

Cultural Traits and Food Habits of the People in North East India

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ABSTRACT

North East India (NEI) is a place in the Himalayan region constituting by hills, mountains, plains, rivers, waterfalls, sanctuaries, forest reserves and so on with granary and scenic beauty in the eastern part of India having floras and faunas and assimilated with composite cultural traits, conjoining therein the celestial things of nature along with varied nature of food habits, different cultural activities and festive affairs and besides; free life-style of ethnic populations who have been living in this remotest corner of the land-locked areas. However, this place is very important in so far as the composite culture as well as the living pattern of easy-going of various innocent tribal and ethnic groups of people in this region is concerned, who have been deprived off the basic amenities of life bringing facilities as compared to all-India level. So, this research paper attempts to discuss some important issues pertaining to cultural traits and food habits of people to focus their importance in all-India demographic situation, their participation, vulnerability, growing demands and equal development with the forward States of India. Taking into account all such stocks, it is expected that the paper will reflect on the essential findings and recommendations with valuable suggestions and conclusion in sparkling and celebrated manner for the purpose of urgent need of developmental activities in this backward part of the country to keep pace with forward moving requirements.

Keywords: Composite Culture, Demographic Dividend, Ethnic Groups, Food Habits, Income Inequalities, National Identity, Regional Disparity.

INTRODUCTION

North East India (NEI) is covered by hills, mountains, rivers, sanctuaries, forest reserves, waterfalls, floras and faunas, and having celestial scenic beauty. Here, people have been living with natural phenomena in celestial happiness, and maintaining their own cultural attributes, propagating shifting cultivation system as their agricultural activities and rearing animals. However, their food habits vary in accordance with the ethnic pattern of living in a culture of free-life-style. Religious diversities are their cultural part of indigenous craftsmanship as well as reflection of numerous fashion design, concerned with their own handicrafts and handloom products. Thus, people of NEI reflect their own cultural identity in all-India level to position themselves as demographic distinctiveness of cultural diversities, living norms originality and free way of going in maintaining their own status, social cohesiveness and regional allegiance to

the multiplicity of natural bounty. It is observed that innocent and free-going people are mainly habituated to live and survive with forest life and natural habitation process, like Jhum cultivation system which provide wide range of ethnic foods rich in nutrition and is compatible to culture ethnicity of tribes¹. New generation educated youths have now started using commercially processed foods, fast foods due to globalization and cultural transition with another places for employment and other purposes as an intervention of modern crop varieties, materialistic life; instead of traditional vegetables, fruits and fermented ethnic foods of local tribes, which has resulted for many diseases and most notably, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other ailments². But truly speaking, cultural traits of tribal communities are associated with social dynamics and food habits are related to consumption pattern concerned with availability, nutritional elements, socio-cultural aspects and medicinal values.

This research paper discusses laudably the cultural traits of tribal people of NEI with various aspects of ethnic diversities mingling towards their food habits, living style, religious ceremonial functions, craftsmanship, handicrafts, agrarian pattern of living, local customs and traditions and besides, varied nature of activities pertaining to their national identity, regional diversity and international order of social dynamics. Accordingly, the research paper aims to deal with cultural affinity, linguistic diversity, free living norms, social life-style, food habits and similar other things of tribal population in relativity aspects to bring out major findings in sparkling and celebrated manner. Conclusion will be made at the end and valuable suggestions will be given. Again, appropriate recommendations will be provided to improve their life-styles with urgent developmental needs, to place themselves in equal setting with other forward zones by removing difficulties for backwardness to prosper with growing dynamicity. Altogether, the study attempts to bring out the loopholes in tribal development policy framework for decision-makers, administrators, bureaucrats, government functionaries, non-government organizations (NGOs), tribal groups, social thinkers and others with scientific exploratory discourses in healthy manner. The study depicts a nice view on tribal communities in relevant manner to the wide range of variety and multiplicity, indigenous identity and regional diversity, in so far as cultural traits and food habits of ethnic groups of NEI is concerned to that of the other regions of India.

