

Anthology of Northeastern food culture released



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Raktim Baruah 27 April 2013 Updated 28 Apr 11759 views

In a major boost to further exploration and debates on the food culture of the different tribes and communities of Northeast India, Nagaland Governor His Excellency Shri Ashwani Kumar today formally released '*Food Trail: Discovering Food Culture of Northeast India*' - a first-of-its-kind anthology on food culture of Northeast India in the presence of a host of scholars, writers and distinguished personalities from various walks of life. The book, which has been conceived, written and compiled by writer Aiyushman Dutta, features a host of prominent voices from the region as also from different parts of the world. 'Food Trail' has been published by NEZCC, under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

Releasing the book, Shri Ashwani Kumar said, "It was an enriching experience for me to go through this unique book. I really learnt a lot about the culture and society of the region after reading these beautiful narratives. I would like to urge everyone to buy this book and read it."

Distinguished anthropologist and Tagore National Fellow Prof AC Bhagawati, who has written the foreword of the book, termed the book as a novel and path-breaking venture. "*Food Trail* is a highly unusual book and a first-of-its-kind. Food culture is a huge subject and it is surprising very little has been done in this regard. NEZCC deserves praise for supporting such an innovative endeavour."

A first-of-its-kind anthology, *Food Trail: Discovering the Food Culture of Northeast India* offers a peek into the life and culture of the people here through the prism of their food. Containing perspectives on subjects as varied as anthropology, sociology and literature, this book is a comprehensive database for those seeking to know about the social and symbolic role of food in Northeast India. Besides featuring narratives by some of the most respected voices of the region, the high quality aesthetic photographs provides for a visual delight.

Food Trail includes more than 30 insightful narratives by prominent Northeast Indian writers and researchers, including Prof Temsula Ao (Padmashree awardee), Easterine Kire, Kula Saikia, Anjum Hassan, Jahnavi Barua, Janice Pariat, Susan Waten, Dr Rabindra Teron, Dharam Singh Teron, Meenakshi Borkotoki, Cherrie L Changte, Karunamay Sinha, Bhaskar Phukan, and many more.

NEZCC director Som Kamei said that the book was published in an effort of the centre to develop the cuisine industry of the region. He said, “Food is an integral part of every human culture. The importance of food in understanding human culture lies in its infinite variability – a variability that is not essential for species survival. For survival needs, people everywhere could eat the same and simple food. But human culture, over the ages, have been experimenting, innovating and developing sophisticated cuisines, which reflect human knowledge, culture, art and which have become an expression of love.”

Congratulating Dutta for his untiring endeavour to popularise the exquisite cuisines of Northeast India, Kamei said that the NEZCC had undertaken the task to not only popularise the cuisines of the region but also to document the various cultural milieu in which these cuisines have developed to become what it is today. “We hope that these rich collections of essays from experts and researchers will generate interest in the cuisine of the region and in the process, spark the potential cuisine industry and help in the overall development of cultural industries in Northeast India.”

Talking about the genesis of the book, Dutta said, “Most people in the world still relate food with general dietary habits and practices while the fact remains that food touches every facet of human life. The diversity of food as a subject can be gauged from the numerous and varied ways in which it affects people all across the globe – be it through nutrition, environment, economics, society, et al. Although, in recent years, a lot of interest can be noticed in the realm of food studies across the world, very little has been done on this subject in the country, barring of course a few well-documented essays and articles.”

He further said, “Given the huge expanse of food studies as a subject, ‘Food Trail’ can be described as an amateurish effort have a first-of-its-kind birds eye view of the social and symbolic role of food in shaping the life and culture of the people of Northeast and in determining their identity. But nonetheless, it is a beginning and I hope that that the well-researched articles are able to create renewed enthusiasm in the subject. I also hope that the government and agencies concerned realise the potential of the subject and support further documentation and study on the food practices of the region.”

In the open discussion that ensued, Padmashree awardee Prof Temsula Ao said that food is not only an unifier but also a divider. She dwelt on how Northeasterners were not allowed to take up houses on rent for cooking smelly food.

Also present in the gathering were Assamese cuisine expert Jyoti Das, Padmashree awardee Sentila Yanger, Music Task Force director Gugs Chihsi, Dr Ayangla Longkumer, amongst others. The event was conducted by popular Naga writer and columnist Susan Waten.

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