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# Awang Sekmai's Gastronomic Heritage: A Culinary Journey of Tradition and Unity

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**Khwairakpam Goutam Singh\***

*\*Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Mizoram University India.*

*Corresponding Email: [goutamkhwairakpamsingh@gmail.com](mailto:goutamkhwairakpamsingh@gmail.com)*

**Received:** 23 April 2023

**Accepted:** 08 July 2023

**Published:** 22 August 2023

**Abstract:** *Awang Sekmai is located within the Lamshang sub-division of Manipur's Imphal West district, which is esteemed for its scenic enticement and tranquil landscapes. The region is home to the state's indigenous ethnic community. The place is conveyed through a myriad of art forms, rituals, traditions of culture, and festivals, making it an enticing destination for culture enthusiasts. Food plays a crucial role in establishing social cohesion and garnering the fascination of community members or multitudes. As Awang Sekmai continues to flourish while preserving its established customs and traditions, it exemplifies the potent role of culture in shaping identities and fostering unity among its people. The local populace has witnessed the ebb and flow of time, adapting its traditions while maintaining its fundamental values. The context here exemplifies the tenacity of traditional cultures in the face of modernisation. The uniqueness of this location and its culinary offerings has been observed and experienced by tourists from across the country and the globe. This paper examines the significance of food underneath the culture of Awang Sekmai. It examines Sekmai Yu, a traditional fermented rice beverage, as well as traditional dishes such as Oksha Thongba, Chamthong, Morok Metpa, and others which exemplify the culinary expertise of the community. In the context of festivals, religious ceremonies, and social gatherings, the cultural significance of these dishes is highlighted.*

**Keywords:** *Community, Dish, Sekmai, Yu, Tradition.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Manipur is a northeastern state in India, with its capital city Imphal. It has been described as "A Jewelled Land" and "Switzerland of the East" owing to its natural grandeur. Manipur is one of India's seven sister states, bounded to the north by Nagaland, to the south by Mizoram, to the west by Assam, and the east by Myanmar. It possesses a distinct culture with ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. It is the birthplace of both the sport of Polo and the classical



dance form Ras Lila. Mythologically, Manipur's origins can be traced back to the reign of "Konchin Tukthapa Ipu Athoupa Pakhangpa" (Pakhangpa was his given name, which means "The one who knows his father," the universal father God). He gave rise to the seven clans of the Meitei society, including Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moilang, Khapa-nganba, and Salai Leishangthem (Chingtamlen, 2009). "Kanglei which is now called "Kangla" was the first capital of the kingdom called "Kangleipak". "Lainingthou Sanamahi" is the creator of all according to "Kangleichas", the then inhabitants of the now-called Manipur. The religion of the land was pure "Sanamahism", one of the oldest religions of the world" (History of Manipur, 2022, Para. 7).

The Manipur name itself has the basis on Hindu epic Mahabharata, in which a shining diamond called mani ('jewel') in Sanskrit is thrown from the head of a snake god Vasuki, which disseminates natural beauty throughout the land but this theory of Manipur history is much denied by numerous scholars because the Manipur of Mahabharata and present state Manipur (formerly known as 'Meitei Leipak') are not referring to the same place. Throughout historical events, the Manipur was also known as Meitrabak, Kangleipak, and Meeteileipak, alongside over twenty other names. Sanamahi Laikan wrote that Manipur's new nomenclature was implemented during the reign of Meidingu Pamheiba in the eighteenth century. The name "Manipur" is composed of two Sanskrit words: "Mani," describing a jewel, and "Pur," which indicates land, the place, or abode. Thus, "Manipur" is a representation of "Jewelled land."

