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Remembering Forgotten Foods: A Collaborative Project

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Remembering Forgotten Foods: A Collaborative Project

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SIT India Summer 2018: Agroecology and Food Security in the Himalayas

11 July 2018

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I. Acknowledgements

Firstly, we would like to our acknowledge our directors Tara-Ji, Durga-Ji and Manoj-Ji. We would not have been able to complete this project without their guidance and support over the last six weeks. Next, we would like to acknowledge the pivotal role of both the Chalamthang and Patuk communities. We would like to thank each and everyone in the villages who took time out of their day, especially during peak harvesting season, to engage and interact with us in order to have the best cultural exchange possible. Additionally, I would like to thank Rupen for helping to direct the play and translate during rehearsals. We would also like to thank our parents and universities for making this experience possible. We would also like to acknowledge all of the guest lecturers for their academic perspectives that paired very well with our experiences in the villages.

II. Project Rationale

The processes of orientalism has framed industrial farming positively simply because it is practiced in the western world. In "Orientalism: Western Representation of the Orient," Edward Said argues that the construct of the orient serves the purpose of extending the exclusionary process upon which idea of european superiority emerged (Said, 1978). The "orient," or the "east," Said suggests, is a social construction of the history, tradition, and vocabulary of non-European countries created as a product of the western gaze. The idea that countries of Europe are superior emerged out of the "sovereign Western consciousness," since people from the western world had the means to travel to other places in the world during the process of colonization. Thus, people who are blinded by the orientalist gaze belief any practice form the western world is superior even before comparing the benefits and consequences. This is precisely the case for industrial farming and ecologically attuned farming.

A comparison of impacts of industrial farming and ecologically attuned farming reveals that industrial farming cannot meet the food needs of a growing human population. In "Farming for a Small Planet: Agroecology Now," Lappé argues that the pressure to have higher returns in "ever-larger farm operations, corporate suppliers, and food processors," the regenerative capacities of nature are diluted (Lappé, 2016). Industrial farming requires large amounts of direct and indirect inputs to function such as chemical fertilizers, manufacturing of GMO seeds, increased water use, and fossil fuels. Agroecology, which relies on principles of biodiversity, preservation of indigenous knowledge, and environmental protection, can provide a path for nutritious food that is accessible. Through a variety of case studies, including Sikkim, Shiva and Singh demonstrate the differences in vitamin content and yields in organic and conventional agriculture. In the context of Sikkim, "organic mixed farming produces 21.6 times as much vitamin per acre of farmland in Sikkim as conventional monocropping" (Shiva et al., 2011). Through holistic, well-researched experiments, Shiva and Singh prove that agroecology is in fact the only way to ensure nutritional security.

A key factor to understand in our project is the aspiration of young Indians in various fields including farming, manufacturing, trade, and medicine. The majority of the Indian youth aspire to be a part of their nation's transition from a "developing" to "developed" model. Most young Indians desire jobs in medical, technology, and engineering sectors. This has heavily impacted small village communities and other rural Indian cities because many of the villagers' traditional professions and livelihoods are now perceived as "backwards". Because rural communities cannot always provide high-paying opportunities, the younger generations have begun to move to larger cities in order to fulfill their aspirations. CEOs of large corporations have showed interest in hiring workers from rural areas of the nation such as Sikkim because they can evade paying them a reasonable salary (Vijayakumar, 2013). The literature shows women tend to have more flexible professional dreams because they are expect to alter their career depending on their future spouse, where men do not face this obstacle (Vijayakumar, 2013).

In India, many youth are steering away from agriculture in favor of other lines of work (Sharma, 2018). Students from homes which rely on farms for livelihood are no exception. Young people are receiving a higher education than ever before and are pursuing less labor intensive careers. However, the article states that the number of opportunities in the agriculture field are increasing. The agriculture sector is "four times more effective in preventing poverty" than other sectors. Further, as while other business are looking to downsize, the farming industry will always be expanding in order to feed the worlds ever expanding population. In the mid-1960s the chairman of the UGC decided to implement a rule that there must be a farming university in all the states of India (Sharma, 2018). Now there are 49 agricultural universities in India offering many degree programs for Indian youth to move forward in their education, yet not move away from farming.

The declining interest in farming among the youth of India presents a challenge for the transference of indigenous knowledge from older generation to younger generations. "Adaptations of culturally and nutritionally important traditional foods in Eastern Himalaya" by Singh et al. highlights the wealth of knowledge the elder women in the Adi tribe have about regional biodiversity. The study reports that there is a significant divide between the traditional knowledge the elder generation holds compared to the younger generations. The younger generation is less informed about the entire farming process, specifically the harvesting process and the food preparation process. As the younger generation becomes less involved in the agricultural processes, the transference of indigenous knowledge becomes more difficult.

