



Axone: Ethnic Cuisine of Northeast India

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Why in News

Recently, **Axone or fermented soya bean** has become popular, which is eaten by many **tribal communities** in different parts of Northeast India especially in **Nagaland**.

Key Points

- Axone — **also called as akhuni** — is a fermented soya bean of Nagaland, known for its distinctive flavour and smell.
 - It is a **condiment** (a spice, sauce, or preparation that is added to food) used to make pickles, chutney or curries.
- It is prepared and eaten across **Nagaland mainly by the Sumi (also Sema) tribe**.
- It belongs to the broader **phenomena of fermentation** necessary for food preservation in certain ecological contexts.
 - Fermentation gives it a distinct smell and taste.
- **Fermented soya bean is known by different names** in different parts of Northeast India, including Meghalaya and Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur as well in other South, Southeast and East Asian countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Japan, Korea, China, Myanmar, Vietnam and Indonesia.
 - It is the one food that **connects the Eastern Himalayas** as a **culturally cross-cutting cuisine**.

Food Fermentation

- Food fermentation is a food processing technology that utilizes the growth and metabolic activity of microorganisms for the stabilization and transformation of food materials.
 - Fermentation was primarily developed for the stabilization of perishable agricultural produce.
 - It is a process through which microorganisms like yeast and bacteria convert carbs- such as starch and sugar- into alcohol or acids.

- **Uses:**
 - The production of carbon dioxide is used to make bread.
 - The production of organic acids is exploited to preserve and flavor vegetables and dairy products.
 - The production of alcohol is utilised to convert fruit juices to wine, grains into beer, and foods rich in starch, such as potatoes, are fermented and then distilled to make spirits.

Soya Bean

- The **soya bean (*Glycine max*)** is a **species of legume** native to East Asia, widely grown for its edible bean, which has numerous uses e.g. soya milk, soya food etc.
- It is a significant and cheap **source of protein** apart from dietary minerals and B vitamins.

Sumi Tribe

- The 'Sumi Naga' is one of the major **ethnic groups in Nagaland**.
- Sumi Nagas mostly inhabit the **central and southern regions** of Nagaland.
- There are also seven Sumi villages in **Tinsukia District of Assam**.
- **Tuluni and Ahuna** are the major festivals.

Way Forward

- It has been seen often that people from Northeast are being refrained from cooking axone and other fermented foods. This has often led to relegating the food of **particular social groups to a remote and primitive** position and giving birth to **racial politics** and **experiences of exclusion**.
- Here, **the fermented food** is connected to a **specific community and its dignity**. Such food habits lead to strengthening of sentiments towards one's own community and express a **sense of identity, comfort and familiarity**.

Source: IE