

Empowering Social Economy through Traditional Food System and Knowledge in Uttarakhand

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ABSTRACT

Traditional food has always been regarded as natural, fresh, healthy, nutritious and culturally beneficial. It is crucial for sustainable food and nutrition security as well as social economy. While the Health and Nutrition aspects of traditional food items of Uttarakhand state is well documented, the sustainable approach of traditional food stuffs that also empowers social economy remains either unexplored or limited. This research addresses the question on how we can take advantage of traditional food in attaining social economy in the mountainous state Uttarakhand. Also the paper views Traditional Food items of Uttarakhand from *Social, Economic and Environmental* perspective of sustainable development. The study concludes that the traditional food systems are fundamental to livelihood, health, well being and have every potentials to provide sustainable commercial viability to strengthen social economy in the state.

Key Words : Traditional food, Food and nutrition security, Social economy

INTRODUCTION

The term “traditional food system” includes all the food species that are available to a particular culture from local natural resources and the accepted patterns for their use within that culture. This term also embraces and understanding of the socio-cultural meaning given to these foods, their acquisition and their processing; the chemical composition of these foods: the way each food is used by age and gender groups within a selected culture; and the nutrition and health consequences of all of these for those who consume these foods”¹. Traditional food systems have the potential to nurture human health and support environmental sustainability². Uttarakhand state is characterized by a rich biodiversity as well as rich culinary heritage. Traditional foods are key elements of our culture, history, and heritage. Food products made by using locally available edible material has its own value for particular locality or even it may have therapeutic or medicinal benefits too. These products are made by using wisdom

and knowledge which is traditionally transferred from one generation³.

Traditional knowledge systems were passed on through the oral tradition over centuries and often through the heuristic devices of legends and myths. In the era of natural resource management, there are strong reasons to believe that many traditional practices and techniques continue to have some validity even in this day and age⁴. Transmission of traditional food system and knowledge is one important means of fostering sustainable livelihoods, ecosystems health and enhanced individual and community capacity⁵.

Rapidly changing life styles with development in science and technology have left traditional diets at the risk of losing their existence. On one hand traditional knowledge systems are today being gradually replaced with modern life style preferences and unsustainable development practices but on the other many firms are exploiting their therapeutic attributes to market and this has recently garnered academic and policy attention.

Therefore an improvised understanding of traditional food knowledge may be proved as an important tool to enhance the social economic condition and curb migration and unemployment especially in the remote mountainous Uttarakhand.

Objective:

The present study showcases the potentialities and commercial viabilities of traditional food and knowledge system in empowering social economy in Uttarakhand and how well the problem of unemployment can be addressed by simply reviving our traditional food culture system through the 4 traditional food social entrepreneurship case studies in the state. The paper is also devoted towards improvised understanding of traditional food in Uttarakhand in maintaining food-nutrition- culture – economy balance.

METHODOLOGY

The present work is an outcome of the study “Culinary Heritage of Uttarakhand: The Pursuit of Health and Nutrition”, conducted in villages of Garhwal and Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. Data on traditional food were collected through field trips. Facts about traditional belief and knowledge and assessment of environmental constraints Vis a vis cultivation of traditional crops were explored through structured and semi structured interviews with Key Informants, Facilitated Focus Group Discussions, Field Sampling, Diet Pattern Analysis and a combination of published and unpublished literature, Discussions on different government schemes and programs focusing on the promotion of traditional food productions with natives and indigenous people were also conducted. The guidelines of Center for Indigenous People’s Nutrition and Environment (CINE) McGill University Canada (2006) were adopted with the slight modification so as to suit the purpose of present study⁶. However the nutrient content present in traditional food stuff was analyzed by using Indian Food Composition Table (IFCT)⁷ for the consequent part of the study.

Study area:

Uttarakhand state was carved out from Uttar Pradesh and came into being on November 9th, 2000. At present Uttarakhand have 13 districts (Almora, Bageshwar, Champawat, Chamoli, Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, Pauri, Pithoragarh, Rudraprayag, Tehri, Udham Singh Nagar and Uttarakashi) in two main regions Kumaon and Garhwal. The natives of Uttarakhand are commonly

known as *Pahari* (the people from hills) or more specifically Kumauni or Garhwali. It is a multiethnic populated state wherein Bhotia, Jaunsari, Tharus, Bokshas, and Raji are prominent ethnic groups, apart from these there are no. of Nepali immigrants in Uttarakhand, who also constitute the population. Cultural preeminence is one of the major inclusion criteria for this study so two districts Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar due to their cultural heterogeneity, were purposively excluded.

Choice of case studies:

Through case studies the traditional food system and knowledge is analyzed for its potential to contribute to social economy. The present paper highlights how some organizations in Uttarakhand have received benefits from their involvement in traditional food based social entrepreneurship and continue to be a regular source of income and recognition both at state and national level. Four case studies on “Traditional Food Based Social Entrepreneurship” were selected for the purpose of present study. Case studies 1 and 2 represent Garhwal region whereas case studies 3 and 4 represent Kumaon region. Case studies have been used to identify, document and showcase innovative social economy empowering activities.