Objectives of the Study

The study concentrates on wide range of parameters of tribal societies cultural activities and food habits, and so, the entire research is devoted to the development goals of tribal population groups in NEI in relation to cultural traits, religious activities, social living pattern, food habits for bringing quality of work life (QWL), to rejuvenate the structure of the global civil society as per norms of ethnic vision of life-style, indigenous mission of working pattern and strategies for development, which are illuminated in sparkling manner for policy framework issues. Thus, the study is expected to find out means and ways for eliminating social poverty, eradicating regional imbalances and reducing gaps between rich and poor in terms of committed services to solve the problems of social inequalities with justice driven principles of working in fighting against all types of social ills and maladies with good governance paradigms. Hence, the objectives of the study are to take into account some aspects of life of tribal groups with visionary goal,

missionary way of dealing with the things and strategic solution of their social problems for regional development, peace initiating measures and existential freedom of life bringing possibilities in nurturing those people, protecting their sociological customs and traditions, and making holistic progress in dynamic nature with forward looking tendencies to global march towards reaching at the goal of integral humanity.

Scope of the Study

This is an exploratory research endeavor has been attempted to depict on some valuable customary rules and practices of tribal society and their food habits for cultural development purposes concerning their social customs, local traditions, indigenous culture, and original food habits maintained in terms of ethnic social living norms and guidelines, so as to recommend measures for protecting precious tribal natural environment in promoting civil living initiatives with judicious guidelines, and thereby ensuring to nurture scarce resources of nature with justice driven principles of work in equanimity thought for emancipation of tribal population from severe social sufferings to a stage of liberal living autonomy. With a view to safeguard tribal culture and their food habits, this empirical research study helps cementing effective public relationships and explore avenues for progress of tribal groups successfully in the long-run perspective with dynamic rolling of their society, and so, the findings and conclusion of such theoretical research effort will provide suggestions to policy makers, administrators, researchers, social thinkers, environmentalists, anthropologists, reformers, academicians, entrepreneurs, jurists and others for framing models of tribal development with ethnic qualities in future. Hence, the entire study has wide scope to embrace the holistic concept of development models, inclusive growth prospects and realistic progress of tribal society in terms of forward looking tendencies and thereby, framing decisions in this regard to implement policies for future development with the common interest of all the stakeholders in indigenous tribal society; so that there comes a harmonious and peaceful social living environment for their co-existence. Altogether, the study has ample scope and enough opportunities for efficient composite cultural development and effective socio-economic activities to the establishment of tribal identity of NEI in integrated approach through civil living existential autonomy.

Methodology

The study is mainly devoted on the basis of theoretical research practices, and therefore, all secondary sources are taken care of for historical analysis of things and thereby, the essential facts are reflected in terms of government reports, reports of international institutions, agencies and organizations. Policy decisions of government institutions and international organizations are attentively observed with path-goal relational approach under the empirical study. Again, information technology and internet services, books, journals, newspapers, magazines periodicals, reviews and some other important sources well warrant the methodology of discussions for covering the wide issues of tribal cultures, food habits, living style, income generation, social pattern of growth initiatives and alike elements for environmental sustainability and ethnic social progress in equipoise nature of doing things with a view to profess, promote and practice the subject matter of tribal study. Thus, the entire study ranges

from deprivation of tribal groups to their environmental protection for the greater interest of cultural identity in eliminating social injustices and establishment of peaceful living measures. All these are accentuated scientifically, discussed chronologically and lamented for healthy exercises with relativity aspects for objective conceptualization purposes to adopting ethnic cultural policies, programs and procedures. As a whole, the secondary sources strengthen the pillars of tribal society in terms of academic discourses for developing models of social progress, implementing policies for dynamic growth and framing strategies for realistic journey of life with civil liberties in the existential autonomy of tribal life bringing processes. Hence, the secondary sources adopted under the study for scientific explanations of things have enriched the whole research in holistic and all-comprehensive manner, to work as a rejoinder as complement to prepare the road map of tribal development.

