

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE OF TRIBAL CUISINE OF ANGAMI TRIBES: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS IN NAGALAND

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Abstract

Despite making up a sizable portion of the country, the Northeast is isolated from the mainland because of various reasons such as the distances involved and geographical isolation. Traveling to these states allows for genuine exposure, which further piques travellers' interest. What's remarkable is that people are now more willing than ever to experience the local cuisine. This article compares the Angami tribe's previous and current generations in order to examine the continuity and change, tribal cuisine among Angamis. The current study makes the case that traditional culinary expertise that is tightly tied to their Indigenous Knowledge System may soon be lost as the younger generation accepts modern food in their daily lives. The primary data source belongs to in-depth interviews with tribal members of the Angami group. Additionally, secondary data from numerous published studies was used. This article is based on research that has been continuing since November 2022.

Keywords: Continuity and change, Ethnic food, Angami Nagas, Indigenous Knowledge System

INTRODUCTION

The North-eastern Indian state of Nagaland, is renowned for its extraordinary and exceptional culinary skills. It is referred as the "land of festivals" and is home to numerous indigenous tribes that joyfully celebrate each tribal holiday there. The cuisine of the Nagas is likewise renowned for being uncommon and distinctive. The typical ingredients in Naga cuisine are bamboo shoots, Naga king chillies, fermented soy beans (akhuni), dried colocasia stems and leaves (anishi), and other foraged edibles. Meat and/or fish are also frequently smoked, fermented, or dried. There is a large variety of excellent meals in Naga cuisine that are also wholesome and nourishing. About 70% of the state's population works in agriculture, making it the state's main source of income.

The Angami tribe, who live in the Kohima region, are well known for their flavorful yet straightforward cuisine. They primarily rely on the local produce that is either grown by them or made available to them. Terrace wet rice farming and shifting, or jhum, agriculture are two specialties of the Angami Nagas. The Angamis are good farmers. The primary source of carbohydrates for the Angami Nagas is rice, which they consume up to twice daily and occasionally even three times daily. Rice is frequently served with meat or fish (fresh, smoked, or fermented), along with boiled vegetables and chutney that is frequently made with the hot Naga king chilli.

Rarely is fried food consumed. The Angami Nagas are well renowned for using exotic pork flesh, which is cooked using simple components like bamboo shoots, Naga king chillies, fermented soy beans (akhuni), dry colocasia stems and leaves (anishi), and other foraged foods. Around 84 edible wild plants from 68 genera and 40 families are used, including the ferns *Diplazium esculentum* and *Pronephrium* sp. (Singh, Teron, 2015). The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between cultural identity and ethnic food and to analyse the health implications of traditional cuisine among the Angami tribes.

The scholarships conducted various studies related to ethnic food culture. One article finds the Angami Nagas have a distinctive understanding of food preparation that is challenging for other groups to imitate. Each person has a unique perspective on the addition of various ingredients to various curries. The Angami Nagas now have a wider variety of culinary knowledge as a result. Younger generations of Angami Nagas have exhibited changes in their eating habits as a result of lifestyle changes that are mostly attributable to socioeconomic advancement, conversion to Christianity, and interactions and partnerships with other cultures. Young Angamis not knowing about wild foods can cause a progressive loss of traditional wild food knowledge in the community. However, many Angamis continue to observe traditional eating habits. The current documenting of Angami foods can aid in the transmission of their connected legacy and the preservation of their traditional knowledge of eating habits. (Singh, A. B. and Teron, R. 2017)

The renowned bamboo shoot is one of Nagaland's essential traditional foods. The bamboo shoot is a common ingredient in the cuisine of every tribe in the state. Making pig or fish dishes without including bamboo shoots is unthinkable in Nagaland. Different methods of cutting and fermenting bamboo shoots result in fermented juice from bamboo shoots or dried bamboo shoots. A distinctive scent and flavour are added by the traditional recipe of vegetable and non-vegetable curries with bamboo shoot, setting it apart from the competition. Therefore, the traditional cuisine known as "bamboo shot" greatly benefits our health. Additionally, the growing demand for fermented bamboo shoots among the non-tribal population can help the northeastern states, which are abundant in bamboo, create a developed rural economy. In the upcoming years, it will have more opportunities in the international food sector. (Uttam Nath. 2021)

A statement of understanding about identity and personal boundaries is expressed in how we see food and eating. The predominant role of women in caring for children and preparing meals is said by many academics and authors to be a significant part of female identity. As a result,

we might assert that women identify with food's power. Women have been processing all food items as a source of nourishment for the family from the traditional era. Women from disadvantaged backgrounds to wealthy families in managerial and leadership positions have a connection to chefs and food processors. (Vitsou Yano. 2015)

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN TRIBAL CUISINE

Continuity and change in consumption and preparation of ethnic food can be seen among Angami elderly and youth in different ways. Regarding the preparation and consumption of traditional cuisine, not much has changed. Like in the rest of the world, women of a household often handle the cooking in Angami society. The cook does not measure the ingredients before beginning to cook; instead, she estimates the amount as she goes and adds as needed. Naga food is flavoured in part by preference and intuition.

