Poshan Utsav

Celebrating Nutrition Through Cultural Practices

"Let us work towards 'local for nutrition'. In our country, we have many kinds of healthy dishes that are packed with nutritious elements. These recipes can be shared on 'mygovindia', in a space created for the purpose. Hopefully, your family recipes will help in furthering a healthy and well-nourished India."

Mann ki Baat,
Prime Minister
Narendra Modi

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Title : **Poshan Utsav**

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Dedicated
to

Rashtrarishi Nanaji Deshmukh, 'Bharat Ratna'

11 **October** 1916 – 27 **February** 2010

And to every Bharatiya, a trustee of the country's indigenous knowledge and wisdom...

Deendayal Research Institute

In order to give Integral Humanism, the philosophy propounded by the great thinker Deendayal Upadhyaya, a concrete and practical form, his friend and companion Nanaji Deshmukh established the Deendayal Research Institute in 1968. The institute not only disseminated the tenets of this indigenous doctrine among the people, but created replicable models of holistic rural development that substantiated its significance.

With Integral Humanism as his guiding principle, Nanaji laid the foundation of the institute's rural development programmes in Gonda in 1978. In this campaign of development, he enlisted the initiative and participation of the local communities, using locally available resources. Enthused by the whole-hearted participation of the people, he extended his work to Beed in Maharashtra. Finally, it was the forested region of Chitrakoot, where Lord Ram sojourned (spending over 11 years of his 14-year vanvas), that became his theatre of action.

The institute's workers focused on 512 settlements within a 50-km circumference of Chitrakoot. They adopted these villages as their home, and through their selfless conduct, found a home in the hearts of the people. Having understood the predicaments and needs of the village communities, they came up with solutions. They urged the people to take the initiative to address their problems through collective effort. Village after village joined the Deendayal Research Institute's effort.

DRI functionaries and experts have been working with the village people for more than 50 years. Comprehensive experience in the field has led to the conclusion that shaping attitudes and attachment to critical issues like nutrition and water conservation is best accomplished through the medium of cultural traditions. And in all likelihood, it can be accomplished only in that manner. Therefore, bringing to light the many different aspects of nutrition hidden in Indian traditions is vital. To that end, compiling India's nutrition-related heritage was seen as a necessary effort. DRI's Atlas of Food Culture serves to aggregate, conserve and disseminate nutrition-related cultural traditions and knowledge systems.

All sections of society have helped and participated in creating the Atlas. Academics, educationists, cultural experts, environmentalists, agricultural scientists, nutrition experts, social workers, documentary film makers, artists, mediapersons, policymakers, historians, litterateurs, etc have made important contributions.

The most important role, however, was that of the women and elders of the community. This was particularly true of village communities. The very people whom Nanaji had regarded as custodians and trustees of this wealth of knowledge.

सत्यमेव जयते

प्रधान मंत्री
Prime Minister

MESSAGE

It is heartening to learn about the publication of a book titled, 'Poshan Utsav: Celebrating Nutrition Through Cultural Practices". The title of the book is apt, showcasing our diverse, as well as rich culinary and nutritional heritage through the centuries.

Food and nourishment are deeply ingrained in our culture. A wide array of culinary techniques, foodgrains and spices foster a deeper connection with nature and even with ourselves. Our culture says '*Yatha Annam Tatha Manah*', meaning that our mind is directly related to the kind of food we eat. We also have elaborate traditional *Samskaras* or rituals around food such as '*Annaprashan*' (first rice-eating ceremony of a newborn).

By documenting the songs, stories, and customs surrounding food, this book captures the voices of homemakers, farmers, tribals, and rural communities who have safeguarded this unique heritage.

Through the Poshan scheme, celebration of September as *Rashtriya Poshan Maah* and many other initiatives, a mass movement that prioritises the importance of nutrition is being catalysed. Nutrition to infants, pregnant women and lactating mothers have especially become central focus areas for society with the mantra of *Sahi Poshan Desh Roshan* becoming popular across the nation. Employing a combination of technology such as the POSHAN Tracker App and the on-ground presence of grassroots institutions such as Anganwadis, efficient monitoring and delivery of nutrition related benefits are being done.

Now, this movement is being further strengthened by this valuable publication which brings age-old wisdom within reach for contemporary readers, enabling them to understand the ways in which traditional cuisines and culinary knowledge foster overall health.

Heartiest congratulations and greetings to the Ministry of Women & Child Development for conceiving this initiative and to the Deendayal Research Institute for building a valuable repository of traditional and cultural food practices.

(Narendra Modi)

New Delhi
फाल्गुन 14, शक संवत् 1945
04th March, 2024

स्मृति ज़ुबिन इरानी
Smriti Zubin Irani

आज़ादी का अमृत महोत्सव

सत्यमेव जयते

मंत्री
महिला एवं बाल विकास
अल्पसंख्यक कार्य
भारत सरकार
Minister
Women & Child Development
Minority Affairs
Government of India

Message

Our nation's collective memory bears imprints of golden suggestions from yesteryear surrounding meal habits. From the expert counsel of warm water on an empty stomach to adeptly brewed decoctions for wheezing coughs, these tales are chapters in our efficient nationwide knowledge system revolving around nutrition and food management.

In the last decade, the Honourable Prime Minister has cast brilliant light upon such and other indigenous reservoirs of knowledge amassed. His insights have doubled as a wellspring of cultural learning, cultivating a deep appreciation of native wisdom. Today, nutrition has become a mass movement and India, a global luminary in fighting it.

This has been made possible through the government's front-running, far-sighted POSHAN Abhiyan that ties together the ethos of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas". By initiating the Nutrition Festival, our PM underscored the imperative of reviving forgotten traditions of dietary habits in India. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has executed the Poshan Abhiyan across the nation, translating the Prime Minister's resolutions into tangible action through diligent growth monitoring with the help of 11 lakh smartphones under the aegis of POSHAN.

The government's unwavering dedication to prioritising the health and nutrition of the family as a unit earmarks an unprecedented governance revolution in India. As a woman and a mother, the role of Minister of Women and Child Development appears doubly important to me in the scheme of nation-building. Therefore it is a matter of great pride that today, 10.05 crore beneficiaries are registered through 13.94 lakh anganwadi centres under the aegis of POSHAN 2.0. Nutritional well-being is reaching every crucible of our vast landscape through this scheme.

Propped on the four pillars of maternal nutrition, infant and young child feeding norms, treatment of SAM/MAM and wellness through AYUSH, this Jan Andolan has peaked, yielding priceless dividends. Nefarious correlates of malnutrition have declined as a result of the 90 crore-off community-centric sensitisation activities since 2018.

I fervently believe that nutrition is the cornerstone of both individual well-being and the holistic development of our nation. Even in rural India, where a rich history of diverse food habits prevails, the significance of sustenance is glaringly evident. Distinct local identities expressed through varied cooking styles, serving traditions and palatal delights are integral aspects of our cultural heritage. The Deendayal Research Institute, founded by Bharat Ratna Nanaji Deshmukh, has admirably synthesised these efforts to integrate food seamlessly into Indian culture, considering cultural, social, economic and scientific perspectives. I commend all the diligent researchers of the institute for their exemplary work.

The project of nutrition has been bolstered by families, religious and cultural institutions. I implore our society at large, who are the custodians of our resplendent heritage, to continue to participate in this continuous enrichment. The government stands as your steadfast partner in this noble endeavour. Nutrition has been inextricably woven into the fabric of community participation in India, echoing PM Modi's clarion call for nation and nutrition.

(Smriti Zubin Irani)

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A rich tradition of Nutrition

Showcasing Bharat's Wealth of Traditional Knowledge

The very mention of the word 'food' brings all our senses to life, evoking heavenly fragrances and mouth-watering flavours. Visions of appetizing delicacies float before our eyes, and the stomach yearns for them. Nostalgic memories surface, of our mothers and grandmothers singing songs celebrating the joys of food, and of festive occasions when an array of tantalizing dishes was prepared for our delectation.

India's culture is inextricably linked with food, nutrition and the culinary arts. Conversations revolve around foodstuffs: the different diets to be followed in winter and summer, the most appropriate fare for each season, nutrition for newborns and their mothers, the fussy food habits of children, the nutritional needs of moody adolescents, the whims and fancies of youth, domestic compromises on culinary preferences, older folk revisiting their childhood food cravings and so on. Exhaustive discussions are held on food science, from the rules laid out in the ancient texts to the opinions of contemporary nutritionists. Life centres around food and its preparation.

This manifests the Indian custom of taking pleasure in all aspects of life. Be it childhood capers or youthful pranks, academic endeavours or earning livelihoods, our everyday lives are suffused with cheer. And food is the crowning pleasure. Where there is food, there is celebration. And where there is celebration, there must be food. Birthdays call for a festive repast, and death for a tender farewell to the departed soul with kheer-pua (sweets).

The Indian diet nourishes not only the body, but the mind, intellect and soul as well.

It is imbued with taste, flavours, joy, colour, sacrifice, penance, art, science, bio-diversity and harmony. It conforms to Indian sociology and is in consonance with Indian economics. The Indian food culture has its own philosophical basis, in keeping with which cultural traditions have evolved - spontaneously, naturally, harmoniously.

Food is not meant merely to fill the stomach; it is linked to nutrition, knowledge, sociology, environment, emotion and spirituality. It represents the fulfilment of the four purusharths or aims of life – dharm, arth, kaam and moksha. For the benefit of the current generation, it must be pointed out that the meaning of 'dharm' is rather more extensive than ethics. 'Arth' is a broad representation of economic principles. 'Kaam' expresses the material pleasures of life. 'Moksha' signifies a pinnacle of perfection. Our cuisine is an amalgamation of them all.

Every housewife is proficient in the culinary arts. Her mother's kitchen serves as her school, her aunts are her teachers, and her friend's mother her tutor. From childhood up, through a process of osmosis, Indian women reflexively absorb a knowledge of cooking.

The then President of India Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy in the pangat among vanvasis in DRI, Gonda in 1978. Nanaji in his typical style, offering more.

A young girl, while preparing savouries for her older sister's wedding, may hear the women from her family or the neighbourhood singing; unconsciously, she begins to sing along, not realizing that she is absorbing elements of folk wisdom. Over time, she becomes increasingly proficient.

Our food culture is in keeping with our traditions and core beliefs. All sixteen sanskars (rites of passage) are expressed in the assimilation of food. Thus, nutrition accords with an individual's constitution, the season and the region.

India has two ancient traditions related to food. Indeed, they are better referred to as philosophies of well-being. The first centres around the idea of Annam bahu kurvita (grow food in abundance). The second follows from the concept of Tena tyakten bhunjitah, interpreted as consumption in tandem with renunciation, that is, consuming what is allotted and not what is available, so that no one is in want. Everyone gets an equal share.

The principle of growing food in abundance is found in our scriptures, notably in the shloka Annam buhu kurvita from the Taittirīya Upanishad.

Thus, an allusion to the tradition of renunciation in the mantra Tena tyakten bhunjitah

अन्नं बहु कुर्वीत। तद्व्रतम्। पृथिवी वा अन्नम्। आकाशोऽन्नादः। पृथिव्यामाकाशः प्रतिष्ठितः। आकाशे पृथिवी प्रतिष्ठिता। तदेतदन्नमन्ने प्रतिष्ठितम्। स य एतदन्नमन्ने प्रतिष्ठितं वेद प्रतितिष्ठति। अन्नवानन्नादो भवति। महान्भवति प्रजया पशुभिर्ब्रह्मवर्चसेन। महान्कीर्या॥

तैत्तिरीयोपनिषद् 3.9, पृ. 229

Grow Food in Abundance

Ensure food in plenty. This resolve is an inviolable discipline observed by those who have realised Brahma. The Earth embodies grain, and the Sky the enjoyment of that grain. They manifest together and in each other. Interdependent and coexistent, Earth and Sky are nourishment itself. A composite spirit that simultaenously manifests the abundance of grain and the enjoyment of that grain. Powered by the energy of living beings and all of creation, signifying virtue, knowledge and goodness, it reigns supreme.

Nutrition Mantra: the More You Share, the More You Have

ॐ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा. मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ।

The Divine pervades all of Creation and consciousness. Man may partake of elements necessary to existence, but an attitude of 'All this is mine' must not lead to their exploitation.

We find a beautiful example of communities and sages seamlessly integrating these elevated principles in our culture. A folk song manifests it so beautifully, with a farming couple chanting it while ploughing their field:

An Invocation of Syawad Mata

O Mother Syawad, benefactress supreme
Bring forth food in abundance for all beings
Let sisters and aunts in the husband's home have their share
Fulfil the needs of the birds of the air
Bestow enough for brothers passing by
And sons-in-law, to satisfy
Let no holy man leave our home hungry still
The brahmin, too, must have his fill
Grant enough for stray cattle to eat
Even thieves and robbers must meet their needs
Let it suffice for those who do not till and reap
To maintain order and keep the peace
O Mother!
Fulfill the wants of all 36 communities, we beseech
And what is left over
Let my children receive
O Mother Syawad, benefactress supreme.

Even if food is available in abundance, letting it go waste is unacceptable. A number of wedding songs roundly censure those who leave uneaten portions on their plates (at the wedding feast). The so-called uneducated sections of society have come up with eloquent reprimands to inculcate respect for food. And the same so-called rustics convey those reprimands through the power of song.

The then President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam partaking frugal food with vanvasis at DRI, Chitrakoot in 2005.

Indian tradition has it that food should be received in the spirit of prasad (sacrament), that it should be shared and enjoyed in a festive spirit, and that nutritious food should be consumed. All temples and Gurudwaras in the country prepare and distribute the most heavenly prasad. Deemed a gift of nature, it has served as an inspiration for local communities in evolving their own distinctive cuisines.

The great panoply of Indian cuisine is a result of many different religious, cultural and ethnic influences. If one attempts to count the number of festivals celebrated by the various communities in different parts of the country, the number would cross 365 – more than one for every day of the year. Each of these festivals calls for its own delicacies. And each dish marks a particular festival. All of them are based on the specific biodiversity, climate and geographical conditions of the region.

Indian society has its own food-related rituals. A vast corpus on nutrition is contained in the scriptures, folk traditions and popular literature. These traditions have equal regard for all sections of society. Just as humans have three tendencies – satvik, rajsik or tamsik – so do all forms of nutrition. It is believed that our mental and physical makeup is based on our diet. Hence the proverb: jaisa khao ann, vaisa hove mann (how you feel is what you

eat). It is in this form that the nutritionally superior food culture of India is expressed.

Our grandmothers, mothers, aunts and other elders of the household approach foodstuffs and their preparation with an abundance of knowledge and wisdom. This knowledge is not 'cooked up' so to speak, but is a legacy of generations of experience; a wealth of wellness and nutrition, such that the slighest taste of it imparts a significant nutritional boost and enables a healthful, disease-free life.

The founder President of DRI Sh. Atal Behari Vajpayee and the founder General Secretary Sh. Nanaji Deshmukh taking meals together in Gonda.

This atlas is not a recipe book. Certainly, it is replete with mouth-watering material, but it is for the reader to translate it onto their plates and palates. Here, we have spoken only of food culture. This whole exercise is focused on mapping and describing the available sources of nutrition, and delineating how, in accordance with our traditions, nutrition in India takes the most simple yet splendid forms.

Abhay Mahajan
Organising Secretary

Deendayal Research Instutute

Atul Jain
General Secretary

Editorial Note

Poshan Sadhna
the Recipe

Our esteemed Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is known for his love of traditional wisdom, often expressed in his radio show, Mann ki Baat. Drawing inspiration from him, volunteers and researchers at DRI set about collecting and documenting a vast corpus on nutrition-related cultural practices across the country. The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development fully supported this challenging task.

Food is a fundamental aspect of human life, and has influenced Indian values and beliefs in profound and interesting ways. It is linked with many social and economic developments and cultural traditions. Traditional knowledge on food is exquisitely portrayed in folk songs and tales, wisdoms, rituals, festivals and so on. A treasure trove is hidden in every field of the folk arts.

On the basis of past experience and the latest research studies, it can be said that in an abstract form, health is hidden in the traditional Indian thaali (food tray). The thali varies from region to region, comprising the unique features of each one. It is the aesthetic expression not

only of the nutrition praxis of that region, but of its ecology, society, biodiversity, economy, agricultural practices and tastes. A thorough documentation of the traditions associated with our vast and varied food culture is essential, lest they are lost in the mists of times.

Modern eating habits raise concerns not only about our health and wellbeing, but the eclipse of the nutritional values and special features of our diet. Nutrition is a subject of research the world over.

For the last 50 years or more, DRI researchers and workers have worked with village communities. Based on that experience, we have found that an emotional connect with issues related to food and water is ideally mediated through cultural practices - and possibly, only in that way. Thus, it is vital to promulgate the different dimensions of the immense body of knowledge on nutrition that is hidden in Indian traditions. Compiling India's legacy of nutrition-related folk knowledge is therefore seen as an urgent necessity. To that end, we present the Atlas of Nutrition Culture, a compendium of cultural, traditional, social and scientific thought associated with this important issue, so that it can be preserved and disseminated.

This exercise has been possible only with the whole-hearted participation and assistance of people from all sections of society, and is the result of over two years of unremitting collective effort. Of these two years, one was lost to the vagaries of the Covid-19 pandemic and the attendant restrictions on mobility. For more than six months, people struggled with the uncertainties of the pandemic. Just as it was tapering off, the Omicron variant came knocking at our doors. Fortunately, the powerful traditions crafted and inculcated in successive generations by our sages helped us overcome all barriers.

Team Nutrition Culture commenced the exercise by drawing up a list of learned individuals well-versed in the subject, and invited them to come up with their own lists (of relevant material). We then proceeded to collate anecdotes, customs and rituals referenced in available literary sources.

The list of prospective sources and literature proved very useful, as it enabled us to note down sources cited at

different places. We asked knowledgeable individuals to engage with people in their respective regions, and received whole-hearted cooperation in this respect.

Our first challenge was to prepare a detailed questionnaire. There were innumerable facets to this undertaking. By far the most important one was that the information offered up by ordinary people brought new aspects to light. This, perhaps, was the most useful outcome.