Socio-economic and Cultural Status of Tribal Communities

NEI comprises with composite cultural blend having its own identity, cultural affinity, variety of lifestyles. The modes of easy-going and free existential style of doing things with enormous nature of festivity provide a sustainable natural order to the indigenous ethnic groups in their living autonomy, due to which there is social mobility, free intercourse and economic freedom of choice³. All these reflect tendency towards variety, national identity and homogeneity of reciprocating their own cultural traits in various social plate-forms, cultural forums and national demography, which is a good sign for prosperity, progress and planning for future development with various means of livelihood. We would therefore like to reflect some of the important features of their socio-cultural and economic behavioral traits with under-mentioned points for the purpose of rejuvenating their social structure with healthy discussions:

(a) Assam

The culture of Assam is traditionally a hybrid one developed due to assimilation of different ethno-cultural groups under various politico-economic systems in different periods of pre-history and history. With a strong base of tradition and history, the modern Assamese culture is greatly influenced by various events those took place in the British Assam and in the Post-British era⁴. There was standardized language in Assam, which was done by the American Missionaries with the form available in the Sibsagar district. However, a renewed Sanskritization was increasingly adopted for developing Assamese language and grammar. Broadly speaking, the Assamese cultural system incorporates its source-cultures, such as Bodo or Khasi or Mising, but individual development of these sub-systems are at present becoming more important. Some important common cultural traits⁵ available across these systems are: (a) Respect towards areca-nut and betel leaves; (b) Respect towards particular symbol cloth types, such as Gamocha, Arnai; (c) Respect towards traditional silk and cotton garments; (d) Respect towards forefathers and elderly people; (e) Great hospitality; and (f) Bamboo culture. Bengalis are major group of Assam widely spread throughout the territory of the State and having their own cultural traits with different attributes. Besides, in Assam various tribes live together and maintain their own cultural identity. There is also greater gender equality in Assam.

(b) Arunachal Pradesh

There are approximately 26 tribes and a number of sub-tribes living in the State⁶. Most of these communities are ethnically similar having derived from an original common stock, but their geographical isolation from each other has brought amongst them certain distinctive characteristics in language, dress and customs. Whole population here could be divided into three cultural groups on the basis of their socio-politico religious affinity. About 35% of the population here performs agriculture as their main occupation. Festivals are essential part of their socio-cultural life. Their festivals are usually connected with agriculture and are associated with ritualistic gaiety, either to thank God or to pray for bumper harvest.

(c) Manipur

It is a place where different waves of races and culture met through the ages, which ultimately mingle together. The main population here is Meitei Manipuri and they are divided into seven endogamous groups and mostly speak in Manipuri language, which is in Kuki-chain group. Their society is patriarchal in character. Women share responsibilities of earning and they are not only confined with their household duties. The head of the family has to perform certain religious duties. They practice two types of marriage: (i) by engagement and (ii) elopement. Though monogamy is usual rule, the practice of polygamy is also not uncommon to them⁷. Meitei people are well-known for their sporting prowess. Hockey and polo are their traditional sports. Meitei form of martial art is recently recognized as one of the official forms of international martial arts. Agriculture is the main stay of the people. About 88% of the total population in the hills and about 60% of the working population in the valley depend entirely on the agriculture and allied pursuits, like animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry⁸. The people of Manipur have inherent love for performing art with lyrical beauty and in finer rhythm. They are rich in culture and tradition, which is reflected in their handloom, tasteful clothes and in finer workmanship of handicrafts. Weaving among them is a traditional art. They are deeply sensitive and their unique pattern of inherent love for arts is reflected in their dance and music. Their dances, whether folk or classical or modern, are devotional in nature.

(d) Mizoram

It is believed by historians that Mizos are a part of the great wave of the Mongolian race spilling over the eastern and southern India centuries ago. However, about this tribe it is observed that they are now mostly Christians and mainly non-vegetarian, but their staple food is rice. They are highly literate⁹ people and having a close-knit in society with no class distinction, and no discrimination on grounds of sex, status or religion. Practically, they are hospitable, sociable and love music, singing and dancing. Agriculture is their main occupation, and so, their festivals are connected with agricultural operations. They maintain principle of self-help and co-operation to meet their social obligations and responsibilities. Constructive social works are executed through voluntary community services (VCSs). Every family is engaged in contributing labor for the welfare of community, which is related to social unit in the village. Christian church organizations have direct or indirect relationship in their way of life. Thus, they have undergone

a drastic change in their social life¹⁰. In marriage system or death of a person, their whole village or community feast is arranged by member of the village, in which all are found to be involved.