Currently agriculture is not heavily emphasized in the Indian school system, but there has been a push to include a unit emphasizing the key components of farming. Supporters of this movement include elders and older parents who are also farmers and want their children to learn about farming (Yadav and Ali, 2015). Indian citizens who are in favor of vocational training also support adding farming in the curriculum because they want to prepare their children for as much professions as possible. While there is mixed support for altering the current Indian education system, students who are attending school today are not taught farming practices or the importance of agriculture.

III. Project Goals

Our final project aimed to validate indigenous knowledge and empower younger generations about their rich, organic farming practices while also debunking the stereotypes of American food culture. Additionally, we aimed to reverse the sense of inferiority about agricultural practices in Sikkim amongst young people. The first component will consist of a cooking activity focused around forgotten foods. The second part of the project compares the preparation process of two dishes– one made in Sikkim and the other from the United States. The first poster compares a traditional Himalayan dish with a typical American dish. The second compares the sourcing of the two dishes comparing the local farmer with the factory farm. The last portion was a short theater performance with 8-13 year olds from the village that simply illustrates the history of industrial farming and the negative effects it had on land, food, and health.

IV. Process

Before organizing the forgotten foods workshop, we held a meeting with the elders of Patuk village. We asked the group, "What are some foods that you remember eating in the past that are no longer made today?" We asked village elders because they have direct experience eating cooking and consuming these dishes. The group provided multiple responses: millet, roti, porridge, and corn rice. On July 2nd, we met with Jin Maya Regmi to prepare corn roti so that we would understand the process before the final workshop on July 8th. The preparation process was nearly 3.5 hours and required the cooperation of eleven people. Noting that our workshop could not be longer than two hours, our academic director advised that we prepare a buckwheat dish instead.

Forgotten Foods Workshop

On July 8th, fifteen children ages 8-13 attended our workshop to prepare *phaparko phuraula*. The objective of the workshop was to (1) teach children about nutritious forgotten foods though experiential learning (2) underscore the role of women in providing nutrition for children (3) provide an opportunity for village elders to interact with young children (4) expose boys and girls to the food preparation process. There were a total of six steps to prepare the dish. First, we used a *dhiki* to ground buckwheat into finer pieces. Next, a *nanglo* was used to separate the buckwheat from lighter fragments such as soil and dust. Then, a *jauto* was used to ground the buckwheat further into the hard outer shell and softer inner portion. Thereafter, a *chalni* was then used to separate the hard outer shell of the buckwheat and the softer inside portion. Next, the children added water to the flour and mixed the batter. Finally, we fried the batter in hot oil in small portions. Throughout the preparation process, we asked a series of reflective questions to

children as well as the village elders who helped prepare the dish. We asked elders how they felt when young children demonstrated interest in forgotten foods. We asked the children about the texture of the food, the opinion on the role of women in preparing foods, and the gendered division of labor in the food preparation process.

Nutrition Poster Comparison

We decided to demystify two processes in particular regarding the food production system of the United States and Sikkim: nutrition value of food and the production process of the food. We decided that educational posters should be presented and then afterwards given to the village. The purpose of the posters was to demystify aspects of American eating habits while empowering the local community in their traditional food. In order to gather information of the poster, we interviewed two farmers and searched the internet for well-established facts about the American food production system. The farmers interviewed were Oneyla Bhutia and Yodha Raj Sharma. We interviewed the farmers because they have direct experience with what grows on their farms. The interviewees described the variety of crops they grow, how they grow them, what food they bring to the market, and how they feed their families. We researched the way processed food in America was created and then made a poster comparing it to how most Nepali food was made based on the interviews held with the farmers. We used the same approach to create a poster about the nutrition of processed American food and Nepali foods. We used Canva to design the posters. Once the posters were created we presented them to the village at Patuk and gave them to the community.