A total of seven communities in Manipur are recognised as Scheduled Caste Communities. Those people are Lois, Yaithibis, Namsudra, Patni, Dhobi, Muchi/Ravidas, and Sutradhar. The Lois are one of Manipur's two indigenous Scheduled Castes, along with the Yaithibis. According to Singh and Shyamkishor (2017) literally, Loi means the subjugated or those who pay tribute to a sovereign. Manipur has numerous Loi communities. Nevertheless, not every inhabitant is recognised as a Loi village. Exclusively the inhabitants of eight Loi villages were granted Scheduled Caste status following Manipur's 1949 merger into India (Singh & Shyamkishor, 2017). These villages are Phayeng, Awang Sekmai (Sekmai), Koutruk, Leimaram, Leimaram Khunou, Andro, Khurkhul, and Kwatha.

Awang Sekmai, a Loi village is popularly known as Sekmai. It is located in the Lamshang subdivision on the northern side of Manipur's Imphal West district, 20 kilometres from Lamshang, the district's administration centre. The village's entire area is 1.48 square kilometres. The village of Sekmai is situated on National Highway 2 (NH 2), 19 kilometres from the heart of Imphal. Sekmai is believed to have descended from Kha-Sekmai, which is now known as Sekmai-ching. The king of Manipur dispatched a Kha-Sekmai villager to protect the people who had settled in the valley near the foothill from the tribal people who were attacking them for sustenance. The king dispatched the inhabitants of Kha-Sekmai, who possessed an innate ability for bow and arrow and had begun to settle in the region.

Sekmai is a cultural treasure trove where traditions and customs have been cherished and celebrated with indestructible enthusiasm. The community's unwavering dedication to preserving its heritage will ensure that Sekmai's vibrant cultural tapestry remains a source of inspiration and pride for future generations. As the world advances, Sekmai serves as a reminder of the significance of preserving our cultural legacies, serving as a beacon of resilience. Sekmai is renowned for its culinary delights and drinks. These foods play a crucial role in defining and conditioning culture. It is a potent means of uniting people, exhibiting



traditions, and preserving a society's essence. Each culture's distinctive flavours, culinary techniques, and ingredients reflect its history, geography, and core values. Furthermore, these traditional Sekmai dishes that have been handed down through generations satiate physical hunger, however, they additionally stimulate a sense of belonging and identity.

### **Objectives**

1. To Explore and document the traditional food practices and culinary heritage of the Awang Sekmai community in Manipur.
2. To Analyse the cultural significance of food in shaping the community's identity, social cohesion, and religious ceremonies.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative methodology to explore in depth the cultural significance of food in Awang Sekmai. The study employed observational methods to observe and record the community's traditional food practices, culinary rituals, and food-related conventions. Participatory action research was also incorporated into the methodology, allowing for active engagement with locals, chefs, and community members to obtain valuable insights and perspectives on their food traditions. The research significantly relied on the collection of primary information, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations, to capture firsthand accounts and narratives regarding local cuisine. In addition, secondary sources, such as historical records, literature, and academic studies, were utilised to enhance the contextual comprehension of Awang Sekmai's culinary heritage. The incorporation of qualitative methods, observational techniques, and participatory action research ensured an in-depth assessment of food traditions in this community and stipulated an extensive awareness of the centrality of food to their cultural identity.

### **Unravelling the Secrets of Sekmai Yu**

In the valley of Manipur, India, encircled by verdant hills, lies a hidden gem of local culture and tradition: Sekmai Wine, also known as "Sekmai Yu." It is a fermented drink that holds a special place in the souls of the community of Sekmai and the neighbouring locales. "Sekmai Yu is jestfully adored as a 'first class' drink in the whole region of Manipur. The truth is, one sip can give you a chilling spine, a burning throat, and a winching facial expression" (Singh, 2021). Yu plays a crucial role in nurturing social cohesion within the Sekmai community as a food component. During celebrations, this food is used to convey hospitality, friendship, and unity. Sekmai Yu has a rich heritage that is woven into the community's cultural fabric. It is believed that the art of winemaking in Sekmai stretches back centuries and has deep roots in the region's culture and customs. The production of wine is frequently associated with auspicious occasions, festivals, and community celebrations, making it an integral part of the social life of the locale.

