

Brief Report of the Indigenous Event:

North East India including Meghalaya is rich in biodiversity. This can be seen in the variety of indigenous foods of the different ethnic communities like Khasi, Jaintia and Garos. However, in today's context, because of globalization and commercialisation, many of these indigenous foods are not consumed by the general public. The children and youth of today's world are not acquainted with such foods and the ways in which they are prepared and cooked. Moreover, there is little awareness about the indigenous crops and fruits grown in these parts especially on jhum lands. Thus in this context, the Martin Luther Christian University and Department of Horticulture has taken the initiative to organise a two day Indigenous event on October 6-7, 2010 in Shillong.

There were 4 aspects to the two day event:

1. Exhibition of indigenous fruits and crops
2. Food Court
3. Dinner
4. Workshop

1. Exhibition of Indigenous Fruits and Crops:

The exhibition of indigenous fruits and crops from the four districts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills brought out the rich biodiversity of the land in terms of rice varieties, fruits and food crops. The Department of Horticulture had mobilized the farmers from across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills to bring the various types of fruits and crops. It also motivated the farmers by giving prizes in different categories. It was evident from the public's response that many of the fruits and crops are rare and are not sold in the market. The exhibition created awareness about the diversity in the different agro climatic zones in the state.

2. Food Court:

The food court was an added highlight to the event. The Jingiaseng Kynthei of the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Assembly (Women's wing of the KJPA) had mobilised as many as 8 groups of chefs from 4 districts on both the days of the event. The total number of food items including snacks is 30. The chefs cooked a number of food items at the venue itself using indigenous methods of preparation and cooking. This attracted many people as they could actually see how different food items are prepared. The number of people that visited the food court was about 500 on both days. On the first day, there were many school students who visited the food court. It is hoped that awareness has been created about the different indigenous food item



*Preparation of ja shawlia
(Rice which is sticky in nature)*

of the Khasis and Jaintias among school children. It was interesting to see that *Rice* of different varieties has been used in the preparation of the different snacks.

For example, putharo (a snack) is made of two types of rice, the local rice which is white in colour and another variety which is violet-reddish in colour. Therefore, it is essential to conserve and promote the cultivation of these rice varieties as their availability would determine the consumption of different snacks.

During the event, the Projects Cell of the Martin Luther Christian University took the initiative of recording the method of preparation of all the food items that were sold in the food court. The objective was to be able to promote the indigenous food of the two ethnic groups.

The compilation of the work in Khasi has been done. The nutritive value of the different food items would also be done by assistance from the faculty of the Department of Home Science, St. Mary's College. It is hoped that a recipe book would be published as an outcome of this exercise. The recipe book would not be exhaustive of all the different types of food items of the Khasis and Jaintias but it would be the first attempt or rather the first of its kind since there has not been a recipe book on Khasi and Jaintia indigenous foods that has been published so far. This recipe book can be used by Khasi and Jaintia households across the Khasi hills.



Grinding of rice

3. Dinner: Traditional Food of the Khasi and Jaintia people

In today's urban context, traditional food is mostly not included in celebrations such as weddings, parties etc... People prefer other types of cuisine such as Chinese, Indian, Continental etc... In this context, the dinner was organised to instil in the public a sense of pride in their own indigenous food.

The dinner was organised by the Martin Luther Christian University at the Khasi National Dorbar Hall and attended by 150 people from different walks of life. The Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dr. Mukul Sangma was also present at the dinner. The dinner consisted of Khasi and Jaintia traditional food.

4. Workshop on "Conserving and promoting Biodiversity: Strategic Approaches"

As mentioned earlier, Meghalaya is a land which is abundant in natural resources and rich in biodiversity. However there has been indiscriminate destruction of forests, mono-cropping in agriculture and over use of resources which have threatened the biodiversity. Scientists say that there are many plants endemic to the region that is endangered. Thus there are threats to these reserves and therefore there is a need to conserve and promote biodiversity. In this context, the workshop was organised with the objective of discussing approaches to conserve and promote biodiversity in the state.

The main thematic areas were:

1. Food Science and Indigenous Diets

2. Environment
3. Existence value
4. Traditional Medicine

There were different topics under each thematic area.