Table : Inclusion Criteria for Case Studies

Sr. No.	Organization	Inclusion Criteria
1.	Devkaush	Focus on local and socio economic development, Immaculate use of ICT. Bio-Diversity Preservation, Local Partnership, Employment Opportunities, Amalgamation of age old and modern knowledge.
2.	Mahila Navjagran Samiti	Revenue Generation, Preserving Culinary Heritage, self reliance, Women Empowerment
3.	Ma Chiltha Ajjivika Sahakarita Samooh	Biodiversity Preservation, Encouraging locals to cultivate traditional Food. Self dependence, Capacity Building, Women Empowerment
4.	Kumaon Namkeen	Innovation, Health and Nutrition aspects of traditional foods, Food fusion, Employment Opportunities, Social empowerment

Case Study 1: Devkaush Organization:

Devkaush organization based in Tehri district of Uttarakhand is one of the most germane examples of achieving sustainable economy through preserving

biodiversity and age old tradition of Uttarakhand state. This organization is a brain child of a group of youth working towards the village empowerment and impeding the rate of migration in Uttarakhand State, providing ample opportunities to re-establish themselves by self employment through agriculture and food processing among other activities. Their traditional food based products like *Kodarfi (Ragi Burfi)*, *Mandua Mathri*, *Shakarpare*, *Singori etc.* were huge success in the national wide market. In the beginning phase the organization purchased almost 4 Quintals of traditional crops from local farmers on the price much more than what farmers were normally getting. This gave the required encouragement to the local farmers to cultivate more of traditional crops. Their innovative and organic products are serving twin purpose of biodiversity preservation as well as empowering social economy. Youth at Devkaush, being trained in association with specialist at *Krishi Vaigyanik Kendra (KVK) Ranichauri (Tehri Garhwal)* are promoting healthy snacking (especially during festive seasons), women and village empowerment and reverse migration. The efforts of these youth has been well acknowledged not only by their customer but also by the government as this organization has received several awards as *Hill Ratna Award and Challenges for Change* among others. The organization intends to generate employment for 80 villagers by the end of year 2018. The success of this organization answers the role of Traditional Food in achieving pursuing Food and Nutrition security and Empowered Social Economy through the most sustainable way⁸.

Case Study 2: Mahila Navjagran Samiti's Flavored Salt (Loon):

Salt is synonyms with zest, vigor, relish, spice and piquancy in any food. The age old flavored and mineral rich salt of Uttarakhand is not only healthy but it is making its mark in the world of gastronomy. Flavored salt better known as *Pisi loon* among the natives was traditionally prepared by coarsely grinding rock salt and herbs that's not only a delight to taste buds but also loaded with micronutrients. It is a very much part of culinary heritage of Uttarakhand and served as a side dish in several households in Uttarakhand. Fresh and organic herbs and Spices like Mint, Coriander, Mustard, Curry Leaves, *Gandhrayan (Angelica glauca)* Cumin, Ginger, *Asafetida*, *Bhang* (Indian Hemp Seeds) *Bhangjeera (Perilla frutescens)*, Fresh Green Chilies, Roasted Red

Chilies, and Spring Onion etc. are coarsely grinded on grinding stone. Today its popularity may be accredited to enhanced flavor and peppiness but long back it used to be served either as an alternative during the time when the supply of vegetable or dal was sparse or when the hard working native had shorter time for cooking. Several women under *Mahila Navjagran Samiti* a nonprofit Dehradun based organization and Self Help Groups (SHG's) in the state are earning not only money but respect and accolades by supplying this flavored salt to the huge international market. This illustrates how the use of natural and sustainable resource opens door of opportunity and accomplish the target of building a sound economy. This flavored salt can now be found on online. People in nearby villages have started growing the ingredients required for preparing flavored salt⁹.

Case Study 3: Ma Chiltha Ajivika Sahakarita Samooh:

This is what drew the attention of Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi, as he mentioned how the farmers all over the country should take inspiration from farmers of Uttarakhand, during his popular Radio Talk "*Mann ki Baat*". He appreciated the farmers of *Munar* village, (Kapkot Tehsil, Bageshwar district) of Uttarakhand for starting the production of biscuit from their agriculture produce and selling them successfully in the market. The main crops in this district are *Mandua (Ragi)*, *Chauli (Amaranth)*, *Corn (Maize)* and *Jaun (Barley)*. These crops as such were not fetching them fair price till the farmers adopted sustainable approach. They added value to the traditional food items and loss incurring equation changed into a profit sharing one. The farmers of this region prepared healthy biscuits out of these local produce to sell them directly to the market. These biscuits are now manufactured under *Ma Chiltha Ajivika Sahakarita Samooh*. These healthier and highly nutritious biscuits were readily accepted in the market and resulted in increased price of these crops, supporting the local economy and environment. A sense of faith, self reliance and connectedness towards one's culture and farmland was restored and subsequently encouraged the natives to cultivate more of such crops. As of now this venture of farmers is providing employment opportunities to 900 people from nearby 80 villages. Impressed by the bold initiative of these farmers, the administration has also linked this to National Livelihood Mission. These biscuits by the virtue of their high

micronutrient content (Iron and Calcium) are also being supplied to 50 Aganwadi centers in the state. The organization now aims at establishing factory in the village for expanded supply of their products. The International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) has also extended their support to this endeavor¹⁰.