The Sekmai community has a tradition of making rice wine. It is a type of tradition and occupation that has been practised by villagers for generations. Sekmai Yu is extracted from fermented rice using a traditional method of distillation. For this Yu, we used rice that's known as "Chamang" (unpolished rice). The rice is properly cooked and then washed to reduce its



stickiness. The "Chakngan" the cooked rice, which can be consumed, is then washed by spreading water over the basket and allowing the water to drip dry through a sieve. Following draining the water, the rice is mixed with Hamei (a form of natural yeast made from rice powder) and "Yangli" (*Albizia myriophylla*) bark, a tool in the fermentation process. The rice is fermented for 4-5 days in the summer and 6-7 days in the winter in a bamboo container called a "Sangbai" that is covered with cloth. The fermented rice is then placed in the extraction vessel, and the extraction process is continued by applying flames from the firewood. In the earlier days, only married women prepared Yu, but today both unmarried women and men are involved in the preparation. Generally, about 70 to 80 per cent of families used to be involved in this traditional practice of wine preparation (Sarkar, 2022).

Sekmai Yu has enormous cultural significance in Manipuri culture. It is an integral part of many celebrations and rituals, symbolising prosperity, joy, and camaraderie. In weddings and other significant celebrations, Sekmai Yu is shared among family and friends, nurturing a sense of community and strengthening bonds. Since time immemorial, the Manipuri people have used Yu as medicine, a relaxant, and an offering (Singh, Potsangbam, and Singh, K., 2006).

During religious ceremonies, Yu is also offered to deities, reflecting the spiritual and sacred value this drink holds in the souls of the community. Its prevalence on both joyful and solemn occasions highlights its central role in the cultural identity of the community.

The traditional art of Sekmai Yu or winemaking confronts challenges as a result of modernisation and shifting consumer preferences. Nevertheless, dedicated "Yu Thongba, Yu Thongbi" (winemakers) and cultural enthusiasts are attempting to preserve this age-old tradition. Promoting Sekmai Yu at local festivals, cultural events, and tourism initiatives ensures that its legacy will endure.

Awang Sekmai's distinctive traditions and culinary customs are exemplified inseparably by its ethnic dishes. Ethnic dishes serve as a tangible expression of cultural identity, reflecting the history, geography, and beliefs of a particular group, such as the Sekmai community, through the preparation and consumption of traditional dishes. These savoury delicacies are a gateway for contemplating the rich tapestry of humanity and the art of preserving cultural legacies for future generations.

### **Sekmai Yu as a Food**

The Sekmai community generally considers Sekmai Yu as a staple food. It is essential to discover a person's behaviour or personality from his or her "Chakcha Yuthak" "Chakcha Yuthak is a dialect of Manipur. It refers to an individual's eating and drinking habits. We Manipuris believe that a person's eating and drinking habits disclose a great deal about their character" (Prem, 2016, para. 5). Some elderly individuals consume this Yu as an appetiser before a meal. The younger members of the community, regardless of their status or position, serve the drinks to their elders on almost every occasion. Yu is a part of the food and traditions of the Sekmai community, despite its misuse as an intoxicant by many. In the absence of Yu, the community feasts appear incomplete, even though not everyone partakes.

### **Yu as an Important part of Ibudhou Koubru Lai Haraoba**

Sekmai Yu is used as an offering to the local deity or god as gratitude and also offers this Yu as the hope to bring more prosperity to the family and the community, especially during the