Children's Theatre Production

For the third portion of our collaborative project, our group wrote a children's play to highlight the importance of eating local, nutritious food and the impact of the green revolution in Sikkim. We interacted with community elders to have a better understanding of the history of agriculture in Sikkim. Then, our group wrote a play titled *Remembering Forgotten Foods*, which included five acts with seven characters. During the interaction with the elders, we posed a series of questions such as how has your farming practice changed since organic certification? and how have your children's behavior changed? Using the responses, we crafted a script that discussed (1) the farming methods and the condition of the farms before the green revolution (2) the role of the government in the green revolution, (3) the impact of chemical fertilizers on crop yield and nutritional value of food, (4) the nutritional value of packaged food, and (5) the importance of learning traditional knowledge from the elder generation. The play was performed on July 8th, 2018 with children ages 8-13 in front of the community in Patuk, East Sikkim. One day was spent writing the play in English dialogue and another day was spent translating and transcribing the script in Nepali. Then, we spent three days rehearsing the play with the children in the village. Simple costumes were chosen to signify specific roles. For example, the children who played the grandparents wore traditional dress, the mother wore a kurta, the governmental official was dressed in a uniform with a tie, and the children were wearing western dress. The performance served as a microcosm of the effects chemical farming on livelihoods in Patuk. The purspose of the play was to demystify the perception of processed foods as superior to local foods, and to validate the importance of community elders and indigenous knowledge.

V. Deliverables

The outcomes of our project are (1) a workshop to prepare *phaparko phuraula* (2) a poster comparing nutritional value of American food and Himalayan food (3) a poster comparing food production process in America and Himalayas and (4) a play highlighting the importance of eating local, organic food.

The outcomes from the *phaparko phuraula* workshop are (1) greater knowledge about traditional knowledge among children (2) creating a sense of pride among Nepali regarding organic farming and (3) empowering women regarding the importance of their traditional knowledge. The workshop served as an intervention to the lack of transference of indigenous knowledge from older generation to younger generations. We consciously choose to limit our influence during the workshop and serve as facilitators. Our workshop was designed to maximize interactions between elders and children since the elderly, not we, possess the traditional knowledge that must be taught to young children. The knowledge that is transferred, however, does not need to be static. We found that kids who participated in the workshop believed that the responsibility for preparing food should be handled equally by men and women. We also found that after the workshop, children recognized elderly women as "experts" in cooking traditional food and were inspired to learn more dishes in future. Since children of this generation are exposed to more influence from the outside due to globalisation that any other generation in history, workshops such as these are crucial in facilitating the transference of indigenous knowledge to younger generations.

The takeaways of the poster process and presentation were greater awareness of the issues in the American agriculture system and deeper appreciation for the organic farming practices in Sikkim. Our experiences living with and interviewing farmers about their farming practices revealed the connection between where the food was grown and where it was consumed. The close proximity of where Nepali food is grown made that of American food seem much greater. Observing this connection made us realize that not all vegetables were equal. The cucumbers we consumed in Sikkim were organic, highly nutritious, and directly from farmers' home garden. Although the cucumbers in the United States look similar, they are traveling a great distance, are grown with chemicals, and contain only a fraction of the nutrients. Although the concept of industrial agriculture in America was not new to us, seeing the process on the other end of the spectrum made us really aware of how toxic our food is in reality.

The children's theatre production presented many challenges, but was ultimately successful. When the rehearsals began, the children needed to first learn the history of agriculture in Patuk and its connection to the plotline. The major challenge that we faced was encouraging the children to act freely and engage in their character roles. Most of the children remained stiff and recited their lines in a monotone. Eventually, the children eventually learned to act naturally on stage: keeping our body movements loose, exaggerating our emotions and expressions, and getting into their character. It seemed as though the behavior that is taught in the school system proved difficult to unlearn in the context of a theatre performance. Despite this challenge, the children were eager to participate. Almost all of the children practiced each day at home with their families. By running lines at home, parents and family members were also able to engage with the process of putting on a play and learn the history and impact of green revolution in addition to their children.

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Appendix A:

WHERE DOES OUR FOOD COME FROM? हाम्रो खानेकुरा कहाँबाट आउँछ?

HIMALAYAN



- The typical Nepali farmer has been farming for decades and grows a variety of crops.
- They feed their families first and sell the excess crops in the market.
- Their family members and other villagers typically work on the farm to encourage community.
- They take pride in growing organic foods such as vegetables and rice.
- They prefer local foods over packaged foods because packaged foods are bad for their health and the environment.

हिमाली किसान

- हाम्रो हजुरबा-आमाले धेरै प्रकारका खानेकुरा फलाउँदै आएका छन्।
- उनीहरू पहिला आफ्नो परिवारलाई खानकौलागि राक्छन र उब्रिएको बजारमा बेच्छन्।
- उनिहरूले खानेकुरा ऑफ्नै बारीमा फलाएर खान्छन्।
- उनीहरू स्वास्थ्यको लागी घरैमा फलेको खानेकुरा खान मनपराउँछन्।
- उनिहरू खानेकुरा आँपनै बारीमा फलाँउदा गर्व गर्छन।
- उनिहरूले खानेकुरा chemical अर्थात विष नहाली फलाँउछन्।

RMERICAN CORPORATION अमेरिकी किसान



- American farmers grow only one type of food in a large quantity.
- They put chemical fertilizers and pesticides in their farm.
- · The majority of Americans eat meat.
- American farmers grow vegetables to feed the animals to have more meat.
- Americans bring their food and vegetables from very far and do not grow food in a home garden.
- In order to preserve the vegetables and meat, they use chemicals.

