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Indigenously prepared foods and beverages of *Bhotiya* tribal community of Munsyari, Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand

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ABSTRACT: *Bhotiya* tribe is a group of ethno-linguistic people typically living in the Trans-Himalayan region. The tribe is generally inhabited in three major districts of Uttarakhand namely Pithoragarh, Chamoli and Uttarkashi. These tribal people live in close proximity with nature and therefore their food and other resources are derived from nature and local forests, thus explaining their dependency on nature. The food they consume, the dietary and cooking practices they follow are typical to them which are also eco-friendly and sustainable. Therefore, attempt was made to study their indigenous food and beverages and document their preparation and cooking methods. The research was exclusively conducted among 50 *bhotiya* women aged between 18-50 years residing in village Ghorpatta of Munsyari tehsil in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand. A total of 14 food and beverage items were reported in the study. It was also found that some of the recipes used ingredients which were used as medicine by the tribe in curing various illnesses. These indigenously prepared food items also ensure food security and improved nutrition therefore, the study is an attempt to document these indigenous cooking methods which are eco-friendly and sustainable.

Key words: *Bhotiya*, ethno-linguistic, indigenous food and beverages, tribe

The term tribe is used in different contexts and generally refers to a group of people sharing common language and customs and those who live in close proximity to nature. Historically, the tribes were considered primitive by the colonists and were thought to be uncivilized (Sneath, 2016). Tribes identify with each other on the basis of clan, race, language, habitat, religious beliefs, tradition and culture. These tribal people constitute a small proportion of population. According to the Census of India (2011), the tribes constitute only 8.6 per cent of India's total population.

The state of Uttarakhand is located in the northern part of India and is divided into two divisions Garhwal and Kumaon. The tribes of Uttarakhand represent the ethnic groups residing in the state. There are mainly five tribal groups residing in the state namely, *Jaunsari*, *Tharu*, *Raji*, *Buxa* and *Bhotiya* (Farswan, 2017). The *bhotiya* tribe chiefly inhabits the seven river valleys in three districts of the state namely Pithoragarh in Kumaon division and Chamoli and Uttarkashi in Garhwal division. The name *bhotiya* is derived from the term *bhot* which means Tibet and the *bhotiya* tribe are presumed of Tibet origin that live along the Indo-

Tibetan border in the upper Great Himalayan region. The *bhotiya* people share facial features with people with Mongoloid origin and Tibetan. The *bhotiya* tribe was notified as a scheduled tribe by the Government of India in 1967 to help in the upliftment of otherwise distressed tribe and improve their status in the society. The tribe is nomadic in nature and practice seasonal or transhumant migration, even today. The tribe lives in the upper Himalayan areas during summer season and as the winter season starts, the tribe starts to migrate to lower regions as during winter season the highlands get covered with heavy snow making the survival difficult. While migrating from lowlands to highlands, the *bhotiya* tribal people carry preserved food items and other essentials with them to make their survival easy. In earlier times, their main source of income used to be trade of medicinal herbs, spices and rugs and carpets with Tibet, which showed drastic downfall after the 1962 Sino-Indian war. The tribe follows Hinduism influenced by their own beliefs and customs which are very different from Uttarakhand people. The majority of the tribe practice agriculture and animal rearing. The *bhotiya* people are skilled in weaving and generally weave carpets and rugs. Traditional food and beverages of a community

means what they eat, why they eat and how they eat. The eating habits of an individual or community is influenced by many factors like, geographic, cultural, personal, social, economic, etc. The tribal population living in isolation and in close proximity to nature have their own traditional food and beverages and eating habits. In India, there are about 68 million people belonging to 227 ethnic groups of 573 tribal communities, out of which 4 tribes *tharus*, *buxas*, *rajis* and *bhotiyas* inhabit the Kumaun division of Uttarakhand. The *bhotiya* tribe living in thick forest region depends on nature for their basic needs of life and survival