“Ibudhou Koubru Lai Haraoba” festival. The Ibudhou Koubru Lai Haraoba is an ancient traditional festival held in Sekmai and surrounding villages. Ibudhou Koubru is the name of the local deity/divinity, or the guardian of the local populace. The term "Lai Haraoba" derives from two words: "Lai," which refers to a deity or divinity, and "Haraoba," which refers to a dance-filled celebration. The rich cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs of the community of Sekmai are celebrated and reflected at this vibrant and holy festival. It reflects the harmonious relationship between humans and nature and embodies the essence of Manipuri mythology, which gives it immeasurable significance. During this Lai Haraoba, Sekmai Yu must be presented as a sacrifice to the Ibudhou Koubru. For this special offering, nearly every household brings litres of this Yu. The two varieties of Yu are also served on this special occasion. These are "Wai Yu" and "Puk Yu." The Wai Yu is made with "Wai" (Paddy husk), "Chak-hao" (Manipuri black aromatic rice), and other ingredients, and the process resembles the aforementioned Yu preparation. Puk Yu is made from rice that has been crushed, fermented with Hamai, and strained without the use of heat or fire. In return, the "Lai Sebari" (servants) and others intake it as blessed or holy food. In addition to this Yu, local rice, egg, fruits, flowers, poultry, and pig are also offered to the deity. Lai Sebari ranks are hierarchical and comprise Khullakpa, Lullakpa, Phamshaang Lengshaang Phamba, Khumaang, Shanglen, and Lairoi.

### **Oksha Thongba (Pork curry)**

Oksha Thongba is one of the most significant dishes in the Sekmai culture. It is a pork curry prepared with various seasonings, including ginger, chilli flakes, chilli powder, onion, and coriander leaves. The finest desiccated red chillies are selected and made into flakes. There is no use of edible oil or turmeric powder. The locals asserted that pork already contains lipids, so there is no need to add oil. Moreover, turmeric powder is avoided on the belief that it hardens meat. The Sekmai community consumes it on the majority of weekdays. They hold high regard for it. The best pork curry is made from the finest pork meat produced in Sekmai, where the pigs are fed the rice left over from the distillation of Sekmai Yu. This imparts a distinctive flavour to the meat available in Sekmai. There are approximately fifteen pork retailers in Sekmai. Visitors become extremely enamoured of the pork curry served. On every occasion, regardless of how large or small, pork curry seems obligatory, and people deserve it. In the context of the majority of occasions, festivals, or gatherings, the locals slaughter pigs for the community and cook their meat in a large Khaang (Pan) over a fire fueled by firewood, which imparts an exquisite flavour. The people always yearn for such feasts. In Sekmai, the majority of community members preferred pork curry over alternative types of meat curry.

### **Ngari (Fermented fish)**

Sengmai Ngari, which is fermented fish, is a popular traditional and typical food in the northeastern Indian states, especially in Manipur. It is the well-known Ngari brand within and beyond the state. The fame of the products has spread internationally. It becomes one of the most prosperous enterprises in Manipur and beyond. It is produced exclusively in Sekmai. Sengmai Ngari is sometimes referred to as Sekmai Ngari as an alternative term. Today, its demand is exceedingly high that it crosses international borders from a remote settlement. Fish are fermented to produce Sengmai Ngari, a pungent and flavourful condiment that can be served as a main ingredient in a variety of dishes. It is one of the most popular fermented fish





products consumed daily by Manipuris within and beyond the state. Sengmai Ngari is a ubiquitous ingredient in Manipuri dishes, contributing a distinct umami flavour and aroma to curries, stews, and chutneys. It is a delicacy that provides a one-of-a-kind culinary experience to those who enjoy fermented fish dishes despite its strong flavour.