Food Science and Indigenous Diets:

- Food Science Food Security and Food Diversity: Mrs N James, St Mary's College
- Nutritive value of Indigenous Foods: Ms. Mandari Blah, St Mary's College
- Diet Survey of Rural Households in Khasi and Jaintia Hills: Ms. Badalam Dkhar, MLCU and Ms. Barikor Warjri, St. Mary's College
- Tungrymbai and Tungtap- the lesser known indigenous fermented foods of Meghalaya, S R Joshi, Associate Professor, Department of Biotechnology and Bioinformatics, NEHU, Shillong

Environment:

- Water conservation – Mr. ABS Swer, Soil and Water Conservation Department, Meghalaya
- Clean Development Mechanism and its potential in Agricultural, Dr. Somnath Hazra, CTRAN Consulting Pvt. Ltd. Bhubaneswar, Orissa

Existence Value:

- Natural ecosystems: Mr. S Khongsit
- Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and its role in conservation of biodiversity, CP Marak, Conservator of Forests, (Social Forestry & Environment) Meghalaya

Traditional Medicine:

- Conservation Strategies For Indigenous Plant Resources in BRDC
- Policies and legislation: Dr. GC Kharkongor

Under the first area related to indigenous diets, an important aspect was the diet survey which was conducted by MLCU. The indigenous diets, an important aspect was the diet survey which was conducted by MLCU. The findings will be presented in the next section.

5. Diet Survey:

The diets of people in the urban and rural areas are determined a lot by the availability of choices of food, culture, traditions etc... The availability of choices of food in today's context has led to changes in diet patterns of people in urban areas. The diet survey was conducted by the Martin Luther Christian University with a few of understanding the diets of people in rural areas and the consumption of indigenous crops or edibles. Thus the specific objectives were as follows:

- To assess the diet patterns of rural households in Khasi and Jaintia Hills in terms of:
 - Diets across different age groups
 - Dependency on traditional grains, vegetables and fruits including jhum crops
 - Entry of modern/market foods into the diets

Methodology:

The survey focused on rural areas. It was conducted in 4 districts of Meghalaya mainly the Khasi and Jaintia hills which are East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaintia Hills. Twelve villages were surveyed where 3 villages were selected from each district. Within each village, a household interview and focused group discussion was conducted. The household interviews were conducted in 240 households where 20 households per village were selected. The focused group discussion was done mainly with women and elderly of the village. Thus the sample is as follows:

- Districts 4 districts
- Villages 12 villages
- Households 240 households
- Focused Group Discussions 12 FGDs

The names of the villages selected are given in the following table 1:

Sl no.	Name of District	Name of the Block	Names of villages	Main Livelihood Activity
1.	East Khasi Hills	Pynursla	Pongtung	Agriculture (fruits, betel nut, betel leaf) broom cultivation
			Nohwet	
			Wahkhen	
2.	West Khasi Hills	Mairang	Mawlyntriang	Agriculture Charcoal making
			Pyndeng Nongbri	
			Nongkhlaw	
3.	Jaintia Hills	Laskein	Laskein	Agriculture Daily wage earnings Coal mining – winter season
			Nongkynrih	
			Mookyndeng	
	Ri Bhoi	Jirang	Patharkmah	Agriculture Daily wage earnings
4.			Umrit	
			Umkysier	

Data Collection:

The data collection was done by a group of 4 MSW graduates. The time period for the data collection was from September 6 – 21, 2010

Following are the major findings of the survey:

Demographic Data

The family size was 6 to 7 members. The main livelihood activity was farming or agriculture for 55 percent to 65 percent of the respondents and 15 percent to 25 percent were daily wage earners.

Rice: Staple Food

The Staple Food in all the districts is rice. Rice is cultivated in all the districts except in Pongtung village in Pynursla block where rice is not cultivated because the people have cultivated broom grass on a large scale.

Table 2: Cultivation and consumption of rice

Sl no.	District	Type of Rice Cultivated	Purchased / cultivated	Period for which it lasts	Dependency on Market (non local rice)
1.	Jaintia Hills	Local rice	Cultivated	6-7 months	5-6 months
2.	East Khasi Hills**	Local rice	Cultivated	3-6 months	6-9 months
3.	West Khasi Hills	Local rice	Cultivated	3-6 months	6-9 months
4.	Ri Bhoi	Local rice	Cultivated	5-6 months	6-7 months

From table 2, it is evident that though is cultivated in almost all the villages, yet it is not enough for the whole year for a family. The dependency of a household on non local rice ranges from 5 to 9 months on an average. The cost of rice per kilogram in the markets ranges from Rs. 21.00 to Rs. 23.00.