Apart from members of the public, various groups made notable contributions to this multi-dimensional process:

- leading members of social and religious organisations
- experts in art and culture
- agricultural scientists
- educationists and eminent academicians
- environmentalists
- nutritional experts
- social workers
- policy makers
- media professionals
- documentary film makers
- artistes

Most important of all were ordinary folk. The housewife. The matriarchs, mothers and grandmothers. The traditional families. Indeed, the most ordinary people in villages proved to be the most well-informed and scientific in their approach to nutrition. To this day, our forest-dwellers have an encyclopaedic grasp of a broad array of subjects.

Across India, we found a goldmine of knowledge, expressed in local dialects and accents. Government agencies, too, had stored up valuable information over time. But in the absence of a holistic and integrated approach, it had not been utilised. The network of Krishi Vigyaan Kendras under the Indian Council of Agriculture Research, and of the Tribal

Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, proved extremely helpful.

This atlas is dedicated to the late Rashtrarishi Nanaji Deshmukh. Honoured with the Bharat Ratna (India's highest civilian award), Nanaji had plumbed the depths of India's invaluable heritage. He maintained that if the soul of India vests in her villages, it is because the denizens do not flaunt their knowledge, but treasure it. They have an emotional connect with the wisdoms received as an ancestral legacy. These precious insights are to be consciously lived, not paraded.

From the perspective of governance, our diversity-rich country is divided into 15 agricultural and ecological zones (Agro-climatic zones). So differentiated are they that they have been further divided into 127 sub-zones. But from a geo-cultural perspective, all of India is one – greater India.

The prevailing nutritional practices of all 15 zones appear throughout the book in various sections, so that they are not presented in isolation. In one chapter, we find folk songs. In another, folk tales. Social mores of a region may find mention in one place, its festivals or traditions in another. For instance, the culture of Maharashtra finds expression through the songs of Khandesh, the folk tales of Marathwada, the customs of Vidarbh and the festivals of Konkan.

In general, the sizeable pictures used are both pleasing and contextual. The caption explains the folk knowledge they represent. It may be in the form of a folk song, or a concise description of a story, ritual, festival, etc.

The atlas is in the form of a coffee table book. As such, it presents mere glimpses of an extensive and dynamic culture. Detailed information will be made available through a portal in due course of time.

Although sweets are an integral part of our diet, a separate chapter has been devoted to confectionery. The reason being that for nutritional and scientific reasons, unlike desserts in the western world, here sweets are eaten before and not after the meal. In that spirit, some delectably sweet items have been dished out before the main repast.

Khichdi (a rice-based stew) is virtually a national dish, popular throughout the country and comprising nutritional elements specific to particular regions. Likewise, its four standard accompaniments – curd, papad (or poppadams), ghee

(clarified butter) and pickles – are wonderfully diverse. The jar of dry mangodi (dal-based side dish) or vegetables found in most household kitchens bears testimony to the family's industriousness and the art of food processing.

Vessels found in the remnants of the Harappa and Mohenjodaro civilizations, used for cooking, storing and serving food, express the diversity that marks each region of the sub-continent to this day. Food may be cooked in bamboo, or in leaves, thereby remarkably enhancing its nutritional value. When cooked in an earthen vessel, raabdi (a creamy pudding) or curry take on a different mouthfeel. In the huge kitchen of the Jagannath Temple at Puri, we find specific vessels and methodologies of cooking that speak to nutrition, but also to implicit social and economic aspects. That, too, is a singular feature of our cultural heritage.

Generally speaking, different sections of the book are devoted to different foods, but a whole chapter has been dedicated to paan (betel leaf digestive) – an important and essential feature of our food culture. From Assam in the North-East to Kerala in the South, no meal is complete without it.

Team Nutrition Culture has attempted to collect nutrition-related cultural and folk knowledge from across the nation, within the available resources. This coffee table book is but a sample of that endeavour. The team's efforts have not ceased. New dimensions will continually be added and shared through the portal, thereby enriching our collective learnings. That is the team's objective. Readers, too, can enhance this wealth of information through the proposed interactive and dynamic portal.

The Editorial Team places on record its respect and gratitude towards the unknown exponents and practitioners of folk traditions in Bharat.

Vande Mataram.

POSHAN Abhiyaan
PM's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment
सही पोषण - देश रोशन

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Poshan Utsav

Social Traditions Around Nutrition

India is synonymous with a refined food culture, where food is shared equally by all, with regard for one another. Meals are served with warmth and courtesy, and savoured with joy and zest, albeit in a spirit of sacrifice.

From this enlightened culture emerges a robust social convention whereby, if it is put into practice, no living being in the country will go

Colours of Vasant Panchmi

Gulgula Party in the guise of worshipping goose tree !

hungry or suffer malnutrition. The basic principle is that even the weaker sections of society must enjoy all aspects of life. Each person must have the benefit of a full stomach and nutritious diet, so as to enable their all-round development. Only when the all-round development of every single citizen is ensured can India emerge as a world leader.

Like other aspects of the Indian ethos, this beneficent culture has been undermined in the last millennium but continues to thrive in many parts of the country in varying degrees. This is particularly true of rural India, where knowingly or unknowingly, communities continue to follow these sublime traditions of sharing and caring.

India's great thinkers applied their powers of perception to a profound study of society, its material and spiritual requirements and social behaviours, taking note of regional particularities, geo-climactic and otherwise. They analysed these factors, not just from a socio-economic or scientific perspective, but also to understand the emotional quotient of the communities residing therein. From this indepth knowledge emerged myriad traditions, rituals, festivals and so on. The practice of holding the kumbh festival concurrently in different parts of the country emanates from this cultural matrix.

Thus, a multitude of traditions were crafted. Our food culture, too, springs from the same source.

For our sages, ayurvedic savants and learned members of society, foodstuffs were not merely a means to fill the stomach or enable food security, but a conduit to nurturing the body, mind, soul and sensibility. In tandem with the scientific study of foods, they took cognizance of the need to weld our food culture with precepts whereby the underprivileged sections of society could receive abundant nutrition. From this brainstorming emanated customs that were simple and salubrious, yet flavoursome and colourful.

These traditions conform to the unique features of different geographical zones, reflecting their climate and biodiversity. Indeed, they are a tasty and nutritious representation of each locale. They are embodied in the physique of its people, and are thus in absolute harmony with their tridosh or three vital energies, viz vata, kapha and pitta. These excellent traditions touch every aspect of human life.

Indian culture is the sum of all these traditions, which remain much the same across the country. The rituals may be different, but the underlying sentiment is identical – equal regard for all. Food may be abundant, but the abiding principle is that of 'Tena tyaktena bhujintha', or exercizing continence in consumption. To this day, the so-called uneducated sections of society maintain these traditions with great discipline and rigour.

The following instances bear testimony.

The benefits of disdain for *Bhaseed*

In eastern Uttar Pradesh, it is called 'bhaseed'; in Delhi's bazaars, 'kamal kakdi'; in the villages of Punjab, 'bhen' and in Kashmir, 'nadru'. But in the veggie shops of cosmopolitan India, it is known as 'lotus stem'. A fashionable matron at a kitty party might say, "You know, my maid bought it (lotus stem) at Rs 200 per kg last week". The 'nadru kebab' made from mashed lotus stems is a delicacy that adds panache to the menu of any high-end restaurant.

In the so-called backward district of Gonda, however, eating lotus stems is looked down upon. 'Bhaseed' is despised. In fact, in areas where communities still manage water bodies, lotus stems grow in profusion but don't find a market.

The fact is that lotus stems are meant for sections of society who don't have access to adequate sources of nutrition. Once the water body dries up, people descend to the muddy bed to gather up these nutrition-rich lotus stems, scooping up a pan of clay in the process. The pond is thus automatically cleaned and de-silted. Our sages cannily dubbed the lotus stem as 'bhaseed', so as to evoke distate among the well-off! But the despised lotus stem is replete with nutritional elements (the preceding table enumerates their values). Yet, the social setup is such that the poor have access to it free of cost. The clay procured from the pond bed is used as plaster for the kitchen, hearth and walls, and for making mud bricks that regulate temperatures within the house. So exquisitely fine-grained is the clay that it works as a shampoo for village women and a face-pack for the men.

Magnanimous Bhaseed!

Witness the joy of this devotee, as he goes to offer up the first pumpkin from his ‘mer’. The prasad made from this pumpkin is bound to taste divine.

Are you a *Pumpkin*?

'Pumpkin' is an oft-used descriptor, usually employed in a derogatory sense. One might playfully refer to a friend as a 'pumpkin', implying a useless object. Or one might refer to the aforesaid pumpkin as a bechara (poor thing). Nor is the vegetable popular with youngsters, who will often will often turn up their noses if pumpkin is served.

Yet, when the sun's rays fall on the golden flesh of a severed pumpkin lying on the edge of a field, it looks so attractive that one wonders why it's been abandoned. Farmers don't usually sell pumpkins; they are left on the margins of the field for general consumption. Truth to tell, our forebearers deliberately dubbed the pumpkin as 'bechara' - a poor sort of vegetable. The hidden agenda being that this 'super food' should not, like broccoli or avocado, be limited to the tables of the rich.

To ensure that it reaches the underprivileged, the pumpkin was made an integral part of all festive occasions. Kumhara saag, a dish made from a variety of pumpkin, is a must at all community events. In every corner of the country, pumpkin dishes served with puri or rice add to the splendour of the feast. The modes of cooking vary, with local preferences dictating the spices used. If a touch of cumin lends a cooling effect in summers, fenugreek seeds add warmth and flavour in winters. The pumpkin is known to have an antacid effect, just one of its wealth of benefits. Small wonder that, all over the country, it is the king of the banquet, with its golden hue and energizing effect.

The power of the *Mer*

The mer, a ridge of earth demarcating one field from the next, is more than just heaped-up mud. It belongs to no one, and to everyone. Of supreme importance in village life, it absorbs fertilizer from both fields and converts it to nutrition that is available to everyone – free of cost!

The dividing line between two fields, the mer once symbolised harmony rather than discord. It belonged to society at large, so anything that grew on the ridge was literally invaluable, because it was never sold in the market. In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the thor or pumpkin that grows on the mer is a treasure trove of nutritional and medicinal compounds. Likewise, the iron-rich bathua (goosefoot or chenopodium) which grows on field bunds across India, was stigmatized as cattle-feed, so that the poor could get it free of cost. Today, parathas of the once-despised bathua figure prominently on the menu of five-star hotels. Another product of the mer, the kachri or wild cucumber, is packed with Vitamin C. Once freely available to the poor, it was the main form of chutney and pickle consumed in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. In summer or winter, it added a tangy touch to any vegetable dish, along with a healthy dose of Vitamin C. The perennial king of vegetables once ruled over the mer. All these nutritious vegetables were available for free to the entire community.

Hello, Colostrum

In every corner of India, communities have found ways of sharing nutrition. During the Covid-19 pandemic, fear of infection acquainted the global elite with the word 'immunity', and a huge market for immunity boosters sprang up overnight. In India, communities have been sharing immunity-builders among themselves for centuries, in a spirit of amity. For this, we owe a debt of gratitude to that most bountiful of beings, the cow. The practice of equitably sharing its first milk with the entire community, regardless of caste, class and creed, continues to this day.

Every region has its own term for colostrum - teli, cheek, khees and so on. But they all refer to the same thing, the first milk of the cow after calving. For humans, it is nothing short of nectar, replete with disease-resistant properties. Any household in the village where a cow has calved will carefully collect and distribute the colostrum. In some communities, it is distributed at a public feast in the form of confections, to the accompaniment of folk songs. The occasion is a picture of felicity: women of the household rolling out and frying flatbreads, singing all the while, and the men cheerfully serving their neighbours the nutritious repast. This enduring custom, so festive and gratifying, not only glorifies the cow's bounty but tacitly ensures the dissemination of nutrients.

During the pandemic, colostrum was sold at Rs 50 per capsule. Pharma companies across the world made enormous profits through the marketing of this 'medicinal product'. India, however, follows the age-old and universal practice of sharing colostrum, as is evident from the table below. Colostrum is known by any number of different names, but from Kashmir to Kanyakumari (north to south) and Gujarat to Manipur (west to east) communities have in common a tradition of equitably sharing this immunity-booster.

Gujarati	----------	Kheeru
Malwa/Nimar	----------	Chika
Mewar	----------	Bali
Marwar	----------	Balai
Jaiselmer	----------	Myat
Hariyana	----------	Khees
Punjab	----------	Baoli
Chhattisgarh	----------	Penus Dudh
Bihar	----------	Fenus
Allahabad UP	----------	Piyush
Kumaon Uttarakhand	--	Parali/ Parai
Nepali	----------	Jaalo
Magahi	----------	Fenus
Rewa, Vindhya	----------	Khojhari
Bhojpuri	----------	Fenasa
Kannada	----------	Ginna Dudh
Madhya Pradesh	-----	Aamar/ Khedhi
Aligarh	----------	Fenasa
Bihar, Mithila	----------	Khirasa
Himachal	----------	Chherada
Maharashtra	----------	Cheek
Gopalganj, Bihar	----------	Fena, Feni
Bengal	----------	Matri Holud Dugdho
Kerala	----------	Aaditya Mulapal

Here is a Rajasthani Folk

बालो पाखां बारै आयौ, माता वैण सुणावै यूं।

म्हारी कूख सिळाई रै बाला, म्हें तन्नै सखरी घूंटी दूं।।

(Mother's First Milk)

Rituals associated with Menarche

बैसली भोजनासी। चौरंग बसायासी। तिवईवरी ताट वाटी। जांब लोटी पाण्याशी। समया चोहोंकडे। उदकांड्यांची झाडें। रांगोळी तयापुढें। मग म्हणती वाढा। मुली बसून पंक्तीला। उशीर झाला न्हाणूलीला। द्या म्हणती वाढायला। प्रहर दिवस आला। पापड कुरवडी। खारी पापडी मीठ। मिरशेंग पंचामृत। मायमुळा तिखट। शेगट कढिलिंबे। कवळीं मिरें गाजारें। रायतें आंवळयाचे। माका आमसोल आलें।। पडवळ शेंगा वांगी। काशिफळ भोंपळा। वाघोटी मेथी भेंडे। कार्ले तोंडली टाकळा। घोंसाळी शेवगा घेवडा। चुका काळा भोंपळा। कंटोळी फणस तांदुळजा। भाजी होती वांग्याची। वालाचे गोळयांची कढी। होती लिंबाची सांभारीं। बहु झाली आमटी। सुंदर चिंचवणी आणि सारें।।

पुरणपोळया वरण पुरी। मांडे घीवर घाली। चिरोटे फेण्या बुंदी। दळया मुद्गळ सांजोरी। श्रींखंड मोदक दूध दही। मुदे गवले। सरळ सेवयाची माळा। मालत्या फणवले बोटवे। बत्तासे पेढे बर्फी। तूप खिचडी गवले। मुख विलायची मोहनभोग। सारा केशरी भात। कागदी वांगीभात। हलवा पेढे वाढती। वाढण आटोपले।। भोजन झाल्यावरी। विडे देती सुंदरी। सुपारी पान चुना। कात लवंग कापूर। वेलदोडे जायपत्री। जायफळ अक्रोड। ते जवळ बदाम पिस्ता। वरती सोनियाचा वर्ख।।

For most women, the onset of menses is a turning point in their lives. Puberty ushers a girl into adolescence and the profound physical, psychological and emotional changes that ensue. In effect, she takes the first step towards becoming the medium for future generations. At this stage, it is the obligation of her family and society at large to introduce her to the responsibilities she will shoulder as an adult, in a manner that is soothing and agreeable. Her natural diffidence must be addressed by the women of her family, be it her mother, sister-in-law, aunt or sibling. In Maharashtra, the lyrics (reproduced above) sung on this occasion describe the various foods that will provide her the nutrition she needs during this phase. Similar songs and rites of passage are prevalent in every region of the country.

The Rituals of Pregnancy

For any woman, pregnancy brings both joy and discomfort, part and parcel of the process of creation. At this time, the mother-to-be needs special care and nutrition, because she must partake not only for herself but for another being. Each phase of pregnancy demands the addition of certain nutritional elements to her diet. Accordingly, our forebearers laid down a delectable assortment of foods for these nine months.

These days, posting 'baby bumps' on social media is common, and advertisements offering products for expectant mothers are legion. Traditionally, it was the wise matriarchs of the household who took charge of nurturing expectant daughters and daughters-in-law in agreeable and charming ways. Perpetuated through folk songs and rituals, established practices included a diet featuring a variety of seasonal fruits,

Poshan Utsav

tasty and fortifying home-cooked foods and vitamin- and mineral-enriched dry-fruit preparations. Alongside mental and physical nurturing, social bonds were also nourished, maintaining the relationship between the parental and matrimonial homes.

The tradition of 'god bharai' (a sort of baby shower), in which the expectant mother receives a plethora of gifts, is followed across the country. In terms of significance, the ritual is comparable with the wedding ceremony. Usually, in the eighth month, the pregnant woman will receive presents from her parents. For the most part, these include dry fruits and other edibles replete with nutrition for mother and baby. Confections such as gondh jamavna (edible gum), coconut burfi and laddoos made in pure ghee (clarified butter) are typical, although it varies from region to region. In Kerala, for instance, tamarind juice is customary.

It is believed that the expectant mother will have the urge to eat a variety of foods. Halwa or kheer (grain-based puddings) can be freshly prepared but if she feels hungry late at night, her mother's sesame laddoos will come in handy. Satisfaction and pleasure in one sweet mouthful.

Different regions have different names for the god bharai ritual: seemandhan or valaikappu in Andhra Pradesh, Telengana and Tamil Nadu, svaad in Bengal, dohle jevan in Maharashtra, puli kutti in Kerala, dohad in Gujarat and so on. But everywhere, the mother-to-be is showered with gifts, most of which comprise delectable yet nutritious snacks. The very purpose of the ritual is to ensure her contentment, comfort and satisfaction. Health professionals today accept that the mother's diet, mood, emotions and interactions have a direct impact on the unborn child. In fact, Nanaji Deshumukh, the founder of the Deendayal Research Institute, developed a protocol to be followed while nurturing a child in the womb. Folk songs celebrating motherhood and mothers such as Mother Sita and Jijabai are popular all over India.