### **Singju**

"Singju," is a traditional salad that incorporates a variety of indigenous ingredients. It is a variety of salads composed of various vegetables. It contains more than a few common vegetables, such as tomatoes and scallions. However, it contains cabbage, coriander leaves, onions, ginger, lotus stems, other edible foliage, and various vegetables. Variations of these dishes include papaya, banana flower, and lotus root which are served uncooked. Singju may be flavoured with Ngari, besan (chickpea flour), powdered perilla seeds, chilli powder, or other plants. Nonetheless, Singju in Sekmai has a distinct taste of intense chilli flavour. "Heibi Mana Singju" (*Vangueria spinosa* leaves Singju), "Hawai Maton Singju" (new pea's shoot Singju), "Lafu Singju" (banana stem Singju), and "Peruk Sinju" (*Centella asiatica* leaves Singju) are a variety of Sekmai's special Singju. All of these are combined with either boiled "Chakwai" (rice bean) or white peas as the primary ingredient to create these Singjus, which are distinctive spicy salads. "Koujeng (grasshopper) Singju" is one of the most peculiar Singju besides the plants and vegetables Singju. This peppery Grasshopper Singju matches well with Sekmai Yu and is a seasonal Singju reliant on the availability of grasshoppers. Likewise, this attracts many local visitors. These Singjus are associated with the Sekmai people's culinary culture and ceremonies. Singju is a mandatory culinary item at the community feast of the community. Devouring and distributing this Sekmai Singju is primarily associated with "Angang Mana Hutpa or Sana Shinba" (ear piercing for infants), "Yumsengba" (birth ceremonies), and "Mang Karakpa" (death ceremonies). Typically, these Sekmai Singjus are wrapped with "Khanglaa" (leaves from the Khangra tree/parrot tree) or banana leaves along with cooked pork meat with a gravy that has already been gelated and frozen overnight. Typically, in most cases, these Singjus are served with the Sekmai Yu.

### **Chamthong/ Kangsoi**

Chamthong/Kangsoi is a traditional dish from the Indian state of Manipur in the country's northeast. It holds a prominent position in Manipuri dishes and is cherished by both locals and visitors. The name "Kangsoi" translates to "stew" or "curry," and the dish is a delicious blend of fresh seasonal vegetables, herbs, and seasonings. This savoury dish not only satisfies the palate but also provides a nutritious and healthy meal. Manipur has a long history of agriculture, and its inhabitants have always relied on the land's bountiful produce to create culinary delicacies. The availability of a variety of vegetables, greens, and seasonings from the region's verdant hills and fertile plains has made Kangsoi a favourite for generations.

The Sekmai community typically refers to this dish as Chamthong as an alternative term to Kangsoi. It is a vegetable stew made with seasonal vegetables that are boiled and seasoned with sliced onions, cloves, salt, garlic, a bit of ginger, a choice of fresh herbs collectively known as Maroi, and fermented fish as the key ingredient, which enhances the umami flavour and is common in the Manipuri diet. According to their preferences, some varieties of Chamthong or



Kangsoi include dried local fish to enhance the flavour. The stew is typically accompanied by freshly cooked rice.

### **Morok Metpa**

Morok Metpa is a delectable and spicy chutney. It is adaptable to individual preferences, allowing for a variety of flaming options ranging from mildly pungent to tongue-numbingly hot. The pungent heat of the chilli paste harmoniously complements the earthy flavours of those traditional dishes, creating a taste symphony. The primary component of Morok Metpa is the bhut jolokia chilli, also known as the ghost pepper, one of the spiciest chillies in the world. In addition to chillies, the paste may also contain garlic, ginger, and mixed with fermented Sekmai Ngari fish and then salted, which contributes to its complex flavour profile. It is feasible to customise the heat and flavour of this chutney to suit individual tastes by using a variety of peppers and spices. It is made with either dried or fresh chilli peppers. It complements all types of different dishes. Morok Metpa is typically served with traditional dishes such as Chamthong, Chagem Pomba, Utti and Chamfut.

### **Paaknam and Nganam**

Paaknam is a savoury cake made from a thick mixture of chickpea flour, seasonings, herbs, and vegetables, and further flavoured with chilli and the traditional Sengmai Ngari wrapped together with the batter of turmeric or banana leaves. It is followed by deep pan fraying without oil by tightening and compressing the batter's surface with a heavy object to eradicate any remaining steam, vapour, or moisture. However, some people prefer steaming before pan fraying based on their preferences. The aroma and flavour of turmeric leaves are more effective than those of banana leaves. It is considered a delicacy and a perfect dish for an evening snack, relished by both locals and visitors.