Vegetables:

In terms of cultivation and consumption of vegetables, in all villages, there is cultivation of vegetables as seen in the following Table 3. It can be seen that in Pynursla block, only 29 percent of households cultivate vegetables in their own gardens. This is because, in Pynursla block there is large scale cultivation of broom grass. Therefore even the back yards of houses, broom grass is usually cultivated. There is also a high dependence on forests for vegetables or wild edibles except in Ri Bhoi district where foraging of vegetables from the forests is only 19 percent of households.

Sl no.	District	Vegetables cultivated in their own gardens	Vegetables foraged from forests	Vegetables purchased from local market
	Jaintia Hills	53 percent	36 percent	11 percent
	East Khasi Hills	29 percent	54 percent	16 percent
	West Khasi hills	54 percent	33 percent	13 percent
	Ri Bhoi District	42 percent	19 percent	39 percent

Table 3: Vegetables

Moreover, the availability of vegetables foraged from forests is mostly in summer months i.e. June to September 2010 and the vegetables foraged from forests are mostly green leafy vegetables and people consume it in the raw state.

Non Vegetarian Food item:

The non veg food items are pork, beef/smoked beef, fish, chicken, mutton, dry fish, egg, nutrela, silk worm and other fishes that are locally available like dohthli, dohlun, doh skei.

However the consumption pattern mostly ranges from weekly to monthly as can be seen from the following Table 4.

Non Veg	Jaintia Hills	East Khasi Hills	West Khasi hills	Ri Bhoi District
Pork	Monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Monthly
Beef/smoke beef	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly
Fish	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Weekly
Chicken	Monthly	Sometimes	Monthly	Sometimes
Mutton	Never	Sometimes	Sometimes	Never

Dry fish	Daily/weekly	Month	Weekly	Weekly
Egg	Monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Sometimes
Nutrela	Monthly	Monthly	Sometimes	Sometimes

Table 4: Non Vegetarian Food Items

Beverages:

The consumption of milk is very rare as in Jaintia Hills, all the households stated that milk is never consumed and also in other 2 districts of East Khasi hills and Ri Bhoi districts, milk is rarely consumed. It is only in West Khasi Hills that milk is consumed once a month. There is also an interesting finding in West Khasi Hills where curd is made in bamboo as can be seen from the adjacent picture. Tea without milk is consumed in all districts.



*Curd prepared in bamboo
Nongkhlaw, West Khasi Hills*

The other beverages such as juices, soft drinks and rice beer are consumed once in a while usually when people go to the markets.

Snacks:

The consumption of indigenous snacks such as pukhleim, pumaloi etc... is not on a daily basis. The indigenous snacks are consumed on occasions or market days as most of the snacks are consumed from the local market. However, there are snacks which people still prepare at their homes; these are putharo, pu riewhadem, pu syep, ja shawlia, pu tyndong, rymbai ja. It is also interesting to see that most of the indigenous snacks are made from rice of different varieties except for few items such as pu riewhadem which is made from corn and rymbai ja made from soya bean.

Entry of modern foods:

Children and present generation of youth are aware of the modern foods. They do consume the modern foods such as wai wai (noodle) and potato chips almost on daily to weekly basis. These two items are usually available in the shops at the villages, thus the consumption is frequent. However other snacks such as bread, suji, chow, momo, fried rice and Indian sweets are consumed when they visit the markets.

Non Availability of Traditional Foods:

Through the survey, it was found that there is also a threat to the traditional foods. People especially the elderly have witnessed that certain kinds of fruits, wild green edibles or even wild birds are not found in the forests anymore. There are various reasons such as deforestation, broom cultivation, changing life style of the present generation. Table 5 will give the details of each district.

Table 5: Non Availability of Traditional Food

	Traditional Food	Reasons
Jaintia Hills	Wild vegetables like Latara,sohlapih etc.,	Deforestation
East Khasi Hills	Millets, and some wild vegetables and wild fruits like phanjali,sohmluh etc.,	Broom cultivation/deforestation/changing life style
West Khasi Hills	Rice beer, wild birds, and wild vegetables and fruits like sohriew, dhania khlaw, tyrkhang etc.,	Deforestation/charcoal making/changing life style
Ribhoi	Millets, jakhleh, wild potatoes , wheat and wild fruits like sohlyngkdaw, sohsan, sohsyntet etc.,	Broom cultivation, deforestation, changing life styles

Closing Remarks:

The diet survey has brought out important insights into the diets of people in rural areas. The preference of people in general is also on traditional foods as they say it is fresh and healthy. However the concern is on the diminishing source of traditional food due to deforestation, broom cultivation and declining awareness of youths of traditional foods (wild edibles).