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Change and Continuity in the Traditional Dietary Pattern: A Case Study of Taraon Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh

Nihal Marap

Asst. Prof. Department of History, Namdapha Degree College, Miao

Abstract

The indigenous people living in various parts of Arunachal Pradesh share similar recipes, cuisine, ingredients, and knowledge of eatable roots and tubers since ancient times. Despite having some similarities in their diet, all tribes and sub-tribes have distinct culinary traditions. With the advent of modernization and the exposure of globalization, there have been tremendous changes in the traditional diet among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. This paper attempts to document the traditional dietary pattern of Taraon Mishmis, as well as the emergence of new food habits of the Taraon Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Indigenous people, Taraon Mishmi, traditional dietary, culinary, ingredients, modernization, globalisation, Arunachal Pradesh.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford dictionary define ‘’diet” as; the kind of food that a person, animal, or community habitually eats. The traditional diet upon which indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh survived for millennia was based on wide range of nutrients-rich foods obtained from local environment, including cultivation, hunting, trapping, fishing, seasonal berries, stems, roots and tubers (Rinya, 2017).

The diversity of vegetation in the area is largely responsible for tribals' use of large numbers of species to meet their diverse requirements. The tribal population around the world is still well-versed in the use of local plants for food and other specific purposes. The tribal communities primarily depend on forests for their sustenance, which supply them with food, plants, and other material requirements. Their lives are much dependent on forest or natural plant wealth (Angami, 2006). The tribal societies in Arunachal Pradesh have incorporated seasonal wild and domesticated edible fruits and berries into their food habits. Some of the wild fruits have even become an important part of the culture of some indigenous people’s tradition and are known to be effective against certain diseases (Singh, 2006).

The dietary pattern of tribal people in Arunachal Pradesh has some similarities. The typical daily diet of tribal people consists of bamboo shoots, fermented soya beans, meat, paddy, millet, maize, and various domesticated and wild plants. The Mishmi hill districts boast a plethora of flora and fauna. The abundance of flora and fauna enabled them to include a variety of edible fruits, vegetables, paddy, maize, and meat from both domesticated and wild animals in their regular diet. Lohit. The Taraon Mishmis' diet pattern has changed significantly over the last 20 years. Thus, this paper attempts to record the indigenous food knowledge and changes in their diet.

Objectives

- To examine the change and Continuity in the traditional dietary pattern of the Taraon Mishmis.
- To record the traditional knowledge of edible plants and meat sources.

Materials and Methods

The present study is descriptive and historical in nature. The researcher has taken into account both primary and secondary sources. The process of gathering primary sources involved both structured and unstructured interviews with elderly members of society and raconteurs. Books, journals, and research articles served as secondary sources. Furthermore, the researcher's personal and daily experiences also played a role in shaping a new perspective.

Discussion and Result

Food shortages were a frequent occurrence throughout the state prior to independence, and the situation remained unchanged for a few more decades. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh were primarily dependent on their extensive knowledge of wild edible plants. To fend off seasonal food shortages, tribal people in Arunachal Pradesh used sago, millet, maize, root and tuber crops. Seasonal food shortages in the Mishmi Hills are being reported by early travellers. Supplies of grain are eked out by various additions, and in particular by the pith of the tall wild sago (Mills, 1952). The Taraon Mishmis, like other tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh, had a strong reliance on paddy, foxtail millet, sago and maize. Modernity has resulted in foxtail millet, buck wheat, barley and caryota urens being removed from the regular diet. The easy accessibility of rice in the market has a positive and negative impact on Taraon Mishmis. The danger of certain paddy varieties being extinct has arisen due to the substitution of paddy cultivation with other cash crops by the tribe. In some remote villages of Anjaw district, the millets are still a part of a regular diet. The surplus supply of rice by Food Corporation of India has replaced foxtail millet and caryota urens from the regular diet of Taraon Mishmis.

The Taraon Mishmis are knowledgeable about a wide range of wild and domesticated vegetables. Among the innumerable vegetables, piper pedicellatum, calamus erectus, gonostegia hirta, solanum nigrum, lingru, spinalanthes, pumpkin, clerodendrum, colebrookianum, seasonal mushrooms, and taro are most common vegetables.. Exposure to modernity and the availability of new vegetables led to a new food habit developing in the traditional society of Taraon Mishmis. Vegetables such as potatoes, brinjal, cabbage, and red lentils have become a staple food. The Taraon Mishmi society still has a strong preference for traditionally eaten vegetables.

The domesticated and wild root and tuber crops have been a part of the Taraon Mishmis' diet since ancient times. The root and tuber crops that are widely grown include tapioca, yam, sweet potato, and taro. The wild yam are mostly found in Anjaw district. Nowadays, sweet potatoes are cultivated to feed domesticated pigs. The tribe is still fond of domesticated yam, taro, and tapioca. The seasonal food shortage was greatly mitigated by the use of tuber and root crops.

The tribal groups In Arunachal Pradesh share a common understanding of ingredients. The most common ingredients in the kitchen include ginger, sesame, culantro, fermented bamboo shoots, fermented soya beans, zanthoxylum acanthopodium, and varieties of chillies. Cinnamon, clove, cumin, bay leaf, black pepper, and garlic are spices that are commonly used in every household. Zanthoxylum acanthopodium and sesame are no longer a favourite of the tribe. These ingredients are restricted to rare occasions or

gatherings. Despite this, the tribe's favourite foods are still fermented soya beans and fermented bamboo shoots.

Humans have brought a wide range of animals into domestic partnerships over the past 11,000 years as livestock, working animals, household pets, and companions. It is a journey that continues today as humans, with enhanced understanding of the process of domestication and increasingly sophisticated technology for breeding and rearing captive animals, bring an ever-expanding array of animal species, on land and Sea, into domestication (Zedar, 2012).

The animals that are most frequently housed are bos gauras, cows, pigs, and chicken. Domesticating these animals is a common practice for meat, rituals, and marriage.

The meat of animals are often dried to preserve the meat. The culture of eating dried meat has been diminished due to the availability of refrigerators in the market. In addition to domestic animals, there were also wild boars, bears, deer, musk deer, monkeys, squirrels, wild buffaloes, and wild fowls that were often part of the diet. The tribe's diet was supplemented by the trapping of fish. The government's restrictions on hunting endangered animals have resulted in the tribe shifting to boiler chicken, mutton, and egg.

The diet of Taraon Mishmis from Lohit district has undergone more significant changes than those from Anjaw district. The geography of the Anjaw district is helping the tribe to continue the traditional dietary pattern. The Taraon Mishmis in Lohit district have experienced a disruption in their traditional lifestyle and food habits due to rapid modernization.

Conclusion

Thus, from the above discussion it's observed that the Taraon Mishmis have a wide knowledge of both domesticated and wild edible plants. The tribe's diet has undergone a significant change due to modernization exposure. The continuous exploitation of the forest has caused the loss of many wild edible plants in peripheral villages of the administrative centre. Due to the limited availability of wild edible vegetables, the tribe is now compelled to use non-native vegetables in their diet. The socio-economic development and government prohibition on hunting and trapping of endangered animals have also affected their traditional dietary habits. Taking into account all the discussed points, it has been observed that the Taraon Mishmis are still adhering to their traditional diet pattern, but with a slide modification.

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