(e) Nagaland

This State of NEI is almost entirely inhabited by the Naga tribes, except some Kukis, Kacharis, Garos, Mikirs, Bengalis, Assamese, etc. in the plains sector. According to the census report, there are 16 Naga tribes and four non-Naga tribes inhabiting the greater Nagaland. This tribal groups are simple, straight-forward, hard-working and honest people with a high standard of integrity. Their society is egalitarian and the village is a closely knit unit consisting of households of different clans. Traditionally, they live in villages and with distinct land demarcation¹¹. The impact of modernization is slowly but steadily eroding the centrality of villages in the Naga Hills and has caused for their values of lifestyles and social setup with drastic changes. Naga people follow monogamy marriage culture and fidelity to the spouse is considered to be highly virtuous in their social custom. Material inheritance, such as land and cattle is passed on to the male offspring with the eldest son receiving the largest share. Women enjoy traditionally a high social position in classless, casteless Naga society¹² and play a pivotal role both in family as well as community affairs. Being a patriarchal society, these people have strong warrior tradition and their culture and customs, expect Naga women to be obedient and humble, and they are highly respected and given a great deal of freedom. Naga women supplement the household income by weaving colorful shawls. However, they are not included in the decision-making process of the clan or the village. Cultural traditions of the Nagas are: head haunting, common sleeping house for unmarried men and women (a taboo to women and a sort of tribal marriage, or great freedom of intercourse between sexes before marriage), disposal of dead on raised platforms, simple loom for weaving cloth, etc. They replete with festivals throughout the year as all the tribes have their own festivals, which they greatly cherish. Over 85% population of Nagaland is directly dependent on agriculture¹³.

(f) Tripura

The tribal groups in this State are called as Tripuri who consist of mainly Debbarmas, or Debbarmans. Also, Bengalis are inhibited here along the tribal people. The indigenous Tripuri people comprise various hill tribal communities. They enjoy their traditional freedom based on the concept of self-determination and have their rich historical, social and cultural heritage¹⁴, which is totally distinct from that of the mainland Indians. Their distinctive culture is reflected in dance, music, festivals, management of community affairs, dress and food habits, etc.

Tribal Festivals in NEI

NEI is the region in Himalayan belt, so-called as the place of Austo-Laxmi and is full of festive culture, for which people here are known as cultural ethnic groups. We would like to reflect some of the important cultural festivals of people living in both plains and hills. The unique cultures of the ethnic groups come alive across in the form of song, dance, music, etc. celebrated during the festivals. The festivals showcase the vibrant strengths of NEI and also display its art,

handicraft, handlooms, tourism, food, culture, etc¹⁵. The vibrant decorations, the music, the traditional outfits and the local delicacies are very much extraordinary and are blended with nature. Visiting here during festive season will be enjoyed altogether in a new light of life, because most of the festivals are related to harvest, celebrated in winter and having Buddhist roots. We should therefore reflect some of the major festivals of this region for the purpose of deep-rooted idea about the cultural richness of ethnic population living in this part of India. Hence, the following discourses are made for valuable exercises in noting-down their sovereign cult, crafts and cultural affinity.

Bihu Festival of Assam

In this festival, youngsters perform the Bihu dance. It is celebrated trice in a year and known in different names, like Rongali Bihu or Bohag, Kongali Bihu or Kaati and Bhogali Bihu or Maagh. However, these are celebrated in different periods of the particular year. It is one of the biggest festivals in Assam¹⁶. People worship bulls, fed them and bathed; and they themselves present each other as a respect with Gamcha.

Ambubachi Mela in Assam

It is renowned festival in NEI, held in Kamakhya temple in Assam, generally in the month of June. Lakhs of devotees attend in this festival and the doors or the temple remain closed three days at the time of such festival, which has a cultural saying here that it is the period of the annual menstrual cycle of the goddess¹⁷. Some rites are performed by the Tantric Cult during this festival.

Ziro Festival of Music in Arunachal Pradesh

This outdoor music festival¹⁸ is held in one of the most picturesque remote places in Arunachal Pradesh. It features many fold acts, over 30 Indian bands and even camping facilities.

Dree Festival of Arunachal Pradesh

This is the festival of the Apatani Tribe¹⁹ but is celebrated by the other tribes in Arunachal Pradesh too. It is celebrated on the 5th of July each year. This is the largest festival in the Ziro valley and offers prayers to four Gods, Harniang, Metii, Tamu and Danyi. The traditional dance is part of the prayer for a good harvest. Local delicacies include rice or millet beer and home brewed wine.