The tribe living far from the main cities have their indigenous ways of preparing and cooking the various food and beverages item which are unique and indigenous to their own tribe. This indigenous knowledge is transferred among the tribe from generation to generation. The various raw materials used in the preparation of these dishes are majorly acquired from their local habitat only and thus are easily available, economic, eco-friendly and sustainable and also free from any chemical or adulterant. Their unique style of preparation and cooking offers a unique taste to the dishes and are also self-reliant and nutritious, but the younger generation has now started to migrate from their native villages to nearby cities and towns for better education and job opportunities. Since the *bhotiya* community also practices seasonal migration, they preserve and store various food items for the times when they move to higher altitudes where the availability of raw materials is comparatively less. These preserved and stored items are also consumed in off-season and act as a buffer in times of constraints. Various food items preserved and stored by the community are meat, vegetables like potato, Colocasia, onion, radish etc. These sustainable practices thus help in food preservation and food security. Rice, buckwheat, wheat and maize constitute the staple food of the *bhotiya* tribe along with *madua*(ragi). The tribe grows crops like buckwheat, wheat, maize, finger millet, sorghum and paddy, legumes; *rajma*, peas and among vegetables the tribe grows potato, cabbage, cauliflower, radish and bitter gourd (Bisht, 2013). The common methods

of cooking that the tribe practices are boiling, steaming, frying and fermentation.

The food habits of tribal communities are largely influenced by locally available natural resources (Nair *et al.*, 2016). The survey also showed the socio-cultural importance of the locally prepared food and beverages among the tribal people. The consumption of these food and drinks during ceremonies and ritual was very common among the tribe and held special meaning and importance (Rawat *et al.*, 2021). It was also found that some of the raw materials and food items were ethnomedicinally used in curing various illnesses. Such as *tyamur* (*Zanthoxylum piperitum*) was used for relieving cold and cough, *ajwain* (*Trachyspermum ammi*) and *thoya* (wild cumin) in loose motion, wild garlic for joints pain etc. Therefore, an attempt was done to study these traditional food preparation and cooking practices and document these practices considering their sustainability and eco-friendly nature. The article is an attempt to document these traditional cooking practices and discern the local foods and beverages consumed by the *bhotiya* tribe. This would help in documentation of traditional techniques of the *bhotiya* tribe about preparation of food and beverages. The study would also help in promotion of these indigenous methods which are sustainable and eco-friendly and thus can be helpful to the tribe to raise their economy and promote and preserve their tradition and culture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

The state of Uttarakhand is located in the northern part of India. The state shares its borders with Uttar Pradesh in south, Himachal Pradesh in west and north-west and Nepal in west. The state is divided into two divisions Kumaon division (6 districts) and Garhwal division (7 districts). The state constitutes a multi-ethnic population namely Kshatriya (35 percent), Brahmins (20 percent), Other backward classes (18.3 percent), Scheduled castes (18.76 percent) and Scheduled tribes (2.89 percent). The five major tribes inhabiting the state are *jaunsaris*, *bhotiyas*, *tharus*, *buxas* and *rajis* (Farswan, 2017).

In Pithoragarh district the *bhotiya* tribe generally inhabits three major river valleys namely Darma valley (Munsyari block), Byans and Chaudans valley (Dharchula block). The present study was exclusively conducted in Munsyari block of Pithoragarh district. The region lies in higher altitude, at an elevation of about 2,200 meters (7200 ft). Munsyari lies at the base of Johar valley which lies at even higher elevation. The people of Munsyari practice seasonal migration in which they move to higher altitudes (*mallajohar*) in the month of May-October/ November and during the month of November the community starts to move downwards at the base of the valley because due to chilly weather, rough terrain and lack of resources, it becomes difficult to survive in *mallajohar*.

Locale and sample

For the present study village Ghorpatta of Munsyari tehsil was chosen as the locale. 50 women aged between 18-50 years belonging to *bhotiya* community were randomly selected from the locale and information about their traditional food and beverages was collected with prior consent from the respondents. The sample was selected by employing the technique of simple random sampling.

Research design

Research design is the plan of action prepared by the researcher for the research work. It is a systematic plan of action including data collection method, instruments and techniques used for data analysis. In the present study, descriptive research design was employed.