The preparation of Nganam requires meticulous ingredient selection and culinary arts. The primary ingredient of this savoury cake is the abundant small fish found in Manipur's lakes and rivers. Popular varieties of fish used in Nganam include "Ngakha" (*Pethia manipurensis*, also known as bitter fish), "Ngamu" (*Channa gachua*), "Ngatup" (*Schistura*), "Khabag" (*Bangana devdevi*), especially among others. The cake is composed of completely cleaned and finely minced fish. In addition to fish, Nganam includes a variety of aromatic herbs and seasonings that impart an explosion of flavour to the dish. Commonly used ingredients include ginger, garlic, green chillies, coriander leaves, and turmeric, which are all precisely chopped or ground to create a flavourful and smooth mixture. The Nganam preparation technique is similar to that of the Paaknam, although the ingredients are distinct. However, turmeric leaves are more aromatic and flavourful than banana leaves.

### **Nga Thongba**

Nga Thongba is a classic fish curry. The fish is cut into bite-sized pieces and cooked to a certain degree preceding being seasoned with crushed pepper and other seasonings. The community of Sekmai typically uses fewer spices and condiments in their cooking. These individuals enjoy the local fishes that are available in the Sekmai area. In years past, there were numerous fish in field canals and Sekmai rivers, such as Turen Achouba, Keram, Pukshu, Sendrangkhong and others. Traditionally, "Loo Thumba," a fish catcher resembling a basket, was extensively used.



As time passed, the availability of fish diminished, forcing people to rely on imports from within or outside the state. Contrary to Oksha Thongba, the Sekmai community has fewer cravings for fish. Even though fish curry is a substitute for Oksha Thongba in Sekmai, it is not regarded as especially appealing at Sekmai's functions and ceremonies.

### **Hawaijar (Soybean paste)**

Hawaijar is a fermented soybeans product native to the northeastern Indian state of Manipur. It is a ubiquitous condiment used in numerous Manipuri dishes, and it has a distinct flavour and aroma. Soybeans are the primary ingredient in Hawaijar. As for this dish, only high-quality, clean, and dry soybeans are used. The first stage in the preparation process is to soak the soybeans in water. Soybeans are typically soaked overnight or for eight to ten hours to soften and hydrate them. The soybeans are simmered until it is completely cooked. This further softens the soybeans and assures their safety for consumption. Following the soybeans have been completely cooked, they are drained to remove superfluous water. The objective is to have moist soybeans, not soggy ones. The soybeans are then allowed to ferment. This is traditionally done in a basket made of bamboo, which allows air circulation and creates an ideal environment for fermentation. Typically, banana leaves and cloth are used to cover soybeans to protect them from dust and parasites. Depending on the ambient temperature and intended flavour, the fermentation process can last from a few days to a week. Environment-present microorganisms initiate the fermentation process during this period. These microorganisms transform the carbohydrates and proteins in the beans into various organic compounds, imparting hawaijar with its distinctive flavour, aroma, and texture. It is essential to regularly stir the fermenting beans. This guarantees uniform fermentation and prevents the growth of undesirable molds and spoilage. Locally produced Hawaijar in Sekmai is pure, hygienic, and unadulterated, which reduces the probability of food contamination. It is consumed still raw by preparing chutney, cooking, or frying. Local "Ema" mothers continue to prepare and sell the specialised fermentation, which is wrapped in banana leaves, in local markets.

### **Chagem Pomba**

Chagem Pomba is prepared with a variety of vegetables based on the season and availability of the vegetables. This dish is a mixture of various vegetables that have been boiled until softened and thoroughly mixed by stirring until they become gelatinous. Chagem Pomba is a traditional dish made with a variety of ingredients, including green leafy vegetables, fermented soybeans (depending on preference, but the Sekmai community rarely uses soybeans), smokey and sun-dried fish, rice (broken rice is most suitable), white or green peas, and most importantly Sengmai Ngari. Although the appearance and aroma of this dish may not appeal to those unfamiliar with Manipuri cuisine, once tasted, it will be unforgettable.