छोरी ये तने नींबू क्यों भावे – 2
लागि केड़ा की पटकार
कदे मौसम्मी क्यों खावे
हो लागि केड़ा की पटकार

पहलौ महीना जब लागिए, वाकौ फलु
गह्यो फलु लागिए
ए वाइ दूजौ महीना जब लागिए ,
राजे तीजौ महीना जव लागिए , वाकी
खीर खाँड़ मन आइए ,

महला मां ठाढि बलमजी
अपन रनिया मनावत हो
रानी पीलो मधु–पीपर,
होरिल बर दूध आहै हो।

Painting byDr Narmada Prasad Upadhyaya

Buttermilk

is for sharing, not for sale

धन–धन राजा मेदनियां,

घर–घर बाजे मथनियाँ।

अन्नवा से भर गइले खेत – खलिहनवाँ।

गइया – भइँसिया से भइले भथनवा।

सांच भइले सबके सपनवां।

घर–घर बाजे मथनियाँ।

ओसांण ओसांण

Buttermilk, known as chachh, mattha or taak, is now available in cities across India in plastic pouches or tetrapacks. The protein-rich, low-calorie, sugar-free beverage is India's answer to Coke and Pepsi. With the entry of buttermilk, known for its cooling effect, the cold-drink segment is no longer confined to carbonated beverages. Traditionally, an earthen pot of buttermilk was placed outside every home for passers-by to enjoy. After churning curds to procure ghee, the by-product – buttermilk – was made available for public consumption – free! People could take as much as they needed to drink, prepare curry or add to various dishes. Every household with a buffalo or a cow made it a practice to disseminate nutrition in this form. To this day, in many parts of India, buttermilk is not for sale but for sharing. If a wedding is to be held in a village household, buttermilk is collected from all the neighbouring families in a massive vessel. It sours when left standing and the fermentation process enhances its probiotic elements. At the end of the meal, spices and chillies are added and the tart, peppery drink is served as a digestive. The stomach is automatically cleansed without recourse to commerical products/ads!

Oh no, a wedding in such Torrid weather!

Tulsi vivah – the symbolic union of the holy basil plant (representing the goddess of prosperity) with Lord Vishnu – is celebrated with verve across the country. In Rajasthan, the marriage of the Peepul tree (Ficus religiosa) is also celebrated, and with equal verve. Why so? The answer lies in the fierce heat that afflicts the predominantly desert state in the third month of the Hindu calendar. Everything wilts in the searing onslaught, not just trees and plants, but people too. Faces and spirits shrivel. Wells and tanks dry up. Cattle and other animals droop. People shut their doors and windows and stay home, in an annual lockdown ritual.

In this inhospitable environment, the dynamism of a lively society asserts itself. Wherever in that baking desert there is a peepul tree, we also find a well, and they become the locus of a colourful festival. The union of the Peepul, the personification of the Goddess Lakshmi, with Lord Krishna is fixed. Neighbouring villages get together to form a wedding procession. Colourfully garbed, singing and dancing to the accompaniment of music, the revelers arrive for the ceremony, their woes forgotten. They are received and welcomed with all the proper rituals. After the ceremony there is a huge feast, featuring items that have a cooling effect, like khus (vetiver), buttermilk and thandai (milk-based beverage with spices and seeds) coolers, rose-infused confections and phog raita (herbed curds). All of these refreshes the body and keeps it cool for days. Such enchanting traditions, that serve to revive the spirits and turn despondency into festivity, are found in every corner of country.

All polished off, even in the heat!

The First Grain

NAVAANN

Every season brings gifts of nature. In summers, we get fruits and vegetables that have a cooling effect, and in winters, those that provide warmth to the body. Each season is welcomed appropriately. By keeping a fast during the navratri festival, we prepare the body for the change of season. This religious and social ritual was crafted by society and linked to the foods traditionally consumed during the nine days of navratri, which is held in spring and autumn. Customarily, the fresh produce of each season is first dedicated to the deity, so that everyone can get a share.

In every seasonal cycle, food made from the new grains, fruits, greens, etc is referred to as 'nawaan'. The freshly harvested grains might not comprise an entire meal, but must be tasted. Most farmers offer up a share of their produce to the temple refectories, known as annakshetra or langar halls. The customary sharing of nutrition has continued down the ages.

The new harvest is offered up to Mother Earth and other deities in the form of prasad (consecrated foods). This is particularly true of village deities. Only then does the entire family sit down to share a meal prepared from the fresh grains. Neighbours, too, receive a share of the nawaan, known as paina. The rationale is to accustom the body to seasonal foods. The time-honoured tradition of nawaan prevents malnutrition and seasonal ailments, and is observed in different ways all across the country.

Amla Navmi

OmJi Soni, Chitralaya, Udaipur

Poshan Utsav

It was time for the afternoon meal. The platter was prepared. All at once, the guests exclaimed, 'Oh! Today is Amla Navmi'. On this day, when the Amla tree (Indian gooseberry) is venerated, the repast should be had under the tree. Immediately, a bench was placed under the tree to serve as a table. And everyone sat there, awaiting the meal. But when the housewife emerged, she was not carrying rotis, but a prayer thali (platter). She anointed the tree with a tilak (vermillion mark), then bound it with a sacred thread, singing a hymn all the while. Only then did she bring out the food. Simple and robust village fare was gracefully arranged on the platter. Everyone was merry. They began to speculate whether the ripe amla fruits would fall on their plates. That didn't happen, but from within the house the matriarch called out, 'The next time you come, you will get a dish of tempered amla. From today onwards, we have permission to pluck the fruit, because now it is ripe'.

Indian society esteems the amla highly. It guarantees a healthy dose of Vitamin C, and is packed with natural nutrients. All across the country, one hears folk tales related to the amla. One finds amla chutney, or murabba (candied fruit in syrup), or supari (dried and shredded fruit). It is one of the main ingredients in Trifla, an immunity-boosting ayurvedic concoction. Even multi-national companies who make Chyavanprash (a sweetish ayurvedic tonic) sing its praises. But Indian society has dedicated a whole festival to the inimitable amla.

Dhoom *Dham*...

Waiting for the next course

In the modern context, the measure of wealth is capital, a necessary feature of commercial enterprise. Wealth has given new and extravagant forms to social occasions such as weddings, where all manner of eatables representing myriad cuisines from across the globe are loaded on dining tables. Without going into the profligate wastage of foods at such events, it is appropriate to point out that our traditional public feasts were simple, yet delectable and a veritable mine of nutrition.

A large part of India still holds on to these traditions. Perched on the eastern coast is the temple of Lord Jagannath. The prasad served here has become the main fare at major festivals, and will be fully described later in the book. For the moment, let us get a glimpse of the diversity-rich cuisines served at weddings and other auspicious occasions in the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh.

The feast served at these events is known as dham. Very different from the dhumdham (fanfare) and dazzle of such occasions in other places, but so diversity-rich in terms of cuisine that people eagerly look forward to a traditional dham. The chefs at Lord Jagannath's temple are drawn from one

मिरचां झरभरियां ,
चण्या दी दाल करारी
लाडा जालु खाण लगया,
खा गया बाटी सारी
लाडे जालु होर मंगया,
लबडा ने कड़छी मरी
लबडा ते खून बगया,
होया मुकदमा भरी
मिरचां झरभरियां,
चण्या दी दाल करारी !

particular sect. Similarly, the privilege of preparing the dham belongs to a certain set of families. They are termed boti. For untold generations, their art has been protected and promoted by kings and emperors. As in Nokha and Kolayat in Rajasthan, Himachal too, has entire villages of botis.

The women of the boti families prepare spices for the dham, in accordance with the auspicious rituals associated with the occasion, and to the accompaniment of folk songs. The spices are winnowed, cleaned, graded, pounded and ground. An 11-foot long, one foot wide and one-and-a-half foot deep pit is dug for cooking. Experienced botis say that a pit of these dimensions maintains the ideal temperature for cooking. The size of the pit depends on the number of guests.

Early in the morning, after performing their ablutions, in their bare feet and with strict attention to hygiene, the botis prepare the meal. Large, round, wide-mouthed and heavy vessels of brass are used. It is believed that they lend taste and flavour to the food. The ingredients are added at intervals. The dishes served at the dham do not contain onions or garlic. Curds, tomato, ginger, spinach and green chillies lend taste to the satvik (yogic or light, pure, energy-containing foods) fare. The diverse dishes of different regions have unique tastes and nutritive elements. Started by the royal families of the region, the thousand-year-old tradition demanded that kings and subjects sat together to partake of the feast. More than twenty dishes were cooked for the rajaji ki dham (king's feast). Traditionally, most of the dishes were rice- and dal-based. Today, vegetables have become easily available and have been added to the dham.

Seated in rows on the ground, guests are served piping hot dham on pattals (leaf plates). The meal is eaten by hand, with the fingers conveying the gustatory experience to the taste-buds. The foods are served in a particular sequence, in accordance with the rules of shadras (flavours). Many long-held traditions have vanished, but the dham marches on.

The dham allows the tongue to experience shadras – a pleasing and natural form of nutrition.

A feast of Mithun

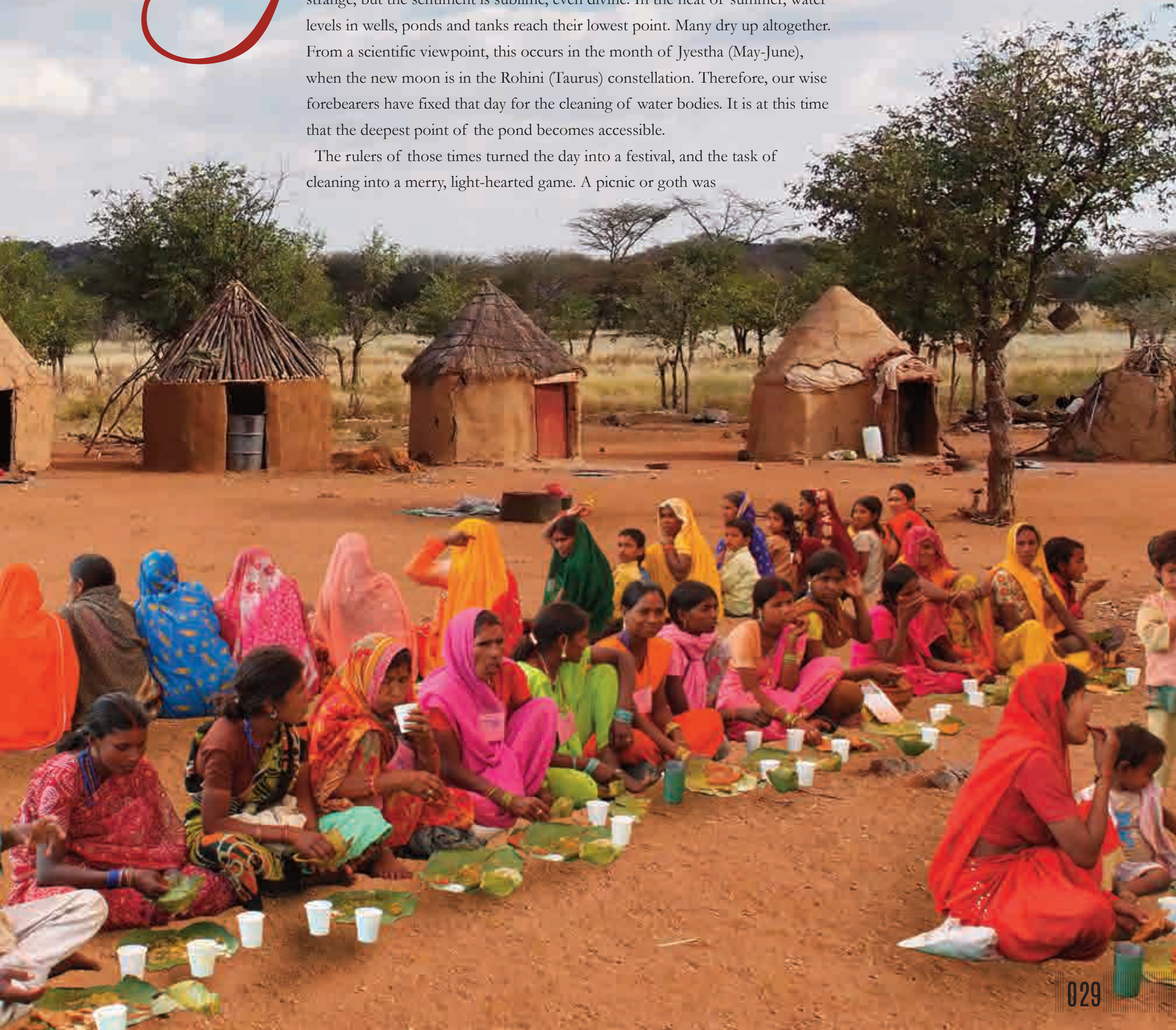
All across the country, nutrition has been influenced and guided by local conditions. In hilly regions, where vegetation is sparse, non-vegetarian foods are part of the daily diet. Among the tribals of the North-East, dietary habits have morphed into traditions and rituals. In Nagaland, for instance, the tradition of sharing the flesh of the mithun, a unique bovine species, is followed to this day.

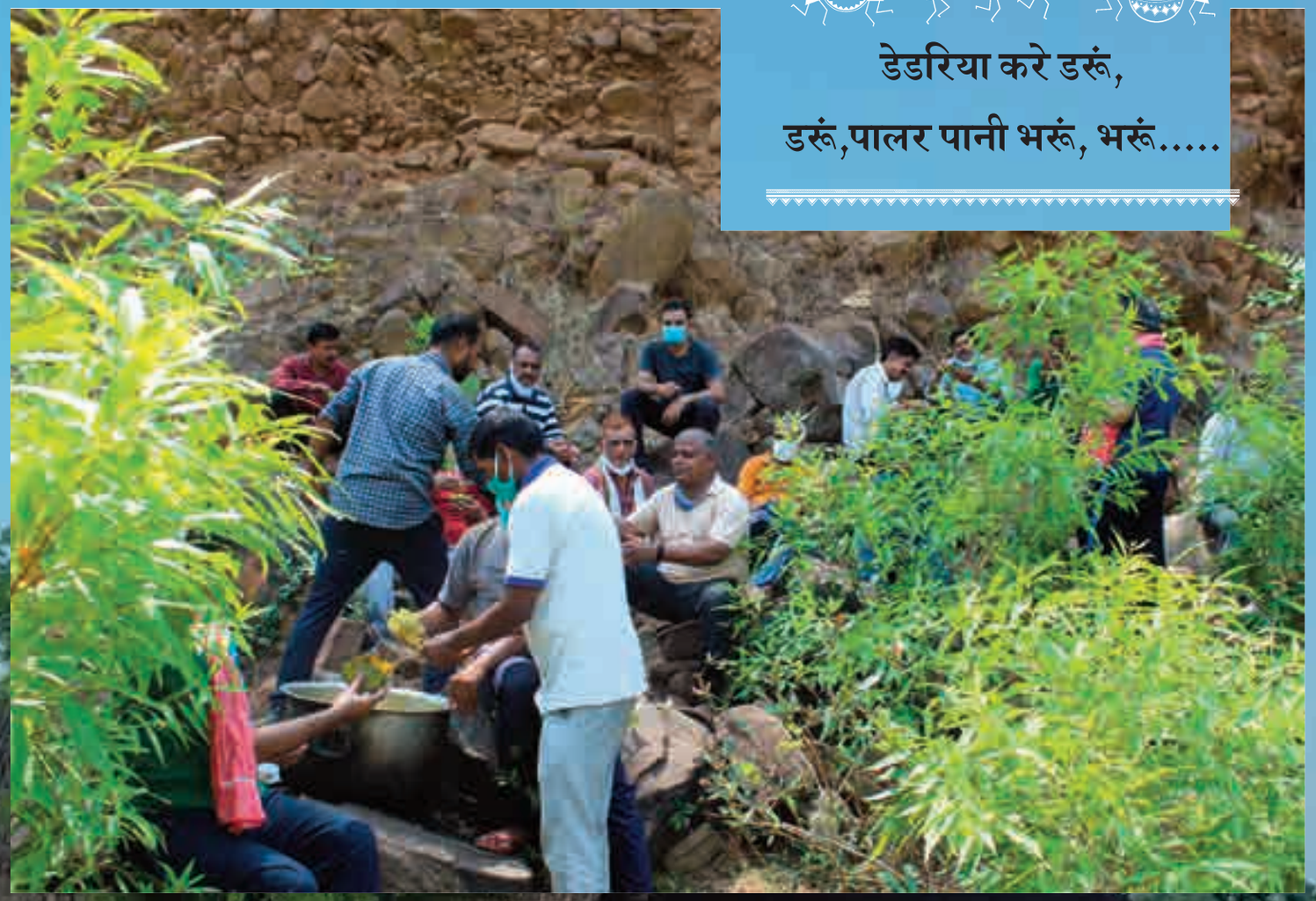
During weddings in the Nyishi community of the North-East, the groom's family offers mithun meat, cooked and served to their relatives and the entire village at a communal feast. The ceremony is known as nyoga adir or pabir panam. The mithun is regarded as the official state animal of Nagaland because of its nutritional value. An institute has been set up at Dimapur for the preservation and improvement of the breed. But in every village, the traditions associated with the mithun have helped in safeguarding and promoting the bovines.

Many Hands
make light work

The term lhas, which translates loosely as collective effort, may sound a little strange, but the sentiment is sublime, even divine. In the heat of summer, water levels in wells, ponds and tanks reach their lowest point. Many dry up altogether. From a scientific viewpoint, this occurs in the month of Jyestha (May-June), when the new moon is in the Rohini (Taurus) constellation. Therefore, our wise forebearers have fixed that day for the cleaning of water bodies. It is at this time that the deepest point of the pond becomes accessible.

The rulers of those times turned the day into a festival, and the task of cleaning into a merry, light-hearted game. A picnic or goth was





डेडरिया करे डरूं,
डरूं,पालर पानी भरूं, भरूं.....

organised, with everyone bringing pot-luck from their homes. The village people sat down to a communal meal, with the king or the wealthy merchant or landowner providing the sweets. Sometimes, the banquet was provided by the ruler; at other times, the villagers organised it on their own. The ruler would begin the 'game', by excavating the first spadeful of mud.

An important aspect of this exercise was nutrition. The sweets provided were not only delicious, but imparted energy. To fuel a whole day of labour, people were given ghugri – a porridge of cracked wheat, flour, rice or besan, with ghee and sugar. Or they might get panjiri (a sweet confection) and ladoos. The sweets replaced the calories expended in hard labour, whereby the people of the village ensured an year-round supply of water for themselves. Energy-giving nutrition fuelled the effort of working in dust and mud, and its rewards.

