchid species, Potato, Ginger, Species, Medicinal and Aromatic plants etc. The economy of *Monpas* is basically agrarian and rural based. They practice both permanent and shifting (*Jhum*) cultivation. Maize, paddy, millets, wheat, buckwheat, barley, soyabean, chilli, frenchbean, cabbage and potato are major crops grown by this tribe (Bareh, 2001). Bio-cultural dimensions of biodiversity memorized and traditional mechanisms adapted by elderly women transfer their plant and cultural knowledge from one to another generation (Singh *et al.*, 2013).

With passage of time, preparation and use of traditional foods are decreasing against modern foods. Different type of knowledge about plants, indigenous foods, meditational plant, fermented product and their uses in food nutritional security is available among elderly people of the community. The loss of traditional culture and ethno medicinal related aspect of the important traditional food and beverage adopted by *Monpa* tribe has been a cause of concern in recent times. Keeping all this in mind, the present study was conducted

on preparation of an inventory of culturally and nutritionally important foods, beverages among *Monpa* tribes of the district.

Materials and Methods

The state of Arunachal Pradesh, at the extreme North East of India, occupies an area of about 83, 743 sq. kilometer. It is bounded on north by Tibet and China, on the west by Bhutan on the south by the state of Assam and on the east by Burma and Nagaland. There are 21 districts in the state. The state is basically a tribal state. Tawang is a land of *Monpa tribes*, is a small district blessed with breath-taking natural beauty. This is situated in the north - western extremity of the state of Arunachal Pradesh. It is the birth place of this Holiness the sixth Dalai Lama and home to world famous *Gaden Namgyal Lhatse*, Popularly Known as Tawang *Monastery*, the largest *Monastery* of India and perhaps the second largest in Asia (Abhisekh, 2015). As per census of 2011, there are a total of 268 villages in the district. The present study was conducted in purposively selected Tawang district having 90% *Monpas* of its total population. Four villages each from two blocks- Tawang and Kitpi of the district were selected randomly and from each selected village (Changbu, Changprong, Shakti, Ghispu, Teli, Soma, Yousum, Khirmu) 15 members were randomly selected as sample of respondent. The sample of the study, thus comprised of 120 members of *Monpa* tribe. For better understanding of valuable information help of local officers' viz. Agriculture field assistant (AFA), *Gaon Burah* and ASM were taken. A list of the members having traditional knowledge about indigenous food and beverage was prepared. An open ended interview schedule was developed to collect the data. The data were collected through personal interview from the respondents and focused group discussion. The participatory observation was major tool

to record the method of preparation of traditional food, medicine and beverages made by different crops. The collected information was analyzed with suitable techniques.

Results and Discussion

Identification of crops used for preparation of traditional food by the *Monpa* tribes

It was observed that the *Monpa* tribes prepare boiled, fermented and processed food and beverage which were nutritionally and medicinally rich for the communities. They use various cereals, vegetables and other minor crops in preparation of their traditional food. Millets are the staple food of these tribes. The following crops in table 1 have been identified during the study which is used for preparation of traditional food.

Food items and their preparation

The *Monpas* are quite fond of specific spicy food. Therefore, chillies are used extensively in their preparations. A very popular side dish, which every typical household prepares as an accompaniment is called *chamin* (local chutney), made by the grinding of chillies with fermented cheese. Fermented cheese is also a key ingredient in almost all of their traditional preparation and is found in every household. They also use fermented soya beans (*Glycine max* Merrill) called *greb-churba* as a flavoring agent.

The *Monpa* are non-vegetarians and prefer beef, pork, yak, mutton, chicken and fish over vegetables. Beef and yak meat is cut into strips and dried during winter months to be consumed later (Maiti, 2013). This study was conducted among sampled households and different types of food items prepared by *Monpas* were identified (Fig. 1). The details of these items are given below.

Thukpa

It is among most popular and common dishes in Tawang. *Thukpa* is basically a noodle soup mixed with meat, chillies, etc. Another kind of *thukpa* is *dheb thupka* in which noodles are replaced by rice. *Thukpa* made of maize and beans is called *ashumthukpa* and made by yak meat or chicken is known as *shathukpa*.

Momos

Momos are very popular in various parts of the country. These are made by stuffing a mixture of meat and onion in dough. They are then steamed for about half an hour in a three-tiered perforated utensil placed above another utensil containing water for soup at the bottom.

