



शि योमी जिला
SHI YOMI DISTRICT



NEWSLETTER

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Dear Reader,

This month we delve deep into the vibrant life of Mechuka, focussing on an agricultural tradition of the Memba community, - finger millet (Teymi) at the heart of their practices. Join us as we explore unique cultivation methods adapted to the valley's high-altitude subalpine climate and the sustainable use of local ferns (pha-so) to enrich soil fertility. Additionally, we look at the significance of millet in the Memba lifestyle in the form of traditional cuisines and local beverage Chang. These practices not only sustain livelihoods but also embody the rich heritage of Mechukha, showcasing the deep connection between the Memba people and their land.

- **Liya Bagra** A.P.C.S, Deputy Commissioner, Shi-Yomi District & Chairman-Destination Management Committee-Mechukha

The Memba community relies heavily on cultivation for their livelihood, with agriculture serving as their primary occupation since the early days of settlement. They regard agricultural land as their main source of income and ensure that every inch of it is utilized effectively, leaving no land unused or misused.

MILLET CULTIVATION

Mechukha boasts a subalpine to alpine climate. Residents of Mechuka have rich knowledge of traditional agro-pastoral sector enabling them to sustainably utilize natural resources for their livelihood. Despite it being a high-altitude region not suitable for all crops, finger millets – locally known as Teymi—play a vital role in their cropping system.

In Mechukha, millet cultivation is uniquely practiced using the transplanting method, a technique rarely adopted by other tribes in the state's mid- and low-altitude regions.



Land and Nursery Preparation

Land preparation is carried out manually using spades to achieve optimal soil tilth. Cultivation takes place on upland terrain under rainfed conditions. The process begins with slicing off the top soil layers, which include grasses and their roots, and leaving them to dry for about a month. The nursery bed is then prepared by gathering the dried grasses along with the attached soil and burning them. This creates a bed known as lingtup, where finger millet seeds are sown during February and March.



Transplanting

Transplanting is typically carried out in April and May. Given the short cropping period in this high-altitude region, the transplanting method helps reduce the crop duration, allowing harvesting to be completed before the onset of the extreme cold weather in winter.



Soil Fertility Management

Unlike other parts of the state where 'jhuming' or shifting is predominant, local tribes of Mechuka practice settled cultivation system within limited cultivable land. To improve the soil fertility without using chemical fertilizers, they use a particular kind of fern (called pha-so in local dialect) to maintain and enrich soil fertility. The fern leaves are collected from the forest and the pastoral land during dry season. The collected plant biomasses are heaped together and stored in the field and used as manure.



Harvesting and Threshing

Harvesting takes place in October when the crop reaches the physiological maturity stage. The panicles are collected in bamboo baskets and then sun-dried thoroughly. Threshing is performed using a traditional wooden device called Yorgue. This implement, crafted from two wooden sticks joined by a small node, is designed to rotate and swing with minimal effort, making it an efficient tool for threshing finger millet.



Traditional uses of finger millet

Finger millet grains can be processed in several ways. Generally, the 'Memba' tribe uses it for making local beverages like 'Chang' or 'Apong'. Prepared from finger millet, it is highly valued and prized as compare to those prepared from rice.

In addition to making local beverage, it is also used for making Paa, chapatti, porridge etc.



GANDHI JAYANTI CELEBRATIONS

Gandhi Jayanti celebration was observed in Mechukha. One such event was observed at Dorjeeling village by Self Help Group 'Ane Primary Level Federation' in collaboration with Panchayat members of Dorjeeling village. The celebration was graced by National level monitoring team from Lucknow, Block Development Officer along with BDO staffs, CDPO Mechukha, RWD JE, Goan Buras and self help groups of the village.