Data collection

For the purpose of data collection observation method and a self-prepared questionnaire was used. Observation method is simply studying the behaviors of the respondents in their natural setting. The set of questions was filled by the researcher herself by explaining the questions and intents of the question and assisting the respondents in answering the questions. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions about the traditional food and beverages prepared and consumed by the *bhotiya* tribe, ingredients used, cooking method employed,

consumption of food items whether as snack, main course or ceremonial dishes.

Analysis of data

The collected data was carefully classified and analyzed. The dishes were categorized into three categories based on their consumption pattern viz, main course, snack and ceremonial dishes. Along with-it classification was also done according to the cooking method employed in preparing the dish.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the firsthand information received by interviewing the local people, fourteen dishes which are indigenous to the *bhotiya* tribe are documented in the study. All these items are prepared using locally available resources, local herbs and spices are used as condiments to add flavor, smell and texture to these food items. A detailed description of these food items is discussed below:

Tyamur ki sabzi – vegetable; main course dish; Ingredients: Root of *tyamur*, salt, turmeric, cumin seeds

Cooking process: *Tyamur* is a type of tuber locally grown by the *bhotiya* tribe. For the preparation of its vegetable, *tyamur* is cut into small pieces. In an iron pan, mustard oil is heated to which *thoya* (wild cumin seeds), salt, turmeric, green chilies and cut pieces of *tyamur* are added. All the items are then mixed and cooked for 10-15 minutes. This dish is eaten as *sookhi sabzi* (dry vegetable) with *roti* (chapatti). Cooking method: sauteing.

Patyud- fritters; snacks; Ingredients: Leaves of Colocasia, wheat flour, spices; Cooking process: In wheat flour all the spices (salt, chili powder, cumin powder, black pepper powder, turmeric) are added, to which small quantity of water is added gradually to make a thick batter. The batter is then spread on washed *arbi* (Colocasia) leaves and the leaves are folded. The folded leaves are then steamed for 5-7 minutes. The steamed *arbi* leaves are deep fried in mustard oil until they turn crispy. These fritters are consumed as a snack or cooked as vegetable to be

eaten with *roti*. Cooking method: frying

Momos; snacks; Ingredients: Minced meat of goat, refined wheat flour, red chili, ginger, garlic, pepper powder

Chutney: Tomato, *timur* (*Zanthoxylum armatum*), red chili powder; Cooking process: Refined wheat flour is kneaded with water to make a soft dough. Small balls of dough are rolled out into small circles to make outer layer of momo. The filling is made by mixing minced meat of goat, red chilies, ginger, garlic, pepper and soya sauce. This mixture is then filled into the small rolled out circles made out of dough and desired shape is given by folding and twisting by hands. The momo is then put into a steamer and served with savory and spicy tomato chutney. Cooking method: steaming

Madu ki badi – gruel; main course/ snacks; Ingredients: Ragi flour, jaggery; Cooking process: Jaggery syrup is added to ragi flour to make a thick paste. This paste is cooked in ghee until it becomes thick gruel and served hot with ghee. This gruel is generally consumed in winter season as it provides warmth and also helps in curing cold and cough. This gruel is also offered to post-partum mothers as it is believed to help in fast recovery post birth and helps in boosting milk production in new mothers. This dish is typically consumed in either breakfast or dinner. Cooking method: boiling

Bhumla- fried rice; main course; Ingredients: Rice, turmeric, coriander, *thoya* (wild cumin), salt, red chili powder. Cooking process: To make this dish, hand pounded rice is exclusively used. This dish is the local version of fried rice. In a pan, ghee is added to which all the spices and *jambu* (*dhunghar*), a local herb is added along with cooked rice. All the ingredients are then thoroughly mixed and cooked for 5-10 minutes. This dish is usually made with leftover rice and consumed in dinner. Cooking method: shallow frying

Chunni- fritters; snacks; Ingredients: Jaggery, wheat flour, *bhangjeera* leaves (beefsteak plant); Cooking process: Jaggery syrup is made by boiling jaggery

in water. This syrup is then added to wheat flour to make a thick batter. This batter is then spread on *bhangjeera* leaves which is then deep fried in mustard oil and served hot with *chutney*. Cooking method: deep frying