An Angami aged man who is a native believes that;

“Consuming Galho, a dish made with a combination of indigenous edible leaves, axone (fermented soy beans), rice, and meat, is quite frequent and well-liked among Angamis. Different homes alter the dish to suit their preferences. The traditional meal hasn't changed despite the years-long introduction of new foods (burgers, pasta, etc.), and despite young people's preference for fried foods. Another meal from my childhood that I continue to like now is one that is made by frying sticky rice that has first been dried”.

This is a component of long-standing cultural customs. Many of the ethnic cuisines stated by the older respondent may become extinct in the near future if the younger generation chooses the modern eating culture.

Although the Angami older generation consumed meat as part of their diet, they were also accustomed to spending long hours in the fields, which is the most obvious contrast between them and the younger generation in terms of health difficulties. They followed a structured schedule. They would typically rise early and make their way to the fields to labour. Even though their home was distant from the field where they worked, they would still travel great lengths to get there. Even the alcoholic beverages consumed by the older generation were manufactured locally from rice and called Zutho. Since most of the alcohol that young people consume is imported, there is a greater likelihood that it has been tampered with by adding unfamiliar liquids, which is harmful to our health. The vegetables that are used in recipes are another crucial factor. Although vegetables are still grown locally, just as they were in the past, the most significant difference is that they are now injected with medications since we buy vegetables that are grown and brought from outside, such as tomatoes, onions, cabbage, and other produce, rather than growing them ourselves. They only used what was available to them and what they could raise in their fields or gardens back then. Their health is directly impacted by their consumption of locally grown food as well as imported vegetables that may have been medicated.

Native man opined;

“At this day and age, despite the fact that the youth has a wide variety of diets to choose from and have access to gyms. However, sweating is still a significant factor that improves health”.

In contrast to today's kids, who consume meat virtually every day, meat intake in the past was significantly lower, occurring only once or twice a month. As a result, we now have to deal with several health problems, such as high blood pressure. Medications can be injected into meat as well as veggies. If that's the case, it seems to reason that it will exacerbate the deterioration of our health.

The same is true when comparing traditional and modern medicine. In contrast to the older generation, we now have access to hospitals, pharmacies, and clinics that provide medications for a variety of conditions and are open 24/7. So what happens when someone becomes sick or hurt? They employ therapeutic plants that are readily available around their home. Although it might not guarantee a complete recovery from the condition it is treating.

According to a native man;

“Because they were familiar with all of these ailments, including headaches, stomach aches, and dysentery, our ancestors relied heavily on the therapeutic herbs that are still in use today. This is not meant to imply that the medications provided by pharmacists and doctors are unreliable; rather, people think that because they are created chemically, they must have adverse effects when taken. However, it is stated that medications manufactured by individuals using the roots, skin, or leaves of such medicinal plants have no negative effects”.

Having said that, major cases like an operation shouldn't be thought of as being treated by medicinal herbs. If we use a bleeding wound as an example. In the past, people would rub the healing leaves into the wound to stop the bleeding. Our culture has advanced to the point where most of our ailments and wounds have quick, ready-made remedies, yet old ways are still frequently used. People in the village who were endowed with knowledge passed down by their predecessors in the past dealt with bone fractures and dislocations. They massage the affected area and administer oil to alleviate these issues. They go by the name Kobiraj. Many Nagas continue to hold onto their belief in Kobiraj to fix their problem.

Young woman from the Angami tribe opines,

“Pork prepared with ginger, chillies, bamboo shoots, garlic, and/or hamok (snail), which is eaten practically daily, is the most popular dish in our home. Even while I occasionally love dining out, I always prefer the home-cooked meals my mother makes. I prefer going to the doctors, clinics, and hospitals for treatments and receiving proper medication when it comes to treating current health issues rather than using locally produced remedies. I would much rather seek professional care by visiting physicians, clinics, and as it provides speedier relief, whether it be for headaches, stomach aches, or other mental ailments”.