Case Study 4: Kumaon Namkeen:

Namkeen a generic term for savory salty snack, this delectable snack is every Indian's favorite and goes best as tea time snack. Tea the most favored beverage of people in Uttarakhand helps the residents in combating the harsh cold of the region. Tea is staple and the cheapest sources of instant energy. Family, friends, guests and even strangers socially bond over a cup of tea. Devki Devi the brain behind immensely popular Kumaon Namkeen of Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand continues to inspire one and all; her success story is a reflection of how the sustainable use of local resources can open new avenues of development. Normally the Namkeen is prepared by simple ingredients like Lentils, Gram Flours, Sago, Semolina, Dry fruits, Indian Spices fruits, Vegetables and Seeds. Incorporating local grains into the Namkeen was the best thing that could have happened to Kumaon Namkeen. Uncommon, unheard and unknown millets, herbs, and beans from the soil of Uttarakhand were replaced with the one that were conventionally used resulting in innovative and healthier products like *Mandua (Finger Millet) stick*, *Mandua Namkeen*, *Jhangora (Barnyard Millet) Mandua Chips*, *Mandua Bhujia*, *Soya Plain*, *Soya Spicy*, *Methi Sev*, *Gehat Spicy*, *Kaale Bhatt ki Namkeen*, *Navratna*, *Lehsun (Garlic Sev)*. Kumaon Namkeen has now a bigger and sound market and the demand is escalating. Traditional grains, millets are now out sourced from different parts of the state. This has attracted the attention of natives to grow more of traditional food item, which indirectly is small but important step in preserving biodiversity and the food –Nutrition- Culture connection of Uttarakhand. In the year 2004 Devki Devi was awarded the National Micro Entrepreneurship Award. In 2008 she was awarded with Teelu Rauteli award by state government and National Productivity Award (2010) and State Level Micro Entrepreneurship Award (2013)¹¹.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Food diversity is an important component of human health, nutrition and culture. Today we are living in

constantly changing food environment where the traditional food system and knowledge based economy can serve as an indicator of bio culturally unique region. Globalization, urbanization, digitalization has enabled local food to easily penetrate beyond native boundaries. Food is much more than taste, it provides mechanism for survival, identity and connectedness. Life style of mountain community reveals some facts regarding community dependence on rural resources. The nutritional and monetary needs earlier were totally met out within local ecosystem. Food is not just about taste, it is also about nutrition, safety, cultural biodiversity and economy. It is the time that Indigenous food culture is revived and brought back to plates. If we lose biodiversity in the wild, we lose our authentic taste and culture. Need to connect ecosystem where it grows and people depend on it for their livelihood¹².

Uttarakhand has a rich traditional food system and knowledge to make its mark on national or global health food market. These case studies ascertain the fact why wellbeing and sustainability remain the fundamental part of traditional food pattern. These success stories reveal that how some organizations are using local knowledge, resources and digital technologies and platforms to share tradition food and revitalize traditional practices and cultural identities. The value of sustainable regional food system can be best understood through their innovative capacity to create shared vision that fosters synergies between social, environmental and economic aspects of traditional food and knowledge system. It can be characterized from social, cultural, agricultural, ecological, health and community development stand point.

A blend of scientific knowledge, marketing strategies, start ups, schemes focusing on traditional food system and knowledge can help environment and natives to go a long way in preserving biodiversity and sustainable social economy. Moreover the younger generation's indifference towards their own culture is a serious concern; there is a need for behavioral changes among the youth as they are neither ready to cultivate crops nor do they eat traditional food¹³. In this regard strong advocacy, strategies and schemes focusing on utilizing local resources must be launched at government level. The research finding suggests that proper usage of traditional food knowledge and culinary heritage has the potential to change the socio economic scenario of the region.

Conclusion:

Search of livelihood is one of the major causes of migration in remote hill areas of Uttarakhand. Migration in the 1980's was the main driving factor for the Uttarakhand movement demanding creation of a separate state. Even though Uttarakhand has done fairly well in terms of economic growth, the focus has been on only plain districts (intra state migration) for better opportunities¹⁴. Locally grown food creates important economic opportunities, provides health benefits and helps to reduce environmental impact. It also helps bring community together and gives people the opportunities to make a difference¹⁵. Uttarakhand has almost all agro-geo zones, which provide commercial opportunities for horticulture. Agro based food processing and horticulture are among key industries behind this one of the fastest growing states in India. The presence of several hill stations, wildlife parks, pilgrimage places and trekking routes make Uttarakhand an attractive tourist destination. The state is home to more than 175 species of rare medicinal, aromatic and herbal plants¹⁶. Here the researcher sees lots of opportunities to show case, market and develop the traditional food cluster. The researcher also recommends further investigation and documentation on several unheard, yet to be explored food stuffs.

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