They are then served with soup and hot *chamin*. Non-veg *momo* is made from maida and pork, yak meat, packed fish, chicken and mutton and veg-*momo* is prepared by the use of maida and leafy vegetables (cabbage, man patta, onion leaf).

Khura

A *Monpa* pancake made of buckwheat flour which is usually eaten with tea or vegetable curry. It is prepared by mixing sugar, water and buckwheat flour in *haying* (local bowl). After wards the mixture is toasted in a *langya* (pan).

Zan

This staple food is prepared by adding millets or another flour to boiling water in *haying*. Mixture is stirred with a flat wooden spatula till it becomes stiff.

It is consumed with vegetables, meat or *chamin* along with the addition of fermented *cheese* or soyabeans as condiment.

Table.1 Use of traditional crops in ethnic foods

Species	Local Name	Botanical Name	Part Use in food	Season of Availability	Conservation mode
Barley	Nai	<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	Grain	May - June	Shifting land and home garden
Finger millets	Comp	<i>Eleusine coracana</i>	Grain	November	Shifting land
Wheat	Ko, Nass	<i>Triticum astivum</i>	Grain	May - June	Shifting land and home garden
Buck wheat	Brame	<i>Fagopyrum esculentum</i> Moench	Immature grain use for Tem (Vegetable), Mature grain use for Phe (Atta)	April- May	Shifting land, home garden and community forest
Rice	Debh, Nu	<i>Oryza sativa</i>	Grain	October - November	Shifting land
Maize	Ashom	<i>Zea Mays</i>	Immature and mature grain	July to October	Shifting land and home garden
Cabbage	Rupong, Pongru	<i>Brassica oleracea var. capitata</i>	Leaf	Round year	Shifting land and home garden
Local Spanich	Patse	<i>Spinaciao leracia</i>	Leaf	April to October	Domesticated in home garden
Radish	Ker	<i>Raphanus sativa</i>	root	Round year	Domesticated in home garden
Bitter gourd	Khau Bando, Ru, Kho Kairy	<i>Momordica charantia</i>	Fruit	July to October	Shifting land and home garden
Pumpkin	Brumsa	<i>Cucurbita moschata</i>	Fruit, Tender leaf	July to September	Shifting land and home garden
Onion	Tshong	<i>Allium cepa</i>	Leaf, Bulb	January	Shifting land and home garden
Garlic	chhet	<i>Allium sativum</i>	Leaf, Bulb	August	Shifting land and home garden
Lettuce	Notch Ru	<i>Lactuca sativa</i>	Leaf	April to October	Shifting land and home garden
Layi Patta	Petsa Ru	<i>Brasicca spp.</i>	Leaf	Whole year	Domesticated in home garden
Local chillies	Solu	<i>Capsicum frutescence</i>	fruit	July to September	Domesticated in home garden
Man patta	Man	<i>Allium spp.</i>	Leaf	April to July	Shifting land, home garden and community forest
Local Mushroom	Moo	<i>Agaricus Spp.</i>	Whole plant	April to July	Community forest
Soya bean	Kya grap	<i>Glycine max</i> Merrill	Grain	October	Shifting land

Table.2 Preparation and form of ethnic foods

Name of Ethnic food	Form of food	Preparation time
Thukpa	Soup noodle	Mainly serve in the dinner
Momos	Steamed	Any special occasion
Khura	Roasted	Any time
Zan	Boiled	Special occasion
Puta	Boiled	Religious occasion
Gypa Khazi	steamed	Any time
Tsizing Kyola	Boiled	Whole year
Bresi	Fried	Religious occasion, Festival
Khazi	Steamed	Any time
Khapse	Fried	Losar (New Year)
Chhurpi	Fermented	Round the year
Soyabean chhurpi	Fermented	Round the year
Yak Meat	Boil, Fry, Snakes, Dry, and Roasted	As per availability
Yak Fat	Churning	Whole year

Fig.1 Pictorial depiction of Indigenous food items of Monpa tribe in Tawang



Puta

The *Monpa* version of noodles is *puta*. These are noodles made out of buckwheat flour. The making of *Puta* is quite a time-consuming and cumbersome process. It is made using a special noodle maker called the *Putatzirsheng*. The dough is put through noodle maker and is then pressed. The *Puta* is usually eaten with a stew made of vegetables, fermented cheese and chillies.