Mopin Festival in Arunachal Pradesh

This is a festival of the Galo tribe²⁰ held in the month of April. The celebrations include the Popir dance and the distribution of fresh rice wine. The goddess Mopin is worshipped to drive evil spirits away.

Kang Chingba Festival of Manipur

This is the biggest Hindu festival in Manipur. It is celebrated in the month of July and is an 8 day long festival. The festival includes a Rath Yatra in the honor of Lord Jagannath. People dance all night and large feasts are organized²¹.

Lui Ngai Ni Festival of Manipur

It is celebrated on the 15th of February each year. This festival is popular among all the Naga tribes and also some other tribes in Manipur. This festival marks the season of seed sowing and is celebrated with a lot of pomp²² including traditional dance and local delicacies.

Wangala Festival of Meghalaya

Garo tribe celebrates this festival²³ in the second week of November each year. This is post-harvest festival honors Misi Saljong. Such ritual is performed by the Nokma or the Chief of the tribe. Major offerings in this festival include: cooked rice, brewed beer and vegetables. The music is the main highlight of this festival and so, it is also called as the 100 drum festival.

Nongkrem Dance Festival of Meghalaya

It is harvest festival generally celebrated by Khasi tribe in the month of November. Goats are sacrificed to the goddess Ka Blei Synshar. The festival is celebrated for five days, which includes dance performed by young men and women dressed in attractive tribal garments²⁴.

Anthurium Festival of Mizoram

This festival is primarily to promote tourism in Mizoram; it is celebrated in the month of September. The celebrations occur in a village named Reiek and include folk music, cuisine and several dance performances²⁵.

Chapchar Kut Festival of Mizoram

It is harvest festival generally celebrated in the month of March. Bamboo dance is the main theme of this festival, called as Cheraw²⁶. Several styles are observed in folk dances, like Chheihlam, Sarlamkai and Khullam and are performed to powerful drum beats and sounds of gongs.

Hornbill Festival of Nagaland

This festival celebrated weeklong and begins on the 1st of December each year in the Kisama Heritage Village²⁷. It is quite the spectacle with people wearing colorful headgear, playing log drums and breaking in to song and dance. There are several interesting contests like pork eating during this festival.

Losoong Festival of Sikkim

This festival signifies Sikkim's New Year. It is celebrated in the month of December. This is a festival that is primarily celebrated by the Bhutia and Lepcha Tribe²⁸. Black Hat Dance and Cham Dance are performed and a locally brewed wine called Chang is served.

Saga Dawa Festival in Sikkim

It is one of the most popular Buddhist festivals in Sikkim and is celebrated during the Lunar Month of Tibet. Saga Dawa is the name given to the full moon day that occurs half way through the lunar month. It is an auspicious day and the month that it occurs in is called the "Month of Merits" and occurs between May and June. It is celebrated by people as a mark of the life, enlightenment and the death of the Buddha²⁹. Such celebrations include large gatherings offering water, bhog and incense sticks at monasteries. The chanting of the mantras during the circumambulation of the Gompas along with the reading of religious texts and turning of the prayer wheels is observed as the principle of serene.

Kharchi Puja Festival of Tripura

It is a Hindu festival observed in Tripura in July or August and involves the worship of the fourteen gods forming the dynasty deity of the Tripuri people³⁰. There are many legends associated with this puja.

Indigenous Living Style in NEI

NEI is one of the richest regions in floras, faunas, and natural varieties, where people are dependent on shifting cultivation practices and life-style are involved with forest based products which is sustainable to the means of livelihood. The ecosystem and environmental balancing situation helps people here to produce indigenous products with plants diversity, product variety and indigenous variability of consumption pattern related to traditional habituation process, ethnic behavioral practices and regional pursuits of maintaining their own identity. Tribal population living here maintain survival compatibility with ethnic foods rich in variety as well as nutritional composition, leading to local fruits and vegetables, used for local diets. The beautiful nature has endowed with ethno-botanical resources for the nutritional security of this region. Tribal women folk share the local traditional foods having regional demands with great pain to arrange for the indigenous vegetables from the remote forests, for which they engage to conserve shifting land in forest areas or indigenous kitchen garden³¹. They also share the traditional foods at their community level in various cultural occasions, like Etar, Solung and Aran festival in Adi tribe, which ensures people about equal availability, balanced nutrition supplied to the community members, mobility from their diets, nutrients drawn from local food and generic in nature with respect to dietary concept.