- अमेरिकी किसानले एउटै किसिमको खानेक्ररा धेरै मात्रामा फलॉउँदै आएका छन्।
- उनिहरूले खानेकुरा chemical अर्थात विष हाली फलाँउछन्।
- उनिहरूले खानेकुरामा धेरै माँसु खानछन्।
- अमेरिकी किसानले माँसुको लागि गाईबस्तु पाल्छन्।
- अमेरिकी किसानले फलाएको सब्जी गाईबस्तुलाई माँसु बढाउनुको लागि दिन्छन्।
- अमेरिकी खाना र सब्जी धेरै जस्तो धेरै टाडा र बाहिरबाट आँउछ र उनिहरू आँफ्नै बारीमा फलाएर खांदैनन्।
- सब्जी र माँसुमा धेरै दिन नकुहिनको लागि chemicals हालेको हुन्छ।

chemicals हालेको हुन्छ। SIT STUDY ABROAD/WORLD LEARNING INDIA 2018 SUMMER SIKKIM: AVERY PERKINS, CLAIRE ROBERTS, SOPHIA ALHADEFF AND AZHER JAWEED

Appendix B:

AMERICAN AND NEPALI FOODS: A COMPARISON

अमेरिकन अनि हिमाली भोजनको तुलना

NEPALI FOOD



- Fewer calories: better for
- Less saturated fat: better for
- More lean meats and fish
- More iron: better for muscles and blood
- More zinc: better for wound healing and fighting infection
- More vitamin A: better for vision and fighting disease
- More calcium: better for strong bones and teeth
- · Strengthened cultural capacity and well being

American food



- · High in calories: weight gain
- Increased risk of developing
- · High sodium: increased risk of heart failure
- · High cholesterol: increased risk of heart disease and
- High carbohydrates and sugar: Increased risk of type 2 diabetes, acne, and bad teeth

हिमाली भोजन

- कम्ती क्यालोरी: वजन नियन्त्रणको लागि राम्रो
- कम बिषालु तेल पदार्थ: हृदयको लागि राम्रो
- अधिक विटामिन : घाउ उपचार र रोग रोकथामको लागि राम्रो
- विटामिन ए: दृष्टि बढ़ाँउन र रोगको रोकथाम
- अधिक क्याल्सियम: बलियो दाँत र हड्डी
- परम्परा, संस्कृती, र खुशियाली झल्किने

अमेरिकी भोजन

- अधिक क्यालोरी : मोटापा बढाँउने
- अधिक सोडियम: हृदय घातको सम्भावना बढाउने
- अधिक कोलेस्ट्रॉल: हृदय रोग र घातको सम्भावना बढाँउने
- खुनमा अधीक कार्बोहाइड्रेट र चीनी: डायबिटिज, डंडिफोर, र दाँत बिग्रने सम्भावना

Appendix C:

Remembering Forgotten Foods

<u>Characters:</u> Grandfather (GF) Grandmother (GM) Father (F) Mother (M) Daughter (D) Son (S) Government Official (GO)

Scene I: The Beginning

60 years ago, before the Green Revolution Single Family Farm in Patuk, East Sikkim

GM: This is our farm GM: यो हाम्रो खेत / बारी हो। GF: We love farming as a family with our children GF: हामी आफ्नो ननिहरु संग एक परिवार भयेर खेती गर्न मन पराँउछौ GM: We grow millet, corn, and oranges GM: हामी कोदो, मकै र सुन्तला फलाँउछौ। GF: Ri कोदो, मकै र सुन्तला फलाँउछौ। GF: We have five cows on our farm. GF: हाम्रोमा पाँच वटा गायहरू छन्। GM: Our soil is so fertile and our food is so nutritious. GM: हाम्रो माटो धेरै मलिलो छ, र हाम्रो खाना धेरै पौष्टिक छ।

Scene II: Introduction of the Green Revolution

The year is 1960 and the government has begun to introduce chemical fertilizers to small farmers across India

Mother and Father standing next to the Grandparents

GO: Hello! I am a government official sent from Delhi to help you and teach you how to grow more food

GO: नमस्ते! म दिल्लीबाट पठाएको एक सरकारी अधिकारि हुँ जो तपाईंलाई धेरै अन्नबाली अनि सब्जि फलाँउन सिकाँउछु।

GF: How to grow more food from the seeds?