Tsizingkyola

The method of preparing this dish is almost the same as that for *Zan* except only buckwheat flour is used in it. It is best eaten with thin *chamin*.

Khazi

This dish's ingredients are cooked rice mixed with finely chopped *maanpatta*, a local vegetable (similar to spring onion leaves), *chamin* and salt.

Gyapa-khazi

The *Monpa* version of the pulao. This dish is prepared by mixing rice, fermented *cheese*, small dried fish, chilli, butter ginger etc.

Bresi

It is basically sweet rice. This dish is usually served during ceremonial occasion. Cooked rice is transferred to a basin on which melted butter is poured. It is then seasoned with raisins and sugar.

Khapse

It is important food made by the *Monpa* society at festival of *Losar* (New Year). This is prepared with flour (maida). It is made into eight shaped rolls and fried in soyabean oil

(Refined). It can be stored for 15 months in a well aerated bamboo container.

Chhurpi

In *Monpa* society it is a popular staple food prepared by Yak milk. They eat this dish during whole year. As per age this is divided in 3 types-*Chhurchirpen*, *chhursingba* and *chhurpupu*. It is paneer like product made by yak milk after fermentation.

Soyabean chhurpi

It is a popular and common dish in *Monpa* society. This product is prepared during October- February. For preparation of this dish, local soyabean seeds are boiled and spread on bamboo mat after draining out the water.

Yak meat

Yak meat is a mostly like by the *Monpa* societies living in different altitudes at temperate zone. Surplus amount of meat are dried in sun light for use during the off season.

Yak fat

Yak fat is known as ghee, is mostly used in *chhurpi* and other different dishes.

A summary of food items prepared by *Monpa* tribal communities along with its physical form and time/occasion of preparation is given in table 2 for ready reference.

Beverages and other liquid items and their preparation

The *Monpas* are also quite fond of alcoholic beverages or *Chang*, which are prepared in every house. *Chang* has a great deal of social importance in the *Monpa* society, especially

on all social occasions such as births, deaths, house warming or festivals. The key ingredients used for making *chang* are rice, maize, millets and barley, which are fermented and distilled. The *Monpa* brew several kind of *chang*.

Sing-chang

It is only made during *Losar*, the *Monpa* New Year festival. It is a sweet beer like concoction prepared by mixing together millets, buckwheat and barley. It can be both hot and cold depending on the weather and the drinkers' preference.

Baang-chang

It is usually prepared from rice but it can also be made by combining millets, maize and barley.

Aarak

Aarak is made by distilling of maize, millets, rice or barley. It is quite strong and is usually served hot in a small cup.

Marchang

When *aarak* (local drink) is fried in yak ghee to remove the unpleasant odour, and then *Kongpu* (finger millets) flour is added to it and mixed properly the dish is known as *Marchang*.

Monpa tea

Unlike most other tribes of Arunachal, the *Monpas* are quite fond of milk and it's by products *Sueja* or butter tea is hugely popular with these people. The tea is prepared in the usual way with a few exceptions. In place of normal tea leaves, *jari* or crude tea leaves are used. The tea is prepared by churning milk, raw butter and a little salt in place of sugar in

the *jan-d hong* (a long cylindrical churn made of wood). The rich butter tea is considered to be effective in the cold weather of Tawang.

The knowledge level about traditional food varies among the women of different villages. It was observed that a gap about traditional knowledge among different age group existed. This was due to lack of knowledge among the new generation and low interest to consume traditional foods. At the moment, traditional food practices techniques used by *Monpa* tribes are rapidly developed because many traditional programme implemented in the district. After study, it was observed that food preparation, its use and food habit was dependent on religion, ecology, festival and cultural ethics. Traditional food preparation and consumption by *Monpas* has been gained from the time immemorial. It was clear that majority of tribal population had understanding of preparation method and traditional value of ethnic food and beverage. They know cultural, nutritional and social value of ethnic food, and their close relationship to environmental health should be well recognized. These results are in confirmation with the study conducted by Singh *et al.*, during 2007. Traditional food is not only maintaining good health but have also certain curative properties against disease and disorder. Therefore, before this traditional food knowledge lost forever it must be documented properly. Systematic identification, documentation, value addition and refinement of traditional food need to be interconnected with government policies. This would save the indigenous knowledge of the tribe.

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