Water sweetened with gur (jaggery) was provided. The sweet potion was nutritious and delicious. The fragrance of lapsi, made with gur and ghee, quickened the pace of work. To inspire people to undertake the community effort, the children of the village would take out processions two or three days earlier, with a sheet on which they collected grains, ghee and gur to the accompaniment of songs.

Nutrition was integral to all community efforts, including the cleaning of water sources.

Poshan Utsav

Prasad
The Food of the Gods

All of us have childhood memories of being tucked into bed by our mothers or grandmothers and lulled to sleep with stories. They might have said, " 'Lord Ganesh loves laddoos', triggering a memory of a variety of modak (a sweet) being offered to the deity on Ganesh Chaturthi (festival of Lord Ganesh). But you would never have espied Lambodar (one of the many names of Ganesh) actually eating a laddoo!

In the Banke Bihari temple at Vrindavan, dedicated to Lord Krishna, you may have seen 56 different dishes set before the deity by devotees chanting, 'Aayo bhog lagao mere Shyamji (Come my Lord, partake)'. But who has seen the child Krishna eating? The bhog, or offering, is set before our Lord in Dwarika, Puri and Imphal as well, but no one would have seen Gopal (one of the many names of Krishna) take so much as a bite! In Dwarika, a ceremonial procession is taken out when the bhog is set before the reigning deity. The same devotion is seen in Puri and in the Govind Dev Temple in Imphal. After the offering is consecrated, it becomes prasad.

In Rajasthan's Salasar Balaji temple, the reigning deity is Hanuman. He is said to enjoy offerings of bajra churma (a sweet, pearl millet-based dish), but devotees never have the pleasure of seeing the Lord eat it. The same is true of the famous Khatu Shyamji temple at Sikar.

At Gurudwaras (Sikh temple), the bhog comprises the divine karah prasad (semolina halwa). Most of us will have had the pleasure of tasting both the prasad and the langar (collective meal, served to all who visit the gurudwara, regardless of caste or creed), which not only satisfies hunger, but gives the mind a taste of bliss. In Kolkata, the heavenly prasad of rasgullas at the Dakshineshwar temple renders the GI tag awarded to the famous Bengali sweet less relevant than its divine taste. And in the Jagannath Puri temple, the prasad is more aptly described as a 'mahaprasad'. One sees a large number of devotees sitting cross-legged in the courtyard and scoffing a vast range of dishes. There's no distinction between rich or poor; everyone sits together and enjoys the

food in equal measure.

Enduring traditions such as these will be described in subsequent pages: the food preferences of different deities; the epicurean god; the one who steals butter and the one who loves modak; the goddess who can be propitiated with a particular offering and so on. But all these traditions urge moderation and a spirit of temperance in the consumption of food. They promote not only food security but nutritional security as well.

The rationale behind nutrition-related customs is important, and is explained by a variety of parables, fables, proverbs, folk songs and so on, so that future generations will absorb the information and pass it on. The tradition of distributing prasad in temples and gurudwaras plays a significant role in this regard.

Rajasthan is an arid state. Here, nutrition is obtained in large measure through milk products rather than vegetables or fruits. For instance, churma-baati comprising wholewheat flour, sweeteners and large amounts of ghee, is widely consumed. The folk deity Gogaji ensures that milk products are accessible to all, not just the wealthy whose households overflow with milk. During the fair held in honour of Gogaji, ghee is not made at home. Those who don't have it, receive it in the form of prasad from Gogaji. The same tradition is followed in Dwarika in Gujarat.

In temples in south India, puttu - a dish of rice and coconut – is offered to Lord Murugan, while Tirupati's Balaji temple is noted for its world-farmous giant laddoos. At the shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi, a prasad of chana (chickpea), puri (fried flatbread) and halwa is distributed to one and all, not just to the young girls who are worshipped as manifestations of the deity.

At the Golden Temple in Amritsar, thousands of people partake of langar and in Gurudwaras across the country, the wealthiest humbly extend cupped hands to receive karah prasad with the utmost reverence. At Ajmer's Dargah Sharif, one of India's best-known Sufi shrines, people patiently queue up to receive the prasad of porridge.

The story of Jagannath Puri is extraordinary. The deity is offered bhog five times a day, not because the Lord is perpetually hungry but to ensure that no devotee who visits the temple goes hungry, be it early in the morning or late at night. The sanctified food or prasad is available through the day. Whoever comes must leave satisfied, after having enjoyed all the six flavours of food. Odisha is not a particularly prosperous state, but it is rich in tradition and culture.

These traditions have so many dimensions that today's scholars and scientists cannot begin to grasp them all. The purity and diversity of food and the fact that no variety of grain used in the bhog offered five times a day can be repeated all through the year, ensures that the bio-diversity of the region is maintained. It also ensures a robust supply chain and contributes to the agricultural economy. The special utensils used for cooking food at such a large scale, without diminishing its quality, generates self-employment opportunities for artisans. The need for a constant supply of fuelwood makes it imperative to preserve forests, minimise cutting of trees and undertake afforestation.

Temple foods and their preparation are often the responsibility of a particular family, passed down the generations. From the age of 12, a child is expected to devote his spare time to assisting his father in the temple kitchen. This is his training. In the vast kitchens of the Jagannath temple, in oven-like temperatures, the youngsters receive an intensive training that cannot be imparted by a skill development class anywhere in the world. The emphasis on absolute cleanliness while preparing the prasad has been translated over time into a culture of hygiene.

Every region has different preferences when it comes to forms of worship and prasad. But the underlying principle is the same: food, and more importantly, nutrition for all. Observe the prayer thali of any sect and you will find it replete with nutrition. Traditionally, five different fruits are offered and given to the pundit or priest after the prayer ritual

is over. Children wait restlessly through the proceedings, hoping to get a share. Everyone gets a portion of prasad, and through it, a dose of nutrients. Other than Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, the 'apple' in the saying 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' refers to the predominant fruit of the region. It is the local fruit that adds lustre to the prayer platter.

The prasad must be local and seasonal, a product of the geo-climatic conditions of the region. Its DNA must resonate with the rest of the biota. In effect, the prasad complements the everyday fare. The essential nutrients that are not present in regular food are made available through prasad.

The purpose of the langar in Punjab or the annakshetra in south Indian temples is to ensure that devotees get a full and filling meal. But the karah prasad or laddoo complements the meal. Historically, the tradition has another purpose. At a time when means of travel were limited and roadside eateries did not exist, devotees who came from far-off places had to carry food on their return journey. They would be given a parcel called the pattal, palla or shidori, with long-lasting eatables. Prasads are thus long-lasting foods that provide an energy boost.

Usually, prasad represents or influences the culinary preferences and habits of a particular region. Most vegetarian dishes are influenced by places of worship in the vicinity. The kachori (a fried savory with a spicy filling) that forms part of the prasad at the Banke Bihari temple in Brij gradually became the signature breakfast dish of the region. The thali peeth (spicy multi-grain flatbread) distributed as prasad at the Mahalaxmi temple in Kohlapur is now regarded as an epitome of nutrition all over Maharashtra. And the churma prasad in the temples of Rajasthan has become a hallmark of the state's cuisine.

The rich, age-old tradition of distributing prasad at places of worship is integral to Indian culture. In times of drought, floods or other natural disasters such as the Covid 19 pandemic, these places of worship have always served as saviours for the hungry.

This is true at all times, not just in extraordinary crises. The origin and universalization of these traditions cannot be easily explained. The answers are not contained in books, or in the intellect. To arrive at an understanding of this sublime tradition, one must look at the heart, the essential nature and consciousness of the people. In other words, at society and its values. Every society fashions economic mechanisms in its own way.

And it is in the kitchens of the temples that we find a comprehensive picture of the resources, skills, culinary arts, bio-diversity, flavours, values, rituals, customs and festivals of the region.

The country-wide tradition of prasad is aimed at ensuring adequate nutrition on all seven days of the week. To that end, diverse prasads must be offered to different gods and goddesses. Each day of the week is dedicated to a particular deity. On one day, a certain kind of food is prepared, and on the next, another kind. One item may be forbidden on a particular day, and another on the next day. The position of the celestial bodies is taken into account, and so is the colour of the foodstuffs, thereby ensuring that devotees receive the benefit of colour-therapy!

काय वाढले पानावरती, ऐकून
घ्यावा थाट संप्रती, धवल लवण हे
पुढे वाढले, मेतकूट मग पिवळे सजले
आले लोणचे बहु मुरलेले, आणि
लिंबू रसरसलेले,किसून आवळे
मधुर केले, कृष्णा काठचे वांगे
आणले, खमंग त्याचे भरित केले,
निरनिराळे चटके नटले.....

The diversity of foodstuffs ensures a full spectrum of nutrients. The practice of eschewing a particular kind of food, of observing a fast, and of breaking it at a particular time with a specific food are scientifically designed to maintain the body's equilibrium. The Ekadashi Fast (observed every fortnight), and Jain traditions of fasting between sunset and sunrise, are age-old and universal customs, that have now been repackaged as 'intermittent fasting'. Part of India's traditional knowledge, the concept won a Japanese scientist a Nobel prize.

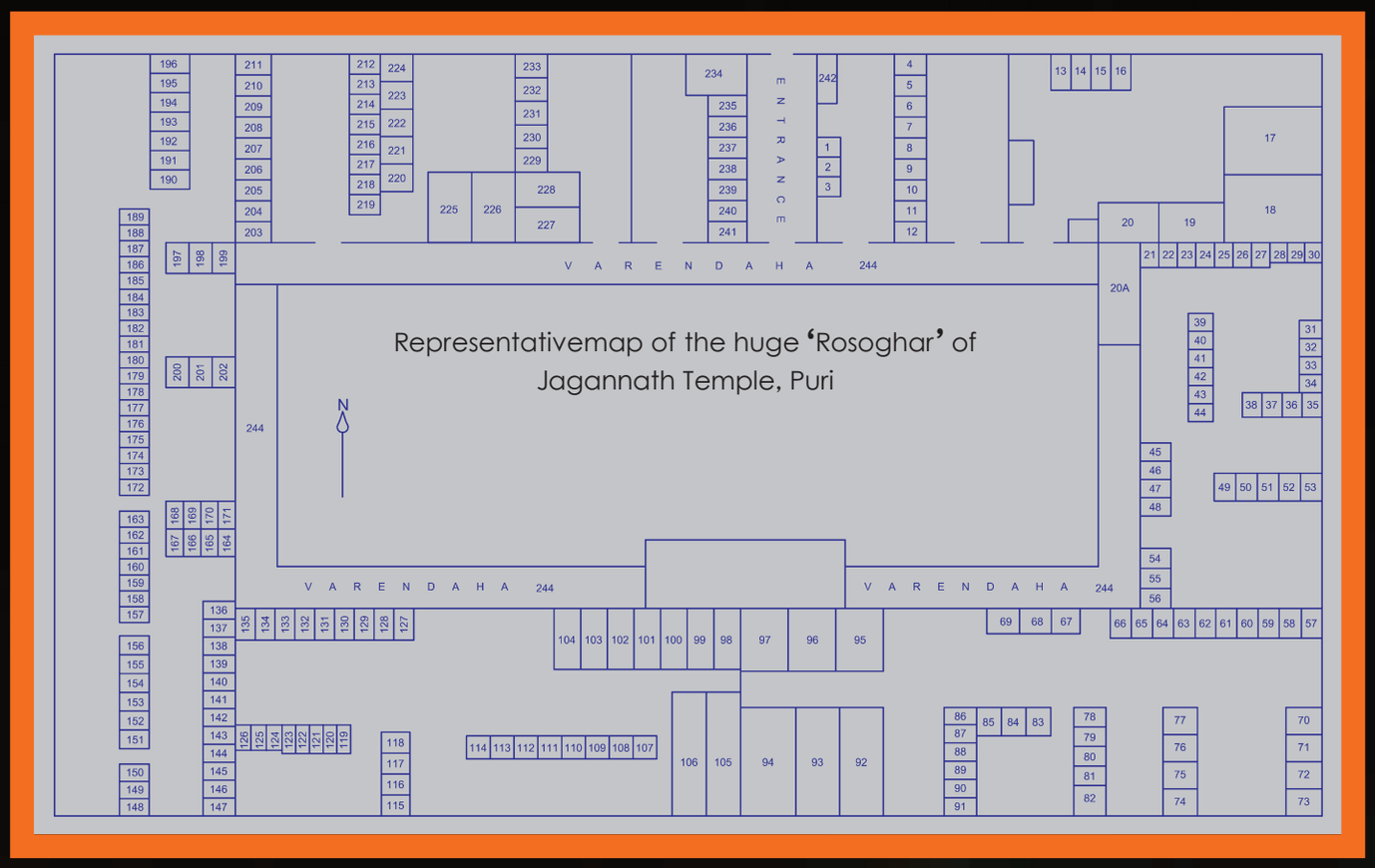
Presentation of the prasad on a thali is an art in itself. Or rather, a science, because it represents traditional knowledge that has been become a part of folk culture through the medium of prasad. Most people use their right hands when eating. So, foods are arranged in a manner that puts easily digestible foods on the right, and heavier foods on the left, because the hand and the attention are less likely to stray in that direction. Over time, regular fare began to be arranged in a similar manner. A folk song of Maharashtra shows that this practice has become part of folk culture:

Examples of nutrition through the medium of prasad are found in the offerings at certain temples in the country. It is possible that you might recall similar traditions in your own village, neighbourhood or town.

Prasadam

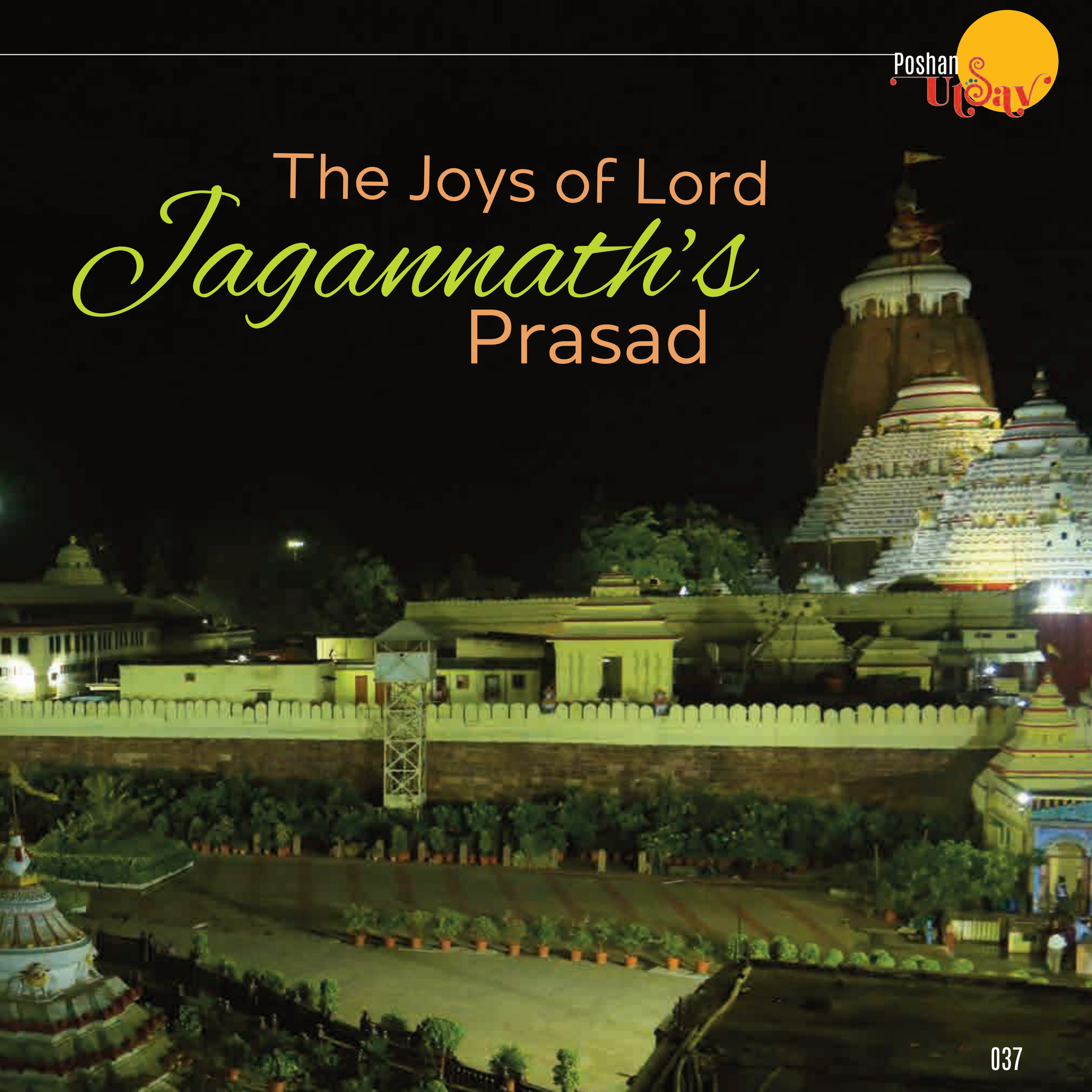
The Jagannath Puri temple is famous for its pure, flavoursome, nutritious, divine and abundant prasad, so marvellous that is is revered as 'mahaprasad' (supreme prasad). It imparts supreme satisfaction to the recipient - mental, physical and spiritual.