Going out to work in the field and working up a sweat proved to be a healthier lifestyle, and that way one wouldn't be susceptible to illnesses even in old age, as compared to sitting at home lazily. She saw this in her parents' lifestyle.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF ETHNIC FOOD

A vegetarian menu for a meat-centric cuisine is an odd oxymoron. However, it is frequently a tactic to draw in a larger audience and attract guests who are eager to taste a relatively unknown dish without any reservations. Vegetarian component of cooking was never highlighted. Home-cooked Angami meals actually consist of a delicate balance of stewed vegetables and greens, as well as chutneys produced from fresh herbs. The people of Nagaland prepare their cuisine using a variety of wild foods that are cultivated locally, naturally, and in their natural habitat. Spices are hardly ever used in naga cuisine.

The majority of the food is cooked by boiling the dishes rather than frying them in oil. As a result, the food they eat has the most nutrients and proteins. Additionally, it is well recognised that several illnesses can be treated with ethnic food. The Nagas utilize tenga pata, or "sour leaves," in a number of their traditional dishes. The leaves are frequently used in the Angami cuisine Galho, which consists of rice, other vegetables, and different kinds of meat. It is described as being incredibly healthy and is a soup-like mixture. Tenga pata is likewise utilised in pig food because it is thought to aid in the fight against intestinal worms that develop in the pigs that are raised by them.

There are reports that these leaves can lower blood pressure, and diabetes individuals can eat them because of their supposed health benefits. Bamboo shoots are another one of the well-known foods. According to studies, including bamboo shoots in a recipe can help lower cholesterol levels and enhance heart health. In comparison to individuals on a control diet, ingesting 360 grams of bamboo shoots after six days decreased total and LDL (bad) cholesterol, according to a 2009 medical study on eight healthy women. Additionally, studies have shown that it boosts appetite and supports digestive health. Additionally, according to the Nagas, some meat can treat illnesses. Frog meat is typically supposed to be ingested following surgery to speed up the healing of wounds, and dog meat is thought to treat pneumonia.

HEALTH ISSUES DUE TO CHANGE IN FOOD?

Nagas are well known for enjoying meat. Whatever the occasion, a variety of meat dishes will undoubtedly be offered at the buffet. The majority of Naga kitchens either have dried meat or fresh meat, cooked or uncooked. More money is spent on meat nationally than in any other area of the country. (Deka and Thorpe, 2008)

Health worker opined,

“Vegetable consumption and setting the table with a balanced meal are no longer practices among Angamis. Additionally, modern meat is either “organic” or produced locally. The majority of these pigs and chicks are provided by commercial operations. Numerous diseases have emerged as a result”.

True, the Nagas have had an excellent understanding of what is nourishing and edible up until this point. The fact that even veggies or farm-fresh produce is typically organic should be mentioned. However, there have been a few alterations due to modern culture. While the focus on "meat eating" has remained a fundamental component of Naga cuisine, vegetable consumption has declined. Pizza, pasta, hamburgers, noodles, KFC, and other junk food are likewise becoming more and more popular.

According to health experts in Nagaland, more cases of different diseases are being reported than in the past, and this percentage is continually showing a northward trend in the graph. King Chilli, also known as Naga Mircha locally, is a common ingredient in Naga cuisine and is regarded by the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's spiciest chilli. Because fiery king chillies are used in the majority of the recipes, the meal is extremely spicily hot. This produces too much heat and can lead to digestive issues like acid reflux and gastritis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cuisine, like language, is constantly evolving. It is never stagnant. More and more often, we are exposed to foods from other regions of India and abroad. Cookbooks, culinary shows, fast food businesses, frozen food, and an abundance of restaurants are all widely popular. It is believed that a person's physical health, which is influenced by their nutrition, determines their mental and emotional state. Nagaland is Christian state. Christian people tend to have less dietary restrictions, though they may be attentive to local customs. Fermented foods have a substantial effect on how networks and solidarities are formed. Eating helps immigrants from Northeast India establish a sense of camaraderie and ties them to their home community, family, and traditions. Oral transmission of culinary expertise and other traditional knowledge of wild edible plants occurs between older and younger generations. Typically, mothers pass on their culinary skills to their daughters or teach them while cooking with them. Due to modernization and improved socioeconomic conditions, younger people today disregard natural foods. As a result, there is a major degradation in the transmission of traditional knowledge about foraging for food and cooking it among newer generations.

CONCLUSION

Even now, there is still nothing quite like the ethnic food of the Angami Nagas. Even though they were illiterate in the past, they would travel long distances to their field, labour incredibly hard, drink the local booze, eat the organic cuisine, and manage their time well. They experienced no negative health repercussions as a result of their way of living. As a result of consuming poisonous foreign substances like the alcoholic beverages that are made outside of Nagaland and sold there, our youth are living shorter lives today. These alcoholic beverages are often tainted and spread various diseases. One of the most effective ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle is to preserve and revive the ancient traditional methods of food preparation and consumption.

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