GF: तपाँइपो हामीलाइ धेरै अन्न फलाउन सिकाउने?

GO: The seeds have been given medicine so that they grow more food and last longer. GO: बीउहरू मा दबाइ हालेको हुन्छ त्यासैले त्यो धेरै दिन सम्मा थाम्छ र बेसि फल्न सक्छ। GM: Looks skeptical... Why do we need this? GM: [शंकास्पद देखिन्छ] हामीलाई यो किन आवश्यक छ? GO: So you can sell the excess food in the market and make money. GO: त्यसैले तपाईं बजारमा उबरिएको अन्न/सब्जी बेच्न र पैसा कमाउन सक्नुहुन्छ।

Scene III: Effects of the Green Revolution

1 year later

GF: I have grown so much more corn this year! GF: मैले यस वर्ष यति धेरै मकै फलाएको छु! GM: Yes, but it is not as tasty as it used to be. GM: हो, तर यो पहिलाको जसतो स्वादिष्ट छैन। GF: But we have more food. GF: तर हामीसँग धेरै त छ। GM: [Nods Head] GM: [नोड हेड] 5 years later.

GM: *Picks up soil*... This soil has lost all of its nutrients! What will we be able to grow? GM: माटो पिक गर्दछ ... यो माटोले आफ्नो सबै पोषक तत्व गुमायो! हामी अब यहाँ के फलाउन सकछौ र?

M: I am so hungry. M: म धेरै भोकाको छ।

F: Me too!

F: म पनि!

GM: What good is this corn! Where are all of our vegetables?!

GM: यो मकै र भात मात्रै फलाएर हुन्छ र? सब्जीजरूपनी त फलाँउनू र खानु पर्छ?!

F: I miss millet!

F: मलाइ कोदो सारै मनपर्छ तर छैन के गर्नु!

GM: I used to be able to feed my whole family and now I have to go the market to buy my food, but I never have enough money.

F: पहिला मैले सबै थोक अफनै घर मा सबै परिवारको लागि फलाँथे तर अहिले बजारमा किन्न जनू पर्यो। पैसा पानी कमति छ, के गर्न्?

GO: Covered in money

GO: पैसामा राखिएको।

Scene IV: Organic Farming Policy Implementation

The year is 2014. Plants rise from the dead. GO and Mother and Father shake hands

M: I am so glad my mother taught me how to farm.

M: धन्न मलाई आमाले खेति गर्न सिकाउन्भयो।

F: Now that I milk my own cow twice each day, I have enough milk for my family and we never go hungry.

M: अब म हरेक दिन दुई पटक आफ्नै गाई दुन्छु, मेरो परिवारको लागि मलाई पर्याप्त दूध हुन्छ र हामी कहिल्यै भोकै ह्दैंनौ।

M: We even have some left over to sell at the market in Gangtok.

M: हामीलाई अब सिंगताम बजार मा बेच्नको लागि पनि उभरिंछ।

S: I still think Maggi tastes better than vegetables!

S: मलाई अझै पनि मेग्गी सब्जी भन्दा टेस्टि लाग्छ!

D: Farming makes my clothes dirty!

D: खेतबारीमा काम गर्दा मेरो लुगा मैला हुन्छ।

S: I'd rather watch Hollywood movies than farm with my parents.

S: म आम बाबा संग खेतबारीमा काम गरनू भन्द त पिकछर हेर्छ्।

Scene V: Learning how to cook 'Forgotten Foods'

The year is 2018. Grandmother is in the kitchen cooking with the Mother. Children walk into the kitchen.

D: What are you cooking? D: के पकाउँदै हुनुहुन्छ? S: It smells good! S: टेस्टि बासना आयो! M: We are making buckwheat roti. M: हामी फापर को रोटी बनाउदैछुं। F: I have only heard of this and have a faint memory of this dish from my childhood. F: मैले यो सुनेको मात्र छु र अलि-अलि थाहा छ। S: Throws away Maggi package in dust bin.. This is more nutritious than Maggi! S: यो मैग्गी भन्दापनि मिथो र पोशिलो रहेछ! D: It's so fresh! D: यो कस्तो ताजा रहेछ! S and D: Let's all farm together! S and D: अब हामी सबै खेतबारीमा काम गर्न जुम!