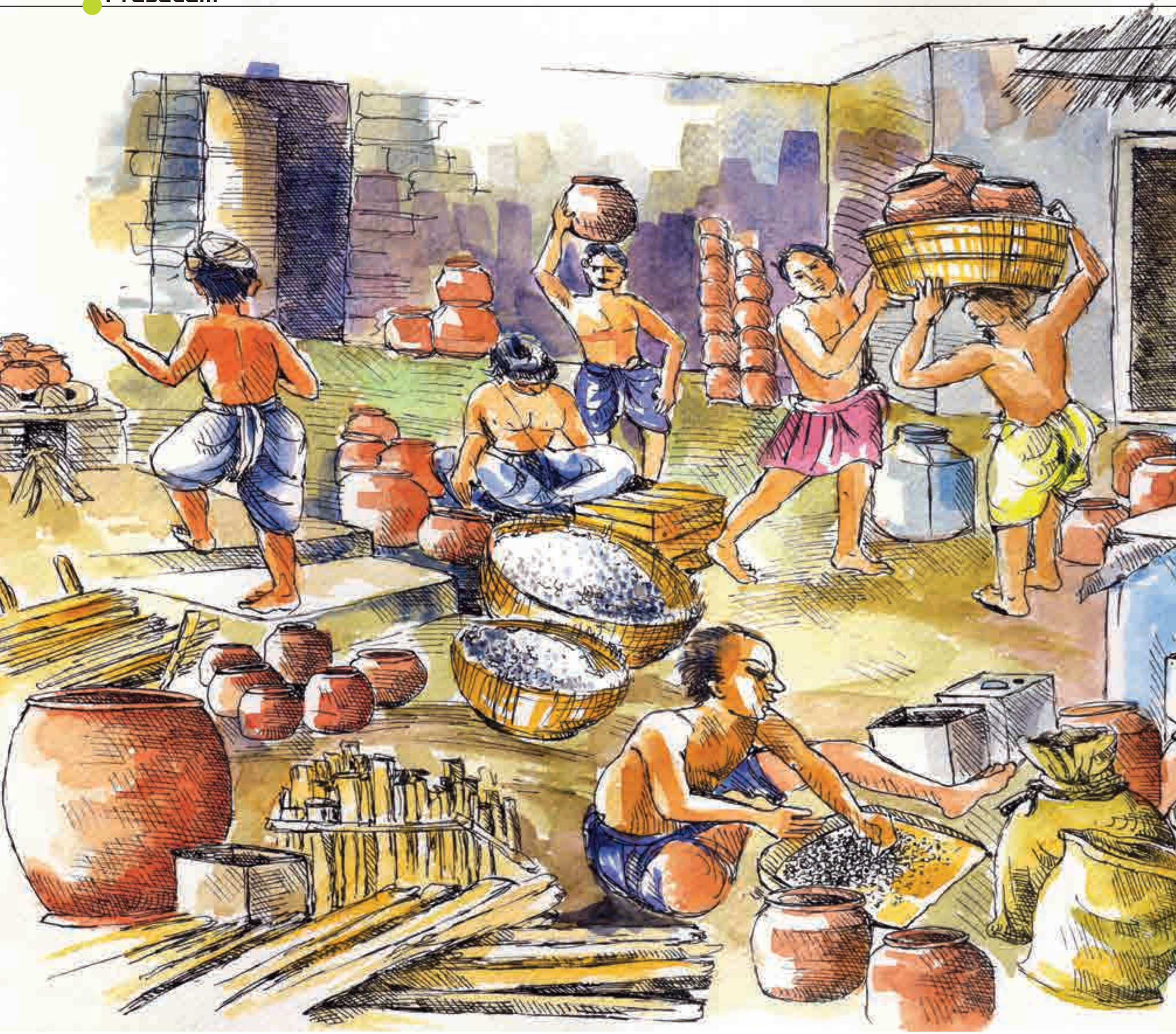
Consecrated offerings are made to Lord Jagannath five times a day, from early morning to late at night. Each time, different foods are offered to the Lord and to his siblings, Lord Balram and the Goddess Subhadra. Different



Puneet Sohal, Architect

The Joys of Lord *Jagannath's* Prasad





Sketch : Dhananjay Pimpalkhute

kinds of dals, rice, vegetables, salted curds, kheer (rice pudding) and other preparations spread their fragrance through the temple kitchen, creating an atmosphere of abundance. Apart from the sanctum sanctorum where the idols of the Gods reside, the vast kitchen is the most important part of the temple. Food is cooked in innumerable earthen vessels, in the steam and heat generated by as many as 242 wood-fired stoves – a method that not only imparts a heavenly taste to the food but ensures all its nutrients are preserved.

Every day, thousands of devotees from India and abroad congregate in search of an audience with the Lord and a share of the prasad. Foods are prepared in a traditional and pristine manner, using seasonal vegetables and fruits. A vital aspect of this process is the training of the mahasuara and the suharas (head chef and his assistants). The privilege of preparing the prasad has been accorded to one particular sect since ancient times, but only to those among them who have acquired expertise. Under the tutelage of their fathers, sons must put in years of hard labour to achieve the requisite level of skill.

Such is the regard for the purity of the prasad that the chef and his assistants bind a cloth over their mouths while they work, so that even their breath does not affect the foods. Nor should the slightest dribble generated by

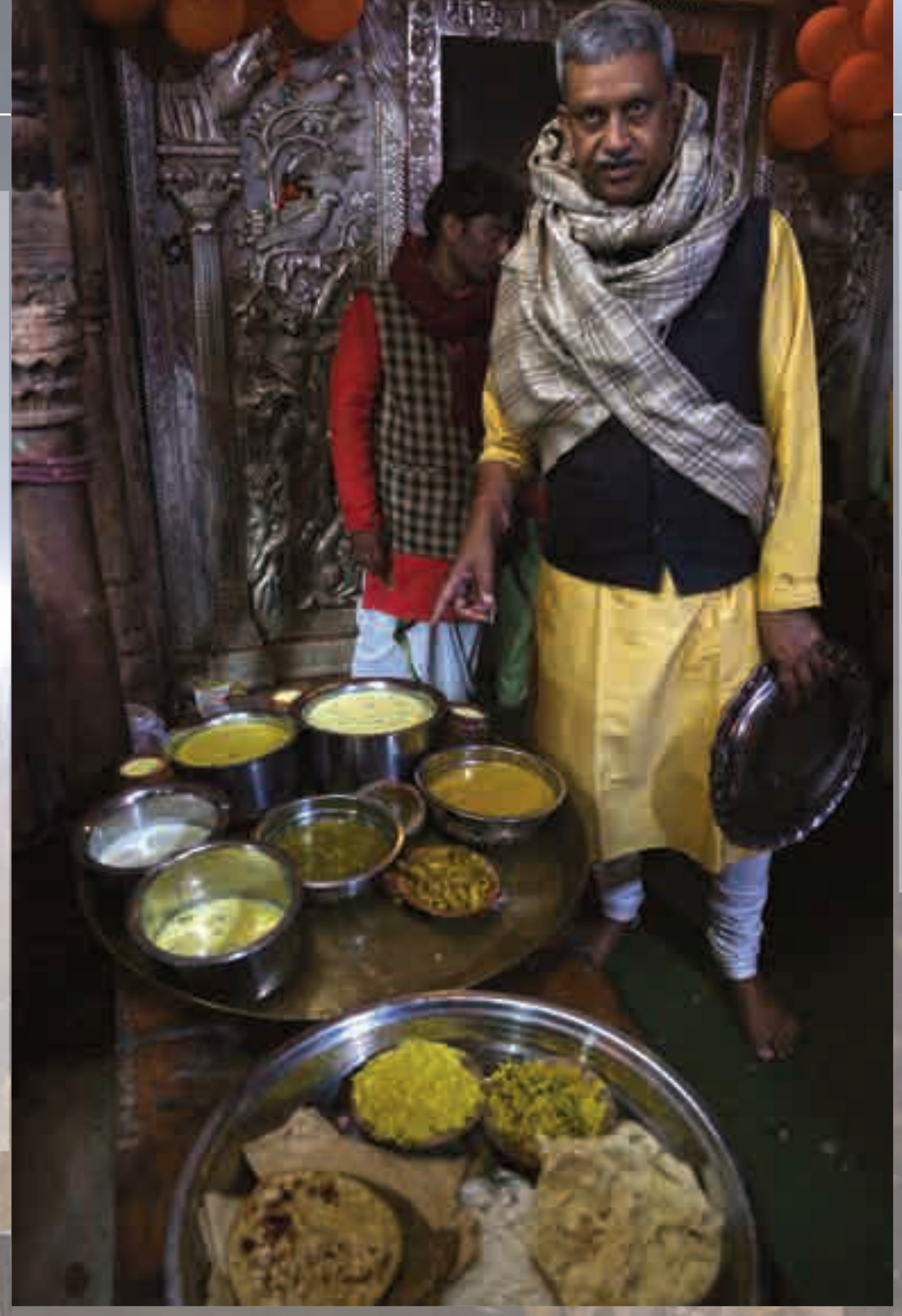
the mouth-watering fragrances contaminate the foods. The prasad is thus referred to as immaculate. Great care is exercised in its preparation, so that the nutrients are fully preserved.

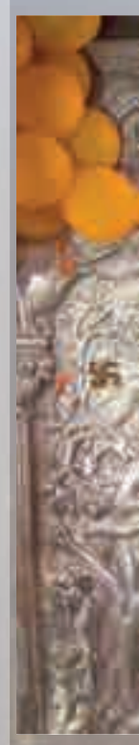
Of the 56 foods that form the mahaprasad, nine are made from staples like rice, wheat, curds, ghee, gur and dal, the same dishes that comprise the main meal of the day for most people. Various kinds of pakhal (fermented rice dish) - dahi pakhal, ad pakhal, sweet pakhal, oriya pakhal, khichhdi (rice stew) and thali khichhdi - figure in the everyday fare of the region. Likewise, a dal made with seasonal vegetables is now a common feature. In coastal Odisha, the need for fermented foods is met by pakhal. The temple kitchen produces so many varieties of pakhal that every day, new tastes are introduced into household kitchens. Foods inspired by the temple kitchen have come to dominate the menu at all social and family functions, and during festivals.

Prepared in accordance with the ancient texts, the temple cuisine - notably pakhal - has influenced the food culture not only in Odisha but elsewhere. It is specially suited to humid weather, given its cooling effect on the body. If Lord Jagannath enjoys the food, so must his devotees. The fare is so simple and plain that everyone can have it. One finds a version of pakhal in all of eastern India: Jharkhand (paani bhaat), Bengla (punda bhaat) and Assam (poita bhaat). The pakhal offered to the Lord in the heat of the afternoon is scented with jasmine. Those who have the wherewithal will share it with others and spread its joys.

The temple has also inspired a range of sweets. The mahaprasad includes 11, made primarily of grains, ghee and gur. Ten of them are made with the milk of indigenous cows. Curds are extensively used. Lord Krishna is said to have been very fond of dahi-vada (spiced curds with dumplings), so this dish is an essential part of the offerings made to the Lord. If food is delectable, it stimulates the salivary glands, and the body produces an enzyme that ensures complete nutrition. The temple food thus nurtures the body, the mind and the emotions.

OmJi Soni, Chitralaya, Udaipur





Banke Bihari in *Vrindavan*

The Lord may be fond of eating, but cannot consume fried foods on a daily basis. Keeping this in mind, the temple kitchen turns out light, non-oily foods: plain, sweet or salted rice, dal, curry, rotis including missi (gram flour) rotis and parathas, dry seasonal vegetables, dahi-bada and raita (salted curds), pickle, papad, kheer and a variety of sweets, along with the Lord's favourite dudh-bhaat (milk and rice) and many others. All these are offered up to the Lord, and his devotees get their share of nutritious, seasonal and local foods as prasad. The temple foods have found reflection in the everyday fare of households in Brij.

The heavier prasad includes deep-fried preparations like puris, kachodis, samosas, mathri, sweets, dahi-pakoda, green vegetables, potato subzi and the inevitable dudh-bhaat. These zesty goodies serve as snacks across the region. In surrounding areas, scores of temple kitchens turn out new recipes to propitiate the Lord. For the most part, these are variants of the same old dishes with the same ingredients and the same cooling or heating effects on the body. Only the presentation changes. Still, these ambrosial foods are necessary to break the blandness of quotidian existence, and play a role in activating and satisfying the taste-buds.

Prasadam

Dwarika

When Krishna the cowherd of Mathura reaches the western coast and takes on mantle of Lord of Dwarika, his food becomes royal – rajsik (stimulating) rather than satvik. The style of the offering is imperial, and the offerings palpably influenced by the local cuisine, the coastal climatic conditions and the agricultural produce of the region.

All told, 56 foods are offered including curried vegetables, moong (green gram) and chana dals, chiwda, muthiya, fafra and so on. But milk, curds, kheer and rabri are a must. Rivers of milk and ghee flow in the region, and translate into milk-based preparations such as curry, buttermilk and shrikhand (hung curd pudding). Vegetables are limited, but different kinds of dal and besan (split chickpea flour)-

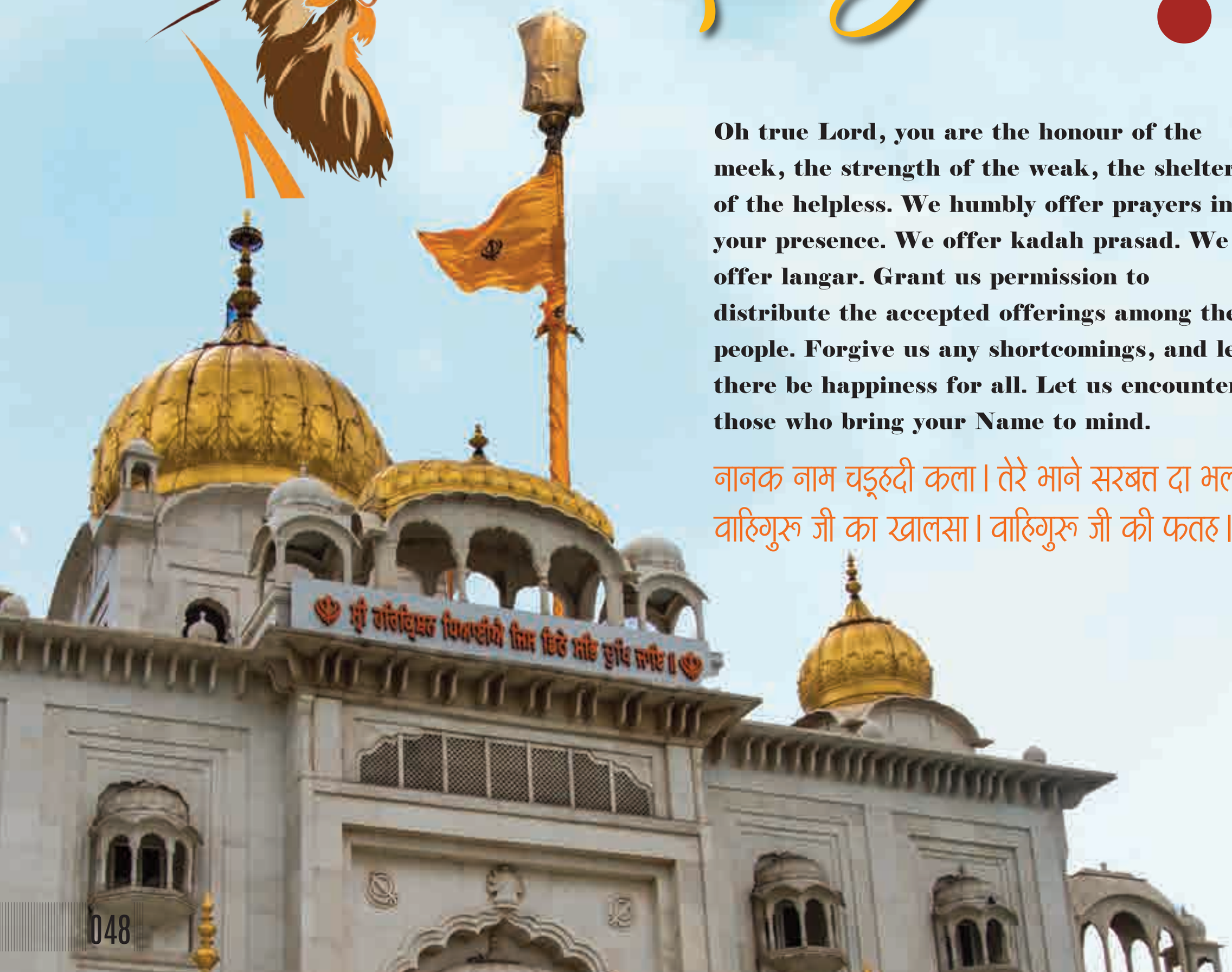
Naivedya on its way for consecration

थार जमवा आवो। ओ थार जमवा आवो, कृष्ण थार जमवा आवो। जसोदा ना बाल कृष्ण, थार जमवा आवो।शनिवार सेव बनाऊ, थार जमवा आवो। रविवारें रस–पूड़ी, थार जमवा आवो।सोमवार सिर–धनिया, थार जमवा आवो। मंगलवारे मिठाई बनाऊ, थार जमवा आवो।

based foods figure in the consecrated offerings. Over time, they have become the dominant foods of the region. A major advantage of cooking foods with milk is that they do not spoil easily. That's why Gujarati traders and tourists tend to carry snacks like thepla, fafra, gathiya and chiwda, which have a long shelf-life.

The arrangement of foods on the consecrated platter follows a set of rules. Milk-based foods are kept in front, liquid foods like curry-rice, jhol and tempered buttermilk are placed on the right, pickles and dry vegetables are on the left and puris in the middle. The platter is a dietary lesson in itself, on the sequence in which foods are to be eaten. For instance, the first food consumed will trigger a particular enzyme, to promote optimal digestion. In every region, one of the three humours – vata, pitta, kapha – tends to dominate the other two. Temple platters are arranged in a way that restores the balance, and these rules are inculcated in the population of the particular region.

Have you had Langar?



Oh true Lord, you are the honour of the meek, the strength of the weak, the shelter of the helpless. We humbly offer prayers in your presence. We offer kadah prasad. We offer langar. Grant us permission to distribute the accepted offerings among the people. Forgive us any shortcomings, and let there be happiness for all. Let us encounter those who bring your Name to mind.

नानक नाम चड़्हदी कला। तेरे भाने सरबत दा भला।
वाहिगुरू जी का खालसा। वाहिगुरू जी की फतह।

'Vand chakko' (share and eat) is a fundamental tenet of the Sikh faith, propounded by Guru Nanak Devji. Thus began the tradition of langar (communal meal). In every corner of the country, no one who enters a Gurudwara will leave hungry. A full meal is available to anyone and everyone who wants it. The people of Punjab are fond of urad (black gram)-and-chana dal eaten with rotis, but any sabut

(whole, unpolished) dal is considered an essential part of a nutritious meal. So, the langar at all Gurudwaras features dal-and-roti. And on the way out, a large dollop of karah prasad is placed in cupped palms.