Interestingly, people have their own affinity for sweet-tasting things in tribal areas, and these sweeteners are seemed to be added to many fruits, vegetables and even cereals and pulses based flours, which are having harmful effects³². Changing cropping patterns have decreased traditional vegetables, fruits and fermented local ethnic foods within the tribal people of the NEI

Globalization and intervention with the system of indigenous living style have caused dire to the necessities of living for income generation purposes of indigenous tribes³³.

Many tribal groups are found to diversify in their own aspects of living, in so far as the local products are concerned. In regard to food habits, it is observed that tribal communities and various groups use both fermented and non-fermented ethnic foods for their consumption purposes and day-to-day living necessities, which are backed by nutritional elements and medicinal values and fit for healthy living objective of life bringing possibilities. In exploratory study, it is found that the people in NEI use food diversities made of soybean, bamboo shoot, tree bean, lai saag (leafy mustard) and rai (*Brassica juncea*)³⁴.

Ethnic Foods In-use to Different Tribal Communities

Following exploratory discourses depict that different tribal communities in NEI use various types of ethnic foods:

(i) Soybean based Ethnic Foods

Mizo tribes use bekaang (soybean) in fermented form crushed and boiled in water and is kept in plates made of bamboo. Lukewarm seeds are wrapped in leaves of belphuar tree and the wrapped bundle is placed over shelf made of bamboo. Mizo women market this product through formal network of Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP). Basar area Galo tribe women of Arunachal Pradesh also prepare soybean based fermented food called Aagya. East Siang district Adi tribe women folk prepare fermented product from soybean seeds, called as peron namsing, which is used in mixing with several boiled vegetables along with local chilli, fermented bamboo shoots and salt. Peron namsing is sold by Adi women in Pasighat market in Arunachal Pradesh. Chutney is also made up of peron namsing. Apatani tribe of Lower Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh uses soybean fermented product and from the fermented seeds they prepare chutney with tomato, chilli, ginger, garlic and salt.

Some other tribal communities also use such kind of ethnic food in fermented form with different local vegetables and also prepare chutney with chilli, tomato, garlic, ginger, etc. as their native food staff. Among them are: Sherdukpen tribal women of Shergaon area in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. Bhutia tribal women of Sikkim prepare the ethnic food made up of soybean seeds and is called Bari. They make chutney with coriander, tomato, garlic, chilli and salt and also curry is made with potato and tomato. Again, Kinema is a fermented food prepared from whole soybean seeds in Sikkim. The women of Meitei community of Manipur prepare their own ethnic food Hawaizaar from soybean seeds by fermentation process. Other tribal groups using soybean seeds in fermented form as their ethnic food items are: Mao-Naga community in Manipur, the Ao tribe of Mokokchung district of Nagaland, Sema tribe of Nagaland, etc.

(ii) Bamboo based Ethnic Foods

Apatani women of different villages of Ziro district in Arunachal Pradesh prepare varieties of fermented food products, viz. Hikhu, Hiring and Hithyi from the indigenous bamboo shoots.

Again, Adi women of East Siang district, Rayang, Bolung, Jiya and model villages of Roing in Dibang valley district use bamboo shoots in different forms. One is called ekung fermented in various methods, and other is the dried shoots called Eyup and the third one is used as fresh, called Eting, which is used directly after boiling with several indigenous leafy vegetables. The edung is left for over 4-5 days for fermentation and shoots are ready to use. Up to 1980s, there was a unique tradition of processing the bamboo fermentation to reduce the cyanide percentage. Cyanide causes several diseases and disorders related to nervous system, miscarriage, abnormal childbirth and goiter problems³⁵. For reducing the cyanide percentage at the time of processing the bamboo shoots, 2-3 small size holes are made inside the edung. Meitei Manipuri community women of Manipur process bamboo shoots by washing in water for natural flavor and taste and mixed with small amount of thum and thuntak (basket made cane/bamboo). It is fermented following some different techniques and is adopted properly squeezed for minimizing diseases, which might be due to cyanogenic glucosides³⁶. The fermented bamboo shoots are used with fermented fish kept in earthen pots, and mixed along with it the variety of leafy vegetables and eaten as local dishes.