Damcha- salt; Ingredients: *Timur*, hemp seeds, garlic, chili, salt; Cooking process: *Damcha* is a type of salt made by the *bhotiya* tribe. For its preparation, *timur*, hemp seeds, garlic and chili are dry roasted in a pan. All the dry ingredients along with salt and coriander leaves are then pounded on mortar and pestle to make salt. This salt is eaten with *madua*(ragi) chapatti and also with fruits. The salt is preserved and stored in air tight container for future use.

Arjee/ geema- preserved meat of goat; ceremonial dish; Ingredients: Goat intestines, *madua*(ragi) flour, salt, turmeric, chili, potato; Cooking process: This dish is prepared by preserved meat of goat. For the making of this dish, the small intestines of goat are thoroughly cleaned and then *madua*(ragi) flour, blood of goat, salt, turmeric and other spices are filled inside the intestines. These pieces are called *arjee* and are sun-dried for 5-10 days or longer. These sun-dried meat pieces are preserved and used all year long. In a pan mustard oil is added to which chopped onion, tomato, garlic, ginger are fried till golden brown, then the pieces of *arjee* and one potato are added to it and cooked for 30-60 minutes. This dish also holds socio-cultural significance among the tribe and is consumed in every important ceremony and festivals. Due to the sun-dried meat, the texture of the meat is a little hard and chewier. Cooking method: boiling

Gitku-soup; starter; Ingredients: *Arjee*, salt, coriander leaves, *timur*; Cooking process: This dish is served as soup. *Arjee* is boiled in water and salt and *timur* is added to it and further boiled for few minutes to make a soup, garnished with coriander leaves and served hot. This dish is mostly consumed in winter season to combat the cold winter season. This dish is also served as a remedy for cold and cough (Bhatt *et al.*, 2009). Cooking method: boiling

Kukla- noodles; main course; Ingredients: Wheat

flour; Cooking process: This is a kind of noodles made of wheat flour and is eaten as a snack among the *bhotiya* tribe. Wheat flour is kneaded to make a slightly tight dough. Small balls of dough are then rolled into noodles with the help of hand. The length of noodles is less than the normal noodles available in market and are slightly thick. The noodles are then added to boiling water for 2-3 minutes. Once they become soft, they are taken out of water and dried for further few minutes. Then the spices are mixed in the noodles and then the noodles are shallow fried in oil with some onion and tomato. This dish is consumed in breakfast and dinner and sometimes as a snack also. Cooking method: boiling and sauteing

Pulee/Phaphar roti- chapatti; main course; Ingredients: *Phaphar* flour (buckwheat flour); Cooking process: Phaphar is a locally grown millet (Lakhera, 2017). *Phaphar* flour is made by grinding *phaphar* seeds. For making the dish, *phaphar* flour is kneaded with water to make a dough. The balls of dough are then rolled out to make *roti* which are then cooked on hot iron griddle. This dish is the staple breakfast of the community. Cooking method: roasting

Saij- sweetened fermented rice; snacks; Ingredients: Rice, *balma* (starter for fermentation); Cooking process: *Saij* is a sweetened rice made out of fermented rice. For the fermentation process to occur, a substrate, *balma* (local herb) is used. Cooked rice is kept to cool down, to which *balma* powder is thoroughly mixed and then the mixture is kept in air tight container. The container is wrapped with layers of clothes to keep it warm for 6-7 days for fermentation process to take place. After 6-7 days a peculiar smell starts to come indicating that the *saij* is ready. In a pan, ghee is added to which *saij* and sugar is added and fried for 5-7 minutes and *saij* is ready for consumption; Cooking method: fermentation and sauteing