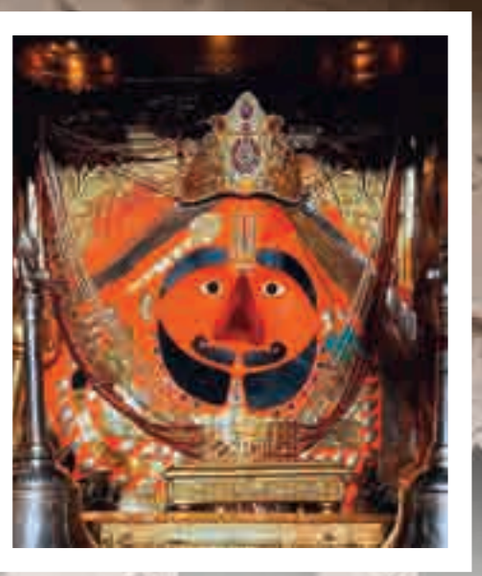
Across the country, one finds Gurudwaras on the outskirts of towns. The truck drivers of Punjab can partake of their favourite forms of nutrition all the way from Baramullah in Kashmir to Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, from Somnath in Gujarat to Imphal in Manipur. In the remote mountains of the north-east, truck drivers ask each other "Langar chakh litta (Have you had langar?)".

Renuka Devi

In the hills of north India, one needs carbs. The slopes are not easy to climb, and both the sun and cold are fierce. Nature provides the hill communities with greens and grains. Among them are kandali (nettles or scorpion grass) and madua (finger millet). In the mountainous Uttarkashi district, near Dunda, is the principle temple of the goddess Renuka, at which a large fair is held on Baisakhi (spring harvest festival) every year. The principle foods offered to Renuka - the wife of the sage Jamadagni and mother of the legendary Parshuram - are madua or kodo (millet) and kandali saag. Kodo and kandali have been associated with the goddess since ancient times. This has proved an effective means of preserving these two nutritious plants down the ages. Perhaps the enormous strength of Parshuram – who single-handedly annihilated the warrior clan no less than 21 times – can be attributed to kodo and kundali.

Gathering and cooking kundali is an art in itself, and it has become part of folk culture. The very fact that kundali is offered up in temples ensures the preservation of this art. The plant flowers once in 12 years, an occasion marked by a festival, during which Lord Shiva is propitiated with jau (barley) and kuttu (buckwheat) flour. The idea is to celebrate local produce and sing its praises.

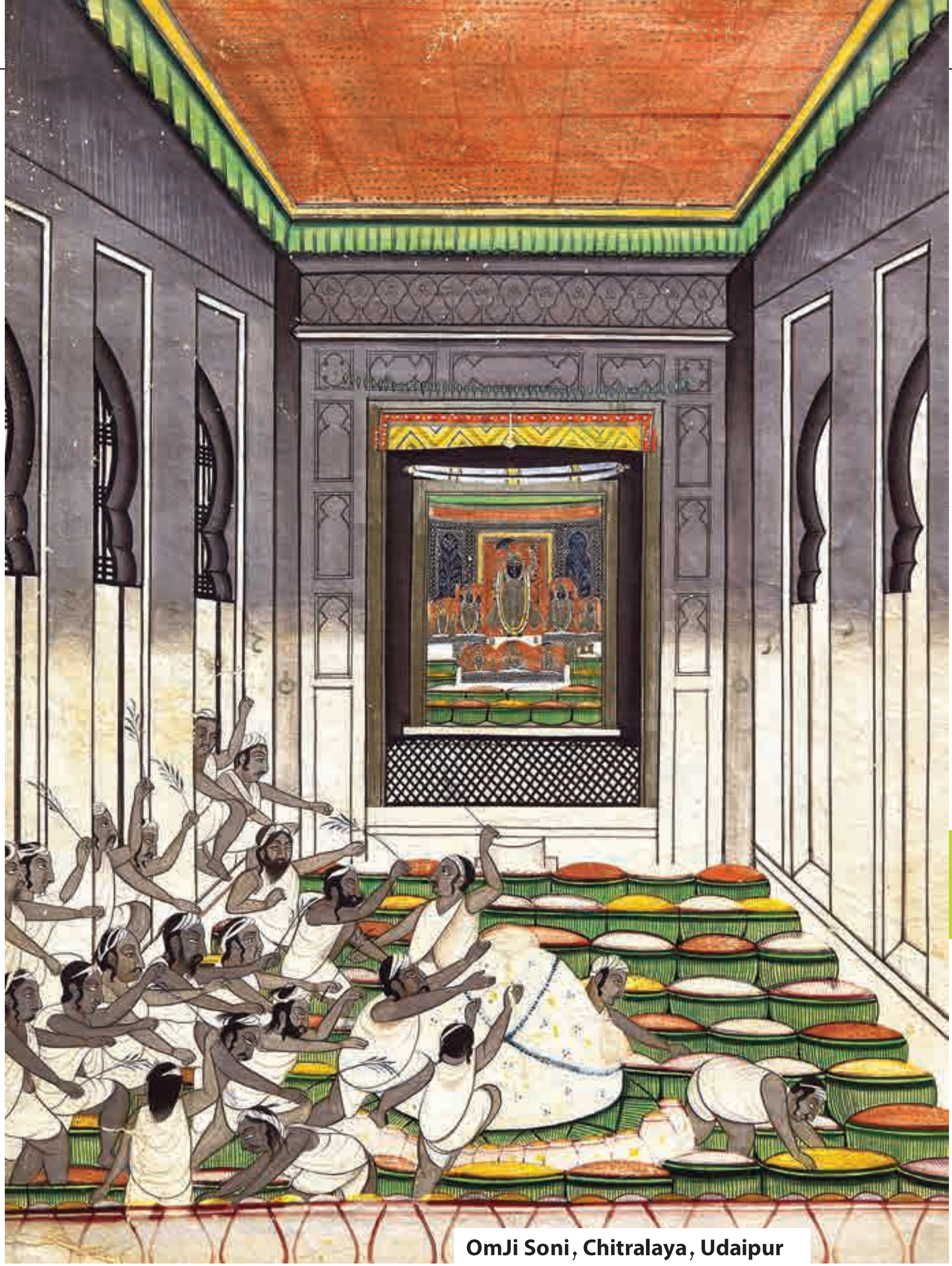
Salasar and Khatu Shyamji



Every auspicious occasion in the households of Rajasthan's Shekhawati region is shared with Lord Balaji at the Salasar temple and Lord Shyamji at the Khatu temple. The deities must be propitiated with with 50 kgs of prasad, comprising churma made with pure ghee, or with boondi laddoos. The prasad is distributed among the devotees at the temple, as well as relatives and friends. Generally, the prasad is made from besan. Chickpea grows well in the relatively dry climate, and the indigenous cows of the region are excellent milkers, so that ghee and other milk products are abundant. Only sugar and gur are imported. All these ingredients are brought together to make the churma and ladoos – delightful, nutritious and long-lasting sweets. Some is offered to the deities and the rest is a tasty treat for all.

The food cooked for devotees in the temple kitchen is no less than divine prasad. Bejad (sorghum-barley flour) rotis, moong dal, gwarphali (cluster bean), tindla and kachhri (wild cucumber) chutney or pickles are served in summer and bajra rotis, ker sangri and dal in winter. A special meal will comprise curry, gutta (besan nuggets) subzi and ghia (bottle gourd) dumplings in curry, all of which are made with besan and curds, that is, with seasonal and local produce. These temple foods are now the regular fare in households across Shekhawati, for both Balaji and Shyamji are fond of them.

In the Udaipur-Chittor region live vanvasis (forest-dwellers) of the Bhil tribe, whose forebearers rendered selfless and vital service to the great 16th century warrior and king of Mewar, Maharana Pratap. Every child in the country has heard the stories of their valour. To express their eternal gratitude, the royal families of the region put in place traditions that are followed to this day. The Srinath temple in Nathdwara is known not only for its unique rituals but for its sublime prasad. Every day, Lord Krishna is immersed in the nectar of devotion, and in a special sweet known as



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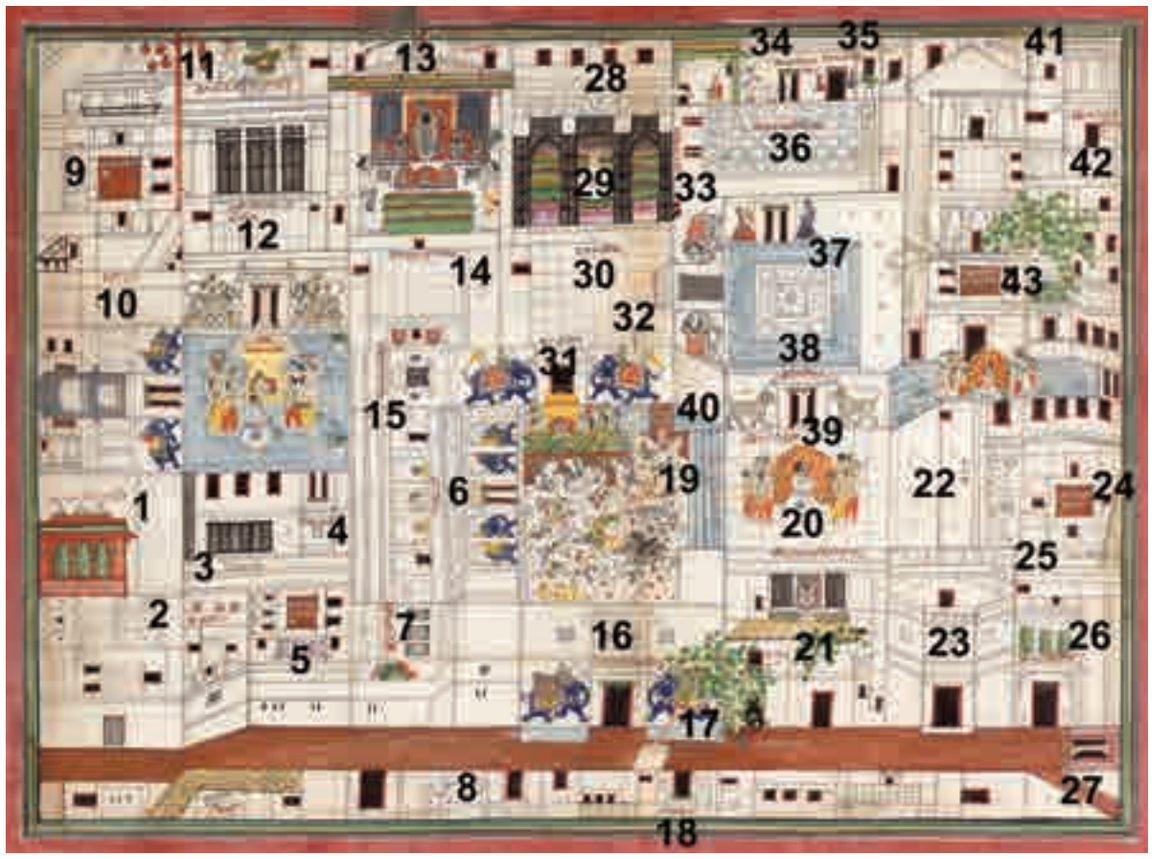


Shrinathji, where nutrition can be 'looted'

thor. Devotees come from far-off places in Gujarat and Rajasthan and want to take a long-lasting prasad back with them. The soft yet crisp thor is their first choice. Over time, it has become a favourite food of the region. A confection of fat and sugar, it graces the tables of the rich as well as those of ordinary citizens.

As popular as thor is annakuta prasad, a smorgasbord of different foods. Offered up to Banke Bihari, it is prepared in secrecy, so that it is not affected by the evil eye. To soothe the fussy, fractious child Krishna, the Srinathji ki haveli (Srinathji's mansion) has a room devoted to milk, a room for sweets, a kitchen, a room for paan, and so on. The delightful preparations made here stimulate the appetite. And in an expression of gratitude to the Bhil tribe, the haveli is thrown open to them after offerings are made to the Lord. The temple administration invites them in to partake of the nutritious annakuta prasad and carry with them as much as they like. Whatever is left over is distributed among the remaining devotees.

इंफाल

द्वारिका

When it's going for the bhog for Krishna, it has to be celebration

Naivedya for Lord Krishna is taken in the form of a procession, whether it is Banke Bihari at Vrindavan, Dwarikadhish in Dwarika or Govind DevJi in Imphal.

Mere Bankey Bihari
श्री कुंज बिहारी श्री बांके बिहारी

Enthroned on a high mountain peak, the Goddess Vaishno Devi attracts devotees from across the world. Enduring the bitter cold to gain an audience with the deity, they are served a prasad of piping hot puris, chana and halwa. They are also given dry fruits to carry back with them, notably the famous walnuts of Kashmir. Seasonal and local, they impart energy and warmth to stave off the effects of freezing cold.

The equally acclaimed apples of Kashmir are also included in the takeaway prasad, in the form of sun-dried chunks that can be carried back for relatives and friends. These apples are a representation of the region's biodiverstity, and therefore figure prominently in the Goddess' prasad.

The *Goddess* is calling, let us go

Kalyan Bhav:

A Sense of Well-being

The Venkateshwara temple at Tirupati is one of India's most important religious sites. The famous temple is wealthy in all respects, with a daily footfall exceeding a hundred thousand. Thanks to online bookings, pilgrims across the world now have the opportunity to gain an audience with the deity. After nurturing the soul with a glimpse of Balaji, devotees look forward to the immensely popular 'Kalyan ladoo'. Nutritious and tasty, it is made strictly in accordance with the scriptures.

Wealthy devotees may offer up tens of millions of rupees to the Lord, but they sit cross-legged on the ground to receive prasad, alongside the poorest of the poor. There is no distinction. Every individual receives the same prasad, the same nutrition: daddojanam (a preparation of curds and rice), pongal (a dish made of dal, rice and ghee), tamarind rice, vada and dosa. The most commonly eaten vegetarian dishes of the region, they provide carbs, proteins and minerals, are easy digestible and combine all six flavours.

चा
से
TEA

Slaking Thirst,

With a Dash of Spices and a Twist of Kindness

Do have something, at least a glass of sherbet. Buransh (rhododendron) is in season; the sherbet has an amazing cooling effect!'

'Who has soft drinks these days?! Wouldn't you like some chaach (buttermilk)?

Or would you prefer a cup of tea, with an infusion of cloves and ginger? It's wonderfully soothing for the throat!'

'If you haven't had a bite all day, why not try a little raabri (grain-based drink)? In this season, though, sattu (gram flour drink) will be excellent!'

'We have a very popular proverb in our community: one cup of tea is

Sketch : Dhananjay Pimpalkhute

a must!'

And so on...

The very first rule of hospitality in India is a warm welcome, and the second is affectionately coaxing the guest to have a little something by way of liquid refreshment. For the most part, the guest is unable to refuse. Whether or not she is disposed to, she will end up partaking of some beverage or the other. This scene, enacted in households across the country countless times a day, captures the essence of Indian hospitality.

Parallel to the warm-hearted concern for guests is the fundamental precept that no one should be allowed to go thirsty. We see it in action during the Nirjala Ekadashi, a waterless fast observed by tens of millions every year. It is an enormous test of will, because it involves abstaining from liquids for a whole day in peak summer - even while serving a variety of cooling drinks to others!

On this auspicious day, all across the country, people set up roadside stalls to dispense chilled infusions to passers-by. In the same tradition, cool water is made available to one and all throughout the year, in large earthen pots stationed at public places by concerned citizens. In India, providing potable water for the thirsty is not an act of charity; it is a moral obligation.

So, even in these times of packaged mineral water, the charming custom of offering cold water to travelers survives. At railway stations on hot summer days, we come across youngsters bringing buckets of chilled water or sherbet from their homes. Calling out 'Cold water here!', they park themselves at the passenger coaches

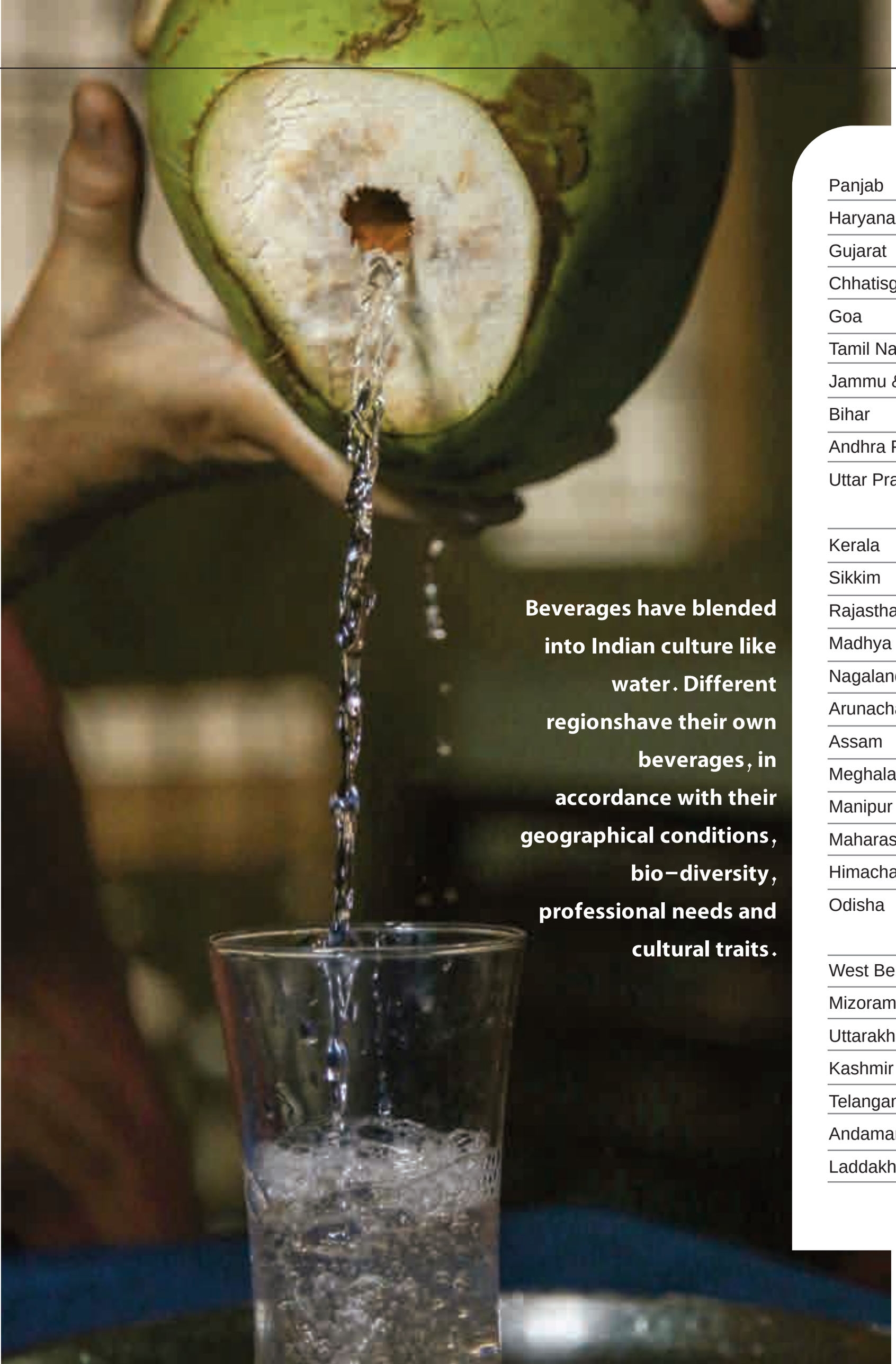
and take joy in satisfying the thirst of travelers. Tradition has it that guests are not served plain water, so the matriarch of the house adds a lump of jaggery or a pinch of sugar to each bucket. Wherever possible, a bottle of rose or sandal syrup is added, or at least a capful.