Again, Khasi tribe of Meghalaya use bamboo shoots collected from forest, peeled, washed properly and cut into small pieces. Pieces are then transferred into glass bottle or traditional bamboo made basket. The fermentation is done in the bamboo made basket. Pickles are also prepared from these fermented shoots. Thus, various local dishes are made of bamboo shoots which are very popular as the indigenous food. It is used with small dry fish and big dry fish mixing with fermented bamboo shoots in the form of curry. Further, in Tripura, Barman community also uses bamboo based fermented food products with dry fishes, salt, chilli, pieces of onion and garlic to improve the taste.

(iii) Leafy Mustard based Ethnic Foods

The Nepali women tribe of East Siang district in Arunachal Pradesh uses leafy vegetables into fermented product. The fermented food from lai saag (leafy mustard) is popular food used by crushing thoroughly and transferred into Doko (bamboo container) having at bottom holes for appropriate fermentation purposes. The final product they use is called as Dhedo. After complete drying, it is called Gundruk and is served as chutney or with curry. Also, chutney is made of Gundruk mixing with tomato, dried chilli, ginger, garlic and salt and curry is made with potato. Again, Bhutia tribe of Sikkim uses fermented lai saag in different methods for making their ethnic food called Gundruk. The leaves of lai saag are used by crushing in squeezed form and fermentation is done accordingly. The fermentation is done in pit and soil and also in cow dung. It is used for preparation of chutney, curry, etc. The Bhutia women use its soup and supply of the soup is provided to the breast-feeding mother for improving milk efficiency. Further, this fermented ethnic food is considered also as a tonic for the old age person.

(iv) Rai (Brassica juncea) Seeds based Ethnic Food

In Sikkim, the Bhutia tribal women ferment the rai seeds and use it with desired quantity boiling properly in water. The lukewarm seeds are kept in earthen pot and pressed with stone to pick

airtight. The fermentation seeds are used with many foods which helps tribal people to cure stomach pain. Hence, it is used as medicinal food having nutritional value and is good for health. Also, it helps for those who suffer from gastric trouble. It works as an improved design of digestive system for the indigenous tribal population.

(v) Radish based Ethnic Food

Mula (radish) is used by the tribal Gurung people in Sikkim. It is used in fermented form. Radish is washed, cut into small pieces and dried under sunlight in naaglo (local utensil made of bamboo). Such pot is safe for winnowing the grains. However, the dried pieces are packed and placed inside a pit. The fermented root pieces are called sinki and are used for making soup. It is to be noted that this ethnic item is very much effective for curing diarrhea, stomach pain and many other diseases. Importantly, it is consumed generally during the period of lean season, in which tribal people are observed to suffer such diseases as mentioned. So, this ethnic food has great medicinal value.

(vi) Tree Bean based Ethnic Food

Meitei community mostly uses this in Manipur. The tender pods of tree bean are used for making chutney and are useful for curing intestinal disorders. It is worthwhile to note that Iromba which is prepared as the favorite delicious ethnic food by this community is made up of tree bean and, this product is used as chutney which is popular form of dishes, used mainly from winter to spring season. Yongchak Iromba is good for health and is mostly used in festive times like, Nugol Chakouba, Chhinaoba, etc. This is also popular among the Christian community of the hill tribes. This ethnic food is prepared through dry fish, red skinned potato, chilli, salt and coriander. In short, this dish is considered as an appetizer and is popular to old age women as the ethnic food.

Findings of the Study

Some of the important findings of the study are as follows:

- (1) Culture has been a key concept in anthropological sciences. Even though anthropology or ethnology began to describe or analyze other cultures, scholars have been busy reporting on tribal cultures, ignoring the fundamental base of composite cultural characteristics or features of cultural identity, social transformation, demographic dividend, regional semblance, human inequalities, national unity and international integrity;
- (2) NEI falls under all the above categories, and therefore, the ethnic groups here maintain a unique quality of work life (QWL) with reference to their cultural pursuits, national identity and regional variety;
- (3) Tribal groups in NEI require adequate nursing and care, and so in this region infrastructure is the crying needs of days; because they do not have adequate means of development for their natural beauty alive along with the dynamicity of national development. Hence, infrastructural

facilities can help eradicating regional disparities, for blending ethnic cultural features with all-India level in terms of demographic dividend of rich cultural heritage of our country;