Jaan- local alcohol; ceremonial beverage; Ingredients: Fermented rice (*saij*); Cooking process: *Jaan* is the traditionally prepared alcohol consumed by the *bhotiya* tribe. The drink is also socio-culturally

significant to the tribe as it is consumed by almost everyone despite the gender and a fresh batch of the drink is especially prepared for rituals and ceremonies (Roy *et al.*, 2004). For the preparation of the drink, water is added to *saij* (fermented rice) and the mixture is kept in wooden pots for 5-6 days for further fermentation. After 5-6 days, the alcohol is separated from the substrate by the process of fractional distillation and the drink is ready for consumption. This beverage constitutes an important part of all the important ceremonies. Cooking method: fermentation

Jyaa- tea; beverage; Ingredients: *Ghee*, water, *katki* (local herb), *sattu*, salt; Cooking process: *Jyaa*, the local tea is also called as salty tea (*namkeen chai*) is prepared and consumed by the tribe daily, especially during winter season. *Katki* (*Picrorhiza kurroa*) (local herb) is added to water and boiled for 2-3 minutes or till the tea acquires brown to black color. When the color starts to appear, it is taken away from the flame and salt, *ghee* and *sattu* is added to it and served hot. The tea also has medicinal properties due to the presence of *katki* (Kumari *et al.*, 2021). Also, the tea provides warmth in the chilly weather and gives relief from cold and cough.; Cooking method: boiling

The results from the study provide information about the traditional food consumed by the *bhotiya* tribe inhabiting Munsyari region of Pithoragarh district and documents the traditional method of cooking of these indigenous dishes. These dishes are not only a part of their eating habits but also hold socio-cultural significance among the tribe. Some of the dishes also have ethno-medicinal importance as ingredients used in preparation of these dishes are traditionally used by the tribe for curing various disease.

The ingredients used in the preparation of all these indigenous dishes are obtained from the local habitat of the community. The major ingredients used are *tyamur*, Colocasia, goat meat, buckwheat flour, ragi flour, rice, *timur* seeds, *katki* and *sattu* along with salt, herbs and spices. In earlier times all these dishes were exclusively cooked in fire wood but today gas stove and fire wood both are used for cooking purpose. During ceremonies the food is cooked in

fire wood only. The alcoholic beverage *jaan* is exclusively cooked in firewood. Use of mustard oil and refined oil is prominent among the community. This traditional knowledge passed on from generation to generation is not only healthy and nutritious but also sustainable and economic (Lalmuanpuui *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the study is an attempt towards documentation of the rich culture and habitat of the tribe. However, the *bhotiya* tribe also inhabits the other region of the district and state as well and so a similar study could also be conducted among the *bhotiya* tribe from different region and also among the tribes of the neighboring region.

CONCLUSION

The proposed study was taken up with the objective of discerning and documenting the local foods and beverages consumed by the *bhotiya* tribe. The results from the study throws light on the indigenous food and beverage items prepared and consumed by the *bhotiya* tribe inhabiting Munsyari and provides information about their cooking practices. Locally available raw materials (herbs, plants, cereals) are used to prepare food and beverages. The various ingredients used in the making of these dishes were also found to have ethnomedicinal significance among the tribe. The traditional cooking techniques which included boiling, steaming, fermentation, frying and roasting were used to prepare their traditional dishes like *arjee*, *saij*, *jaan*, *jyaa*, *jyadu*, *dumcha*, *phaphar* roti etc. The results would help in documentation of traditional techniques of the *bhotiya* tribe about preparation of local food and beverages item and would help in conservation of the traditional knowledge. Thus, the study would help in the conservation of culture, habits and ethnic food knowledge of the *bhotiya* tribe. The study would also open scope for future studies as similar study could be conducted in other tribes of the neighboring region and other parts of the country. The limitations of the study were that the study was strictly limited to tribal women of age group 18-50 years and also limited to only one region while *bhotiya* tribe resides in other regions as well. Therresults from the study throws light on the

traditional food and beverages prepared and consumed by the *bhotiya* tribe inhabiting Munsyari region of Uttarakhand. The study provides comprehensive information on the local dishes of the *bhotiya* tribe. It was revealed that locally grown herbs, plants and cereals andgrains are used to prepare the traditional dishes. Therefore, documentation of traditional recipes would help in conserving their traditional knowledge and culture.

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