### **Utti Pomba**

A well-known vegetarian dish is Utti Pomba or Thongba. Green leafy and stem vegetables are cooked in a spicy broth with onions, garlic, ginger, and green chillies to create a flavourful curry. It is typically accompanied by steaming rice. Fresh and green leaves are an excellent choice as a garnish. A lot of people in Manipur and elsewhere appreciate eating it because it is nutritious.





### **Kangmet and Kangsu**

"Kangsu" and "Kangmet" are popular dishes in Manipur owing to their distinct flavour and preparation. Kangsu is a type of salad that is typically prepared with "Usoi" (new bamboo shoots), "Uthum Mana" (Angiosperm plant), and "Peruk" (Centella Asiatica). These are combined with white peas that have been steamed or dried partially crushed and fermented fish chilli chutney. Kangmet, on the other hand, is boiled dried mashed potatoes with boiled Usoi, Uthum Mana, or Peruk and fermented fish chilli chutney. These dishes are typically served as side dishes or appetizers and tandem well with rice-based or stew-based traditional dishes.

### **Chamfut**

Chamfut is a simple seasonal vegetable dish prepared by boiling them. It can be prepared using or with no sugar, subject to the preferences of the individual. However, Sekmai people typically add sugar. Whenever there is hot, spicy, or oily food, there is a yearning for a simple boil dish. This simple dish plays a significant role in the diet of the community.

This gastronomic heritage must be preserved to maintain cultural identity, nurture community pride, and ensure the existence of age-old food traditions for future generations. Thereby honouring and preserving their culinary traditions, the Sekmai community can share their distinctive tastes and cultural narratives with the world whereas preserving their distinct identity and culinary legacy. The very own "Sekmai Indigenous Foods Festival" was initiated in 2022. Moreover, there is a "Sekmai River Festival" on the banks of the state's most prominent river, the Sekmai Turel. This river festival also features cuisine, drinks, snacks, songs, and music. There are between 100 and 150 vendors in and around Sekmai who sell food and drinks throughout the year to enable them to preserve the culinary culture and run their families.

## **3. CONCLUSION**

The paper attempts to deliver insight into the global understanding of the culturally unique food practices of Sekmai, a community situated in the picturesque setting of Manipur. Through studying the traditional dishes and culinary practices of this particular setting, it becomes apparent that food assumes a crucial role in the development and preservation of its cultural identity. The community's profound connection with its land and history is evident in the distinctive flavours, preparation techniques, and utilisation of locally sourced products. Examining Sekmai Yu to Hawaijar, and from Sengmai Ngari to Chamfut, every culinary masterpiece encapsulates a narrative and embodies the fundamental aspects of their heritage. Moreover, this study underscores the significance of food in promoting social cohesiveness and solidarity within the Sekmai community. Meals provide a purpose beyond providing nourishment, as they facilitate opportunities for interpersonal connection, commemoration, and the transmission of indigenous traditions over successive generations. The act of participating in communal feasts, engaging in the sharing of Sekmai Yu, as well as preparing food offerings during festivals and rituals collectively symbolize a sense of unity and camaraderie among the community. In light of Sekmai's adoption of modernisation and the subsequent emergence of new obstacles, the preservation of their gastronomic heritage assumes paramount importance in the preservation of their cultural identity. It is imperative to exert endeavours to protect and advance these customary gastronomic offerings and culinary customs, guaranteeing their



sustained prosperity in the face of evolving circumstances. Through the act of assigning significance and commemorating its gastronomic riches, the Sekmai community possesses the capacity to disseminate its distinct cultural heritage on a global scale, thereby cultivating a sense of mutual understanding and appreciation. The food culture of Sekmai exemplifies the significant role that food plays in influencing and moulding cultural practices, promoting social cohesion, and safeguarding customary practices. The community of Sekmai demonstrates the symbiotic connection between food and culture, serving as a testament to the significant role that food plays in our collective human experience. The commemoration of our global heritage is enhanced by our understanding and appreciation involving multiple cultural expressions.

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