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaye, who founded Integral Humanism and wove the myriad threads of Indian culture into a single strand, described the essence of this 'sweet' tradition in one of his memoirs. He writes of a heart-warming incident that occured while he and his companions were touring a village. They were thirsty, so they stopped at a hut to ask for water. It took a while for the water to arrive, and they wondered why it was taking so long. Finally, the lady of the house appeared with a pot of water in one hand, and a leaf bearing a lump of jaggery in the other. His heart melted; despite the obvious poverty of the household, the woman had balked at serving her guests plain water. She had brought something sweet with it, as traditions of village hospitality demanded.

Beverages have blended into Indian culture like water. Different regions have their own beverages, in accordance with their geographical conditions, bio-diversity, professional needs and cultural traits.

The vast range of Indian beverages reflect the diversity of our country, but one drink is common to all regions: buttermilk, variously known as matha, taak or majige. In Kashmir, it is called gurus and figures in many popular sayings. And in the world's largest milk-producing belt that includes states like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, its manifold virtues are celebrated in folk and devotional songs.

In Rajasthan, buttermilk serves as a nutrition-packed alternative to water, particularly in the state's arid western region. Intrepid travelers who trek over miles of burning sands into the very heart of the Jaisalmer desert, might come across a small settlement tucked among the dunes. Here, if you ask for water, you will be presented with a pot of buttermilk, along with a glass and some salt – a hydrating and energizing drink. Where does it come from? Take a look around. The settlement's water source, you will find, is an artesian well. The denizens draw water using a camel-powered



Panjab	Lassi
Haryana	Chhachh
Gujarat	Chhans/Panna
Chhatisgarh	Mahua
Goa	Feni
Tamil Nadu	Neera
Jammu & Kashmir	Nun Chai
Bihar	Sattu Sherbet
Andhra Pradesh	Chhachh
Uttar Pradesh	Thandai, Sattu, Aam Panna, Be Sherbet
Kerala	Kallu,Coconut Water
Sikkim	Chhaang
Rajasthan	Kesar Kasturi
Madhya Pradesh	Handia
Nagaland	Zutho
Arunachal Pradesh	Apo/Apong
Assam	Membrane Jau
Meghalaya	Chubitchi
Manipur	Yu
Maharashtra	Kokum/Solkarhi
Himachal Pradesh	Kinaur ghanti
Odisha	Tanka torani, Mandiya Pej, Bela Panna
West Bengal	Cholai
Mizoram	Zawlaidi/Zu
Uttarakhand	Buransh
Kashmir	Kahwah
Telangana	Kallu
Andaman Nicobar	Coconut Water
Laddakh	Chhaang

wheel and pulley system, and fill it in large troughs.

Thousands of animals – camels, cattle, goats and sheep – converge at the troughs every day to slake their thirst. In return, the milch cattle provide their benefactors with the gift of milk, curds, buttermilk and ghee. A folk song captures this desert tradition:

आंबा मीठी आमरी, (आम से भी मीठी ईमली)

चोसर मीठी छाछ. (सबसे मीठी छाछ)

नैना मीठी कामरी (सुंदर आँखो वाली प्रेमिका)

रन मीठी तलवार (युद्ध में प्रिय तलवार)

The tamarind is sweeter than mango,
Buttermilk is the sweetest by far.
Sweet are the eyes of a paramour,
And the sword in times of war.

In Maharashtra, the importance of buttermilk in the worship of Lord Ganapati is expressed in a children's rhyme:

दत्त दत्त दत्ताची गाय,

गाईचं दूध

दुधावरची साय

सायीचं दही

दह्याचा ताक

ताकावरचं लोणी

लोण्याचं तूप

तुपाची बेरी

बेरीची शेरी

शेरीची माती

मातीचा गणपती

गणपतीची घंटा वाजे

घण घण घण

"आईच्या कामाला मदत करू।

ताक घुसळून लोणी काढू।।"

Gist: The above song tells us a detailed process of Clarified Butter making and the sediments remained are used to make Ganesha Idol for worship.

In various parts of the state, the 1. importance 2. significance 3. sublimity of buttermilk is described through riddles, which present it as something 1. scarce 2.precious, so as to engender a craving for it.

भोजनान्ते च किं पेयम्
जयन्तः कस्य वै सुतः।
कथं विष्णुपदं प्रोक्तम्
तक्रं शक्रस्य दुर्लभम्।।

In the folk songs of Gujarat, the women of Dwarika seek to entice Lord Krishna with his well-known love of curds and butter...

The cattle-rearing Gujjars of Kashmir impart advice to the new generation:

हरदु गुरुस म्यतूरस सोंतु गुरुस शतरस।

In the Himalayan region, it is said that buttermilk churned during the monsoon is for friends, while that produced in spring is for enemies. This saying runs counter to the popular notion that buttermilk should not be consumed during the rainy season. But in the mountainous vistas of Kashmir, fodder grasses take on a different character. The pastoral communities have access to vast pastures, replete with fodder for their cattle, and they know precisely which

grasses enhance the goodness of milk. They are best-placed to advise on the quality of milk and its products.

कडवेडु पालकु मज्जिग बेट्ट

यानी, घड़ा भर दूध निपटाने के लिए छाछ की एक ही बूंद काफी है।

Far to the south in Andhra Pradesh, majige or buttermilk tempered with condiments, is consumed at both times. Well aware of its potency, people say:

'A single drop of buttermilk is enough to tackle a whole pot of milk'.

In pastoral communities, milk and milk products comprise a meal in themselves. Where geo-climactic conditions favour animal husbandry, such as in western Rajasthan and eastern Gujarat, it is widely practiced. The nomadic communities of this region who have migrated to other states or are still itinerant, follow animal husbandry as their primary occupation. Milk and its products are their main fare. So what if there are no vegetables available -

there's always taak!

Virile young men in Punjab are known for curling their proud moustaches into sharp points with a pomade of buttermilk, butter or whipped curds. Small wonder nubile young women entreat their fathers to marry them into households with a wealth of cattle:

देवीं बे बाबला उस घरे,
जित्थे सस्सू दे मझां सत्।
इक चौना इक रिड़कां
मेरा चाटियां दे विच हत्थ
बाबल तेरा पुन्न होव

Send me to a home, father dear
Where my in-laws seven buffaloes do rear.
One grazes, I churn the milk of the other
My hands always dipped in a pitcher
Blessings will shower on you, oh father.

The robust young women of Punjab vigorously churn milk until wholesome white butter separates from buttermilk, singing all the while:

कंगना वाली दुध रिड़के
विच्चों मक्खन झातीआं मारे

Girls with bangles churning milk
Bits of butter glimpsed within.

Kahwa or tea flavoured with nuts and spices is an essential feature of Kashmir's culture. In the bone-chilling winters, people carry little fire-pots suspended around their necks under their phirens (long woollen shirt). Kahwa is heated on the hot embers, and they remain steeped in its warmth and sweetness.

पोफि धेदि कँद शर्बत चाबनीबुख
मासि धेदि कोछी लल्नोबुख तेहि

Those who have the means, add a touch of saffron to the tea, sharing its heavenly

fragrance. Kashmiris who engage in manual labour have a preference for salted tea. Three to four cups of this beverage go a long way in keeping the body warm and tiredness at bay. No wonder they sing its praises:

बनी आयस पकि पकि थकिथ

घर वातिय चमि नुन चाए

कथि बोरन तबिस चातिथ

घर वातिय चमि नुन चाए

कुछि पेठ बाति सारी समिथ

घर वातिय चमि नुन चाए

The tropical conditions obtaining in India lend themselves to foods and beverages produced through fermentation. In such a climate, fermented foods not only strengthen but insulate the digestive system. Probiotics create a layer that is very effective in safeguarding the gut against harmful bacteria. That is why our sages developed edible and potable foods that could be produced through natural fermentation, and embedded them in our folk culture.

The world-famous Jagannath Temple in Puri, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, attracts millions of visitors every year. Alongside the transcendent spiritual experience of an audience with the deity, it offers the most divine prasad (sacrament). So sublime, that it is referred to as 'mahaprasad', or supreme sacrament. The matchless foods comprising this prasad have been endlessly extolled, as in the opening pages of this Atlas. But 'tanka torani' has not been mentioned. When worshippers line up for an audience with the deity, waiting patiently in long queues for long hours, the humidity of the nearby ocean takes a toll of their stamina. Tanka torani refreshes and energizes them. Prepared from fermented rice, buttermilk and condiments, this tasty libation is served in earthen cups.

Raabri, known by a variety of names, is consumed across regions. It may be based on barley, pearl millet,

maize or rice flour, but the common ingredient is buttermilk, or at times, fermented curds and water. The version made with fermented rice is known as Apong. It was inappropriately dubbed as 'rice beer' by westerners, thereby alienating it from mainstream culture, but the fact is that to this day, it serves as a primary beverage in the north-east, even for tee-totalers.

In Arunachal Pradesh, Apong is consumed on a daily basis. The tradition of sharing it, in a festive spirit and to the accompaniment of songs, prevails among the indigenous peoples of the state. The appetizing drink, considered a digestive, is consumed by children and the elderly alike, and is very popular among the youth. A similar beverage is marua, differing only in that it is made from pearl millet rather than rice.

In Gujarat, raabri is regarded as a 'power drink', so fortifying that to this day, when a farmer prepares to leave for his field, his wife urges him:

राबड़ी की थाली पी ले, छाछ को प्यालो पटेलण बेगी चाल ।

रे पटेलण बेगी बेगी चाल, काटा खेत मे पालो..

(जल्दी से एक थाली राबड़ी पी लो और एक प्याला छाछ, फिर चलते हैं दोनों खेत में काम करने).

Hurry, drink some raabri, and a cup of buttermilk

Let us go to the field, and work with a will.

'Masala' raabri is a spicy variant, tempered with cumin and red chilli. We hear of a woman from a Banjara (nomadic) tribe, who

wants to buy cumin but forgets what it is called. She tells the shopkeeper:

हे दादा, गला नाही ठाऊ क

राबड़ी में घालते,

घम–घम गन्दावते तैच दे दादा।

(ओ दादा, मुझे नाम तो याद नहीं आ रहा, लेकिन राबड़ी में जो सुगंधित मसाला डालते हैं, वो दे दो न!)

O brother, I don't remember its name,

But the fragant spice we add to rabri,

Give me the same!

For the generally impoverished Banjaras, the low-cost, savoury rabri is a much loved drink. Often served to guests, its deliciousness is reflected in a folk song:

बाई ए मारे घर पाम को ये।

बाई म जामक हलावचू ये।

जामक हलान,जीरो घालन,

राबड़ी करूंचुं ये।

मारे पामकेन जीरे री राबड़ी घालू ये।

All these concoctions – raabri, maheri (a version of raabri), Apong, salan (spicy curry), ragi ganji (millet malt beverage), and so on – reflect the immense range of our food culture. In Karnataka and Telengana, one finds roadside vendors parked under trees, dispensing ragi ganji from large earthen pitchers. Ragi or finger millet is the primary cereal in this region, so in summers,

it forms the basis of a popular beverage.

In Rajasthan and Haryana, raabri is consumed throughout the year, but the recipe changes in accordance with the seasons. In summer, ghaat/khaate raabri, made with buttermilk and cracked barley or pearl millet, is preferred. Bits of onion are added to enhance the taste and protect against heatstroke. In winter, bajra raabri consumed with 1. warm 2. steaming, freshly-drawn milk is a much-anticipated delicacy.

मीठी लागै बाजरे की राबड़ी रै
दल चक्की से हांड़ी पै गैरी
नीचे लगा दी लाकड़ी रै
मीठी लागै ...
रांधे–रांधे थाली में घाली
ऊपर आ गई पपड़ी रै
मीठी लागै ...

As we approach the Malwa region in west-central India, bajra is replaced by macca (maize). But across geographies, raabri maintains its pride of place in the rhythms of Indian life:

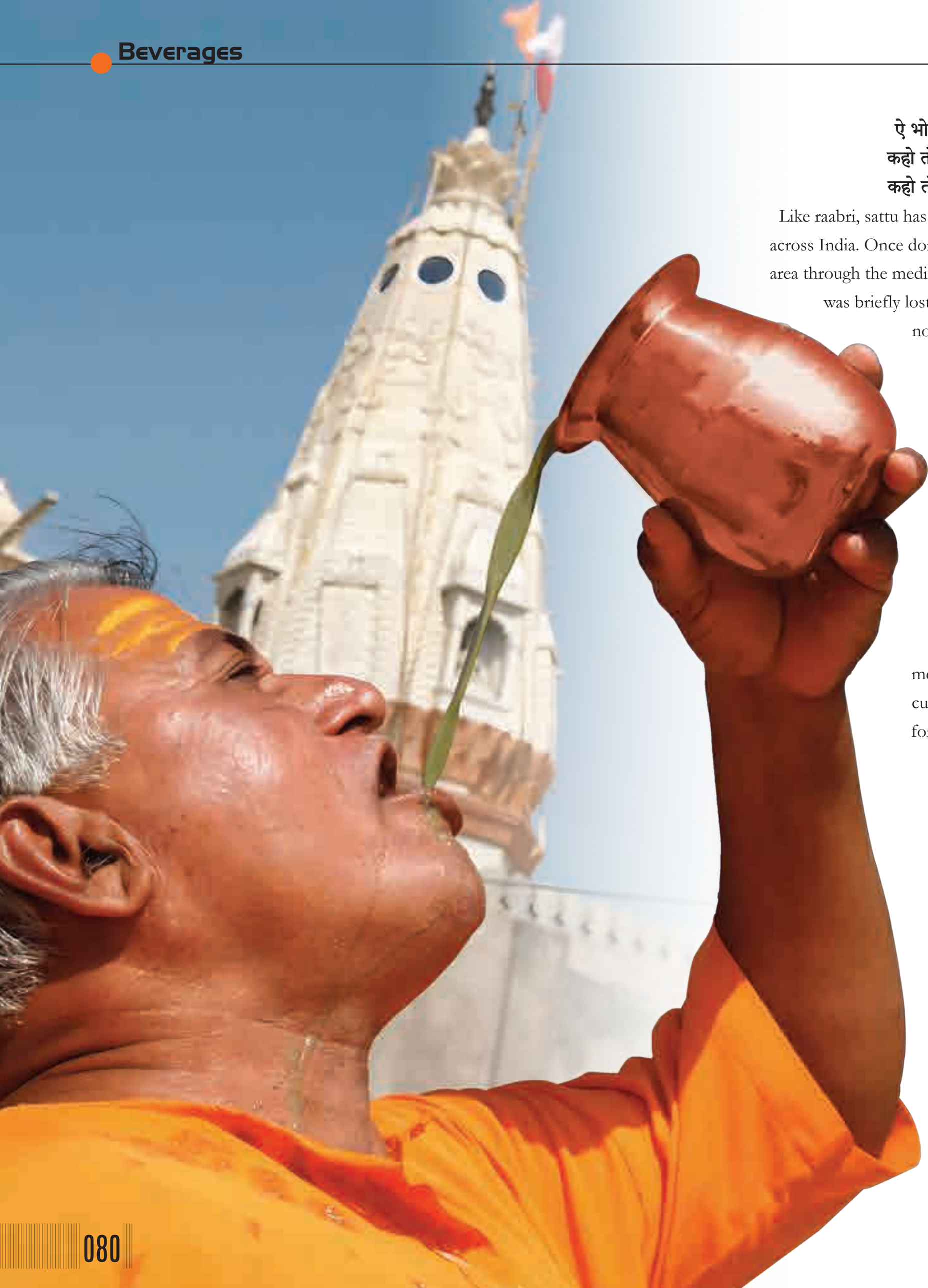
मालवा को प्यारो भोजन, धन मक्का की राबड़ी।
लई ठोपली दळवा बेठी, घट्टी धूजी भापड़ी।
हत्तो टूट्यो, पाळो फूट्यो, कई बिचारी माकड़ी?
कड़ी बेंच खुगाळी बेंची, भेंस लाया भापड़ी।
सासूजी जद दोवण बेठ्या, हांडी भर दी आखड़ी।
चाटूजी जद चूंटन लाग्या, खदबद बोली राबड़ी।
सासू बऊ जद जीमण बेठ्या, थाली लीवी राबड़ी।
बरफी सरका टुकड़ा जमग्या, कंई जलेबी भापड़ी?
अस्सी बरस को डोकरो बोल्यो, आछी लागी राबड़ी।
आल्या-दिवाल्या सबी भरीद्या, मूंडो हले ने जाबड़ी।
मालवा को प्यारो भोजन, धन मक्का की राबड़ी।

Toddy, the self-fermenting liquor obtained by tapping palm trees, has become synonymous with intoxication, but for the adivasis (indigenous peoples) of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Telengana, it is the most effective means of banishing humidity and heat-induced fatigue.