(4) The tribal society is characterized by lack of discrimination and women in the ethnic groups have their own status and respect, for which is it becomes highly essential to impart themselves modern means of educational facilities;

(5) Indigenous innocent ethnic people could be developed, and nourished with the local means of resource availability with proper planning and timely implementation of the government projects, schemes and facilities;

(6) Bureaucratic involvement, political goodwill and decision-making processes, if met as per needs of the easy-going freestyle people, definitely this backward region could prosper in forward looking tendencies at par with other advance places of the county;

(7) The local ethnic foods here are highly value added product of the human living pursuits and also have their medicinal utility, which requires fundamental research base with modern science; and

(8) It is observed that lack educational facilities in the remote villages has caused for enormous problems to match with the bounty of nature, which has yet to be overcome for solving social obstacles of tribal communities remaining in the remotest corners of hills and plains of the region. Thus, backward tribal villages require proper foundation of research base education, which can be mitigated, if at least a tribal culture study university could be opened with immediate effect.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The major suggestions and recommendations of the study are noted below:

(a) The tribal areas require speedy development of tourism, as there is ample scope of coping with natural beauty, adequate opportunities of matching with ethnic food-habits and competitive advantage of diversifying with regional equalities;

(b) Tourism development can not only increase employment opportunities and income generation of people in such backward areas; but also, there is the possibility of reducing terrorism in NEI and bringing peace, harmony and stability in the Southeast Asia;

(c) NEI can easily be made a botanical and biodiversity hub with scientific plans and programs of the government of India as well as respective State governments of the region. It will be beneficial for restoration of ecological balance, maintenance of environmental subsistence and preservation of rare species in regard to global conservation facilities, human growing needs and international order of harmonious balance;

(d) Proper planning, if can be adopted just now, NEI can be a game changer for making new India in future; so that people here get facilities of modern means of speedy development. Hence, it is necessary to open trade centers in the region for sovereign alignment of the whole county with zeal of holistic development, zest of realistic growth and journey of naturalistic way to leading the ethnic cultural groups in terms of opening the gateway of the South East Asia by eradicating all obstacles; and

(e) Composite cultural philosophy can help to attain the benefit of democratic dividend by way of reducing regional inequalities for solving the problems of regional disparity, identity crisis of ethnic groups, bringing national integrity, international brotherhood and communal harmony.

(f) Last but not least, it is apprehended laudably that NEI being major part of Indian democracy having its boundary with many countries of the South East Asia, requires proper attention by the Central as well as respective State governments, because of territorial integrity, national safety and regional balance. Hence, this region should be placed as the especial priority zone (EPZ) in regard to development, mobility and social tranquility for harmonious interrelationships and intercourse with other countries in the crucial part of the Asiatic zone.

Conclusion

NEI is one the ethnic cultural characteristics constituent of Indian democratic values, moral ethics and social stratification having composite cultural blend with its sovereign elements of social mobility, ethnic identity and human integrity. Integral norms of life here emerged in the depth of the ocean of human behavioral prudence, in so far as the food habits of ethnic groups and communities relate to the aspects of multi-diversity, natural identity and national unity is concerned. Hence, this region is considered as the cult of the Himalayan belt surrounded by hills, mountains, plains, sanctuaries, forests reserves and natural habitation process, where there is the echo of natural beauty, diversity of religious and cultural rituals and distinctiveness of dress code of ethnic people and besides; several approaches of life bringing possibilities. The tribal groups are seem to be very much free in their style of living and easy-going fellow, who have respect towards women and avoid class discrimination, though there is sometimes found class and clan conflicts for which the region remains busy with social disturbance, and lagging progress behind as expected, instead of vast natural resources. Proper education and timely guidance by politicians, social thinkers, decision-makers, planners, corporate entities, non-government organizations (NGOs), educationists, economists, anthropologists and others will be found suitable for integrated development of all the stakeholders in this region. Hence, adequate care and attention, knowledge share and human counseling and nurturing and inspirational leading goal should be placed not only for their mutual growth, but also to keep ethnic cultural base steady for progress, regional diversity, national identity and international level peace, harmony and brotherhood philosophy. Thus, the region requires collaborative approach for holistic peace, realistic development naturalistic prosperity.

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