Other factors apart, 1. human capabilities 2. human potential play a significant role in shaping our food culture. For instance, in most of Rajasthan and the neighbouring areas of Haryana, the Brij and Awadh regions of Uttar Pradesh and central India and Malwa, thandai is a prized beverage. It is an aromatic concoction of almonds, poppy seeds, white peppers, cardamon, melon seeds and rose petals, all manually ground into a paste and stirred into milk. Believed to boost brainpower, it is particularly favoured among those engaged in intellectual activities. Why then, is it so popular in Kohlapure, the favourite destination for Indian wrestlers? Because along with bodily

strength, they must apply strategems in order to win! Thandai enhances both brawn and brain. It also has a scriptural significance; devotees of Lord Shiva propitiate Him with bhang (cannabis)-infused thandai before consuming it themselves.

ताडि चेट्टम्मा तल्ली ताडिचेट्टम्मा
निन्नु ताकुतुन्टे ना तनुवु पुलरिंचिंदो
नेनु ताल्लु एक्के रोजुलन्नी यादिकोच्चेनो ।। ताडि।।
मा ऊपिरितित्तुलानु बिगादीस्तू मोपुवेस्तिमि
नी ताडि चेट्लपैनने तनूवंता धारपोस्तिमि
रेयिपगलु आनकुंडा रेक्कलन्नी विरुचुकोनी
प्रकृतीलो मेमंता लीनमैतीमो .....
आ गर्भगुडिलो काटमय्यनु मेमु गोल्तीमो..... ।।
ताडि।।



ऐ भोले बाबा बसो मेरी नगरी
कहो तो मँगादूँ लस्सी या शर्बत,
कहो तो मँगा दूँ भाँग भर गगरी

Like raabri, sattu has established itself as a super-food across India. Once dominant across a large geographical area through the medium of folk knowledge and culture, it was briefly lost in the glitz of urban culture. But now, it has staged a dramatic comeback thanks to social media, where it figures in a number of innovative recipes. Its popularity owes to the fact that it is healthy, tasty, easy to prepare and lends itself to a variety of ingredients. It can be made with barley, or roasted gram. Packed with nutrients and universally enjoyed, sattu is regarded as a wholesome, standalone meal in Bhojpuri (west Bihar-east UP) culture. But in summers, it takes the form of a refreshing beverage:

गर्मी के संग लू चले जब
सतुआ घोरी पीयल जाला।
आ करीया नुन के संघई
पीयाज कुतुर के डालाला।
लू कबहुं पजरे ना आई,
जे गर्मी भर सेवन करी ।
मस्त मियाज हरिहर रही
जे मनई ई अमल करी।

All over the world, tetrapacks of months-old 'fresh' fruit juice sell like hotcakes. But in the garden of diversity that is India are many flowers, which yield delightful sherbets that are the

pride of every state. The roses of Halidghati, the rhododendron of Uttarakhand and the kokum (Garcinia indica) of Konkan have always been a part of our food culture. Chandan (sandal) and kesar (saffron) sherbets were the libations of kings.

Buransh or rhododendron occupies a special place in the lives of the people of Garhwal, owing to its many benefits. The flowers are consumed with relish, the chutney adds savour to meals and the sherbet is peerless in appearance and taste:

डांड्यू खिलणा ह्वाला बुरंसी का फूल,
पाख्यू हैंसणी ह्वोली, फ्योंली मुलमूल,
फुलारी फुलपाती लेकी, देल्यूं देल्यूं जाला
दगड्या भगयान थ्ड्या चौंफुला लगाला।

When the buransh flowers, life in the hills blossoms. But the serene, laid-back denizens of the hills advise, 'Friend, don't be in too much of a hurry, come slowly, gather fragrance, so that

you may enhance the glory of Lord Shiva's crown'.

बुरांश दादू तू बड़ा उतालू रे औरू फूल तू फूलण नी देन्दो।

जाति का तू खास ठकरौल बास तेरी कै देवन हरी।

बालिया कूण सिर शोभी बालिया शिव सिर शोभी।

बालिया बुरांश जागा–जागा बालिया बुरांश लेऊ सिरा

The picture of India's beverage culture would be incomplete without a tribute to the splendour of milk and lassi (whipped curds). Milk in all its delectable forms is inextricably linked with Lord Krishna. Folk tales and songs depict the naughty child Krishna breaking the Gopi's (milkmaids') pots to steal their wares. Observing Krishna's

delight in milk and curds, the Gopis begin to sing songs extolling their virtues, so as to entice him to come to them. In Haryana, where curds and buttermilk are highly esteemed, children are told stories of Lord Krishna to make them hanker for curds, butter, etc. Breakfast for children consists of curds or butter mixed with large sugar crystals, or a creamy lassi, which are an excellent source of nutrients for their fast-growing bodies. The very first lullaby a child hears tells of the joys of milk and cream, and this naturally engenders a taste for them. Every morning, the hymns of Sant Jaitram, a revered spiritual leader, waft from many households:

दूध–दही मन मान्या होई,
कोई जन विरला खाली।
अति सुंदर नीकी नरकाया,
सबके मुख पर लाली।

In the Indo-Gangetic plains, milk is as much an imperative as water, be it creamy and full-fat or 'masala' (spiced) milk, or – as was the craze in the Americas during the Covid-19 pandemic - turmeric-infused 'golden milk'. Naughty Krishna, aware

of the 'sattvic' (pure, vital, energy-giving) and nutritional virtues of milk and its products, engendered such a craze for them that the entire country was captivated.

माता यसोदा दही बिलोवे

कान्हूड़ो राड़ मचावै

दही को सपड़को कान्हे ने भावे

ले ले रे कान्हा दही रे गोड़ियो

बाहर सूँ बाबो नन्द जी आयो

तेरी कान्हूड़ो बहुत हठीलो

हार तोड़े मोती मांगे बालूड़ो।

पूर्वं मधुरमश्नीयान्मध्येऽम्ललवणौ रसौ ।
पश्चाच्छेषान् रसान् वैद्यो भोजनेष्ववचारयेत् ।।
(Sushrut Samhita Sutrasthana 46/460)।

Life's Sweetest Moments are... *Sweet!*

Among westernized folk, the dessert course is the thrilling finale to a meal. But in India, the repast traditionally begins with a touch of sweetness. Only after the sweet course, if hunger persists, is the customary fare of vegetables, pulses and flatbreads consumed. The Indian palate testifies to the popular belief in nectarous beginnings. Contrary to modern notions of diabetes management, the very fact that the tongue identifies sweet foods establishes their necessity in our diet. The abiding fondness for mithai (sweets) has made them an integral part of Indian cuisines and culinary practices. Be it domestic kitchens, street stalls, neighbourhood shops or glittering stores in shopping malls, all of them loudly proclaim the powerful hold that sweets have on our taste buds. The typical Indian menu is incomplete – and unsatisfying - without a touch of mithai.

It is a universally acknowledged that while food is necessary for survival, sweets are necessary to make life pleasureable. Both health and taste are imperative to an enjoyable existence. Consider the fact that, from the very beginning, nectar invigorates the human body. It nourishes the seven humours (fluid, blood, flesh, fat, bones, marrow and seed), imparts vitality and enhances longevity. It enchants the five sense organs and the mind. It is effective against kapha and eliminates vata and pitta. Apart from fortifying the body, sweets elicit pleasant speech. Thus, it is said of a person who sounds mellifluous that he speaks with a honeyed tongue.

India's hot tropical climate, cultural tenets and ancient treatises attest to the necessity of mithai. Hard physical labour is part and parcel of the Indian lifestyle, and syrups or sweet foods provide the instant energy boost that is needed. Thus, Indians are immersed in an ocean of nectar. Their revered deities, too, bless and share in the predilection for sweets.

If Lord Ganesh loves modak, the cardamom-flavoured balls that are perhaps the most ancient of Indian sweets, his sire, the God of Gods Lord Shiva, for all his asceticism, cannot resist kheer (rice pudding). The conceptualization of the many avatars of Lord Vishnu, the sustainer of the universe, seemingly has to do with his delectation of an array of sweet foods during his earthly sojourns.

From the mahaprasad at the Jagannath temple in the east to the chhappan bhog (56 foods) dedicated to Lord Krishna at the Dwarkadhish temple in the west, sweet foods predominate. In every region, the prevailing geo-climactic conditions have given rise to different sweets, with which the principal deity is propitiated.

Lord Ganesh, for instance, may be offered coconut modak in Maharashtra, but boondi laddoos (balled

droplets of fried gram) in the north. The offering to Lord Hanuman may comprise boondi laddoos in one locale and besan (Bengal gram flour) laddoos in another. Lively Lord Krishna who embodies the playful aspect of the divine is immersed in his abiding love of butter and cream at some places but enticed with an offering of sweets in others. In effect, the pantheon of deities, who demand different kinds of sweets in different regions, contributes to the Indian craving for sweets.

Modern and ancient treatises testify to the relationship between Indian traditions of nutrition, culinary practices and consumption of sweets, which are collectively attuned to the indigenous lifestyle. Professions such as farming, metal-working, manufacture of vessels and wood- or stone-carving are all energy-intensive. Sweets are the best possible way of providing the necessary stamina.

Glucose, regarded as an instant energy booster, is nothing other than the most basic form of sugar. While numerous kinds of sweeteners are now available, Indians traditionally consumed sugar in the form of whole or powdered jaggery (gur), molasses, rock candy (misri), and raw or muscovado sugar.

मीठी मिसरी रौ ठिकाणो
केसर भरीयौ मखाणो
बीके रै हठ सूं हुई थरपणा
वौ सैर है म्हारौ बीकाणो

Sweeteners and grains together create a symphony of tastes. In every household we find at least one individual addicted to the delicious combination of paratha (shallow fried flat-bread) with gur or shakkar (powdered jaggery). Another may prefer rice with raw or muscovado sugar. In some parts of north India, a melange of ghee and

porous sugar is a mandatory accompaniment at social events, to counterpoint the spicy fare with explosions of sweetness.

Sweets have a special place in folk tradition. Recipients of good news are expected to distribute sweets to one and all, thereby sharing their own happiness with the community. And when a new stove is installed in a household, it must be inaugurated by making a sweet halwa. This halwa is known by various names in different regions, like sheera in Gujarat. The following lines allude to its divine taste:

मारी शेरी ए थी कनकु वार आवता रे लोल
मुखते थी मोरली बजावता रे लोल
में तो दूध रे शकर नो शिरो करयो रे लोल
तांबा ना तरह मा टेढ़ो करयो रे लोल

Some Indian sweets have gained global popularity. Conversely, Indians have adopted and adapted foreign fare to their tastes so effectively that the provenance of these sweet treats could well be local. People of all ages, from naive children to wise elders, are addicted to them.

Now that India has been dubbed the 'diabetes capital of the world', fierce conflicts over sweets rage in the households of those who have fallen prey to this fast-growing disease. Sugar-coated stories of these battles are told. The extent of internal strife triggered by sweet fixations is described as follows:

छूटा बर्फी, बदान, इमरती, इलायची दाना,
छूटा घेवर, जलेब, छूटा और कलाकंद री
पेड़ा, राजशाही, लड्डू, खुरमें, खताई छूटी
पूरी, कचौरी, मोहन भोग है बुलंद री।
छूटे बताशे, पिन्नी, खेलना, नुगदी, मटरी
छूटा दिल भिश्त खाकर चित हो आनंद री।

When elders in the family are dissuaded by younger members from indulging their sweet cravings, the old folks vent their feelings in this manner...

Laddoo

The King of all Sweets

What is India's national sweet? The answer cannot be found in gazettes, newspapers, journals or books. By far the most worthy candidate for this elevated title, you will find, is the globe-shaped laddoo, representing a world of goodness. Rounded into a sphere in the palm of the hand, its intimate links with the sub-continent's history, geography and food culture, place it firmly on the throne of India's national sweet.

The laddoo's role is as diverse as its constituents; it may serve as medicine, or as a buffer against hunger while travelling, or as an energy-booster for those going off to work. Just as India represents unity in diversity, the stuff of laddoos changes in nature and flavour, but the globular shape remains the same. Indians' love of this mithai can be guaged from the tendency to affectionately address a rotund child as 'laddoo'. The revered Lord Krishna, in his childlike

form, is known as 'Laddoo Gopal'.

Legend has it that the great Ayurvedic luminary (and father of Indian surgery) Sushruta rolled medicinal substances coated with honey into a laddoo. Another story, a north Indian folk tale, says that an Ayurvedic doctor's assistant accidentally allowed a few drops of ghee to permeate a curative mixture. When he took the mixture in the palm of his hand to make it firm, it took on a laddoo shape.

When myriad ingredients comes together in the form of a tasty laddoo, their healthful effects are enhanced. In addition, laddoos are long-lasting, the ideal snack for students returning to their hostels. And when a bride bids farewell to her parents, she carries laddoos to remind her of home...

मेरी मम्मी ने पहुंचाये
मेरे मायके से आये
हो जू सोंठ के गरी के लड्डुआ
वामें से इक लड्डू मोरी सास ने चुराये
हाहा करके पूंछी, पैंया करके पूंछी
सबई तरा से हमने पूछी, उनने नई बतायें। मेरी....
चौकीदार से खबर करी, तब थानेदार बुलाये
थाता करके सासू रानें, लड्डू हमने चुराये। मेरी....

Laddoos assert their dominance not just in the hostel or the

marital home, but in the field of battle. In the Chola kingdom, a gift of laddoos for soldiers departing on a military campaign was regarded as auspicious. On a practical note, with a shelf-life of many months, the laddoo was a buffer against hunger and imparted strength. As an offering to deities or a form of prasad, the laddoo commands pride of place.

Other than wheat-flour, gram-flour (besan), shredded coconut, milk solids (khoya) and additives like sesame (til) and accacia gum (gond), a vast array of ingredients are combined to make countless varieties of laddoos. In terms of taste, nutrition, popularity and acceptability, the laddoo reigns supreme. In the world of laddoos, the boondi laddoo can be regarded as something of a brand ambassador, because it adds lustre to mithai shops across India.

Boondi laddoos - droplets of fried gram flour batter dipped in syrup, sieved and mixed with pumpkin seeds and other ingredients depending on taste or inclination, then rolled into balls – are ubiquitous.

The popular motichoor laddoo is a sibling of the boondi laddoo, the only difference being that the droplets of gram flour are finer. In praise of laddoos...

छोटे–छोटे लड्डुवा बन्हाव
नाउनि बैना बंटाव।
एक घर मा भै–नौ–नौ चूल्हा
फोरि–फोरि लेड्डुवा लै जाव
नाउनि बैना बंटाव।
गुड़ गाना मगर दिल लगाना नहीं
बहू रानी की बातों में आना नहीं
वो तो बेंदी दिखा के बुला लेती है

Besan laddoos are made with gram flour slow-roasted in ghee, a process that gives off a heavenly fragrance and makes the mouth water. A dollop of fresh besan laddoo on the tongue makes the taste buds come alive.

In north India, laddoos made of milk solids and dry fruit, melded with other ingredients, are much-relished. Sesame seeds are added in winters, to provide warmth against the cold. The sesame adds a nutty flavour and crunchiness, and also has therapeutic value.

In the coastal city of Machhalipatnam in Andhra Pradesh, the bandaar or tokkudu laddoos are very popular. Introduced by people from Bundelkhand who settled there during the first war of independence in 1857, they are made of gram flour and jaggery. The immigrants were whole-heartedly adopted by the local people, and so were their laddoos. The bandaar laddoo was given the geographical indicator (GI) tag in 2017.

In the south and on the coasts, coconut laddoos embedded with the unique flavour of the coconuts that grow there in profusion, hold sway.

वो तो पिपरी पिसा के भगा देती है
गुड़ खाना....
वो तो झूमक दिखा के बुला लेती है
वो तो लड्डू बंधा के भगा देती है
गुड़ खाना....
वो तो चैना दिखा के बुला लेती है
वो तो बिलुई रिन्हा के भगा देती है
गुड़ खाना....

{गर्भवती स्त्रियों की खाने-पीने की इच्छा की ही अभिव्यक्ति है, जिसमें उनकी बुद्धिमत्ता के भी दर्शन होते हैं। साथ ही पोषक आहार को लेकर इच्छा भी।}

In this context, the delicious taste of saunth (ginger) laddoos also figures....

सौंठ के लड्डू चरपरे हैं, सौंठ के लड्डू
अँगना में ठाड़ी सास यों बोलीं, बहू एक हमें भी देना,
सौंठ के लड्डू, सौंठ के लड्डू
ये लड्डू मेरे पीहर से आए, ये लड्डू मेरी मां ने बनाए
पसेरी भर इनमें घी जो पड़ा है, सेर भर इसमें गौंद पड़ा है
गरी के गोले नौ पड़े हैं, बादाम और पिस्ते नौ सौ पड़े हैं
छुहारे किशमिश भी तो पड़े हैं, सौंठ के लड्डू चरपरे हैं,
सौंठ के लड्डू....

Gond laddoos are widely prevalent, and are strongly recommended for pregnant and post-partum women. Usually eaten in the cold season, they are called dinkache laddoo in the Marathi language. Gond or the edible gum of the accacia tree is believed to impart heat to the body.

The shahi laddoo is said to have its roots in Persia. The dates and figs brought to India by the Persians lent themselves to a laddoo made with khoya and ash gourd (petha).

While on the subject of expectant women, sweet cravings are not uncommon during this phase. In Indian tradition, conception is the primary rite of passage, because it brings forth a new life. In pregnancy, the expectant mother's nutrition is of dual importance. She must eat not only for herself, but to nurture the burgeoning life within. During this time, specific dietary preferences and food cravings assert themselves, as described in this folk song....

The *Rapture* and *Rhapsody* of *Jalebi*

If a vote was taken on the most mouth-watering of all sweets, the coil-shaped jalebi would win hands down. Sheer bliss in sacchariferous form, it pleases all the senses, with its amber-gold colour, crispness, subtle fragrance and satisfying crunch. In some parts of India, jalebi imparts an energy rush in the morning; in others, the day ends with its intoxicating sweetness.

It is said that the jalebi originated in West Asia or Persia, but is now closely

identified with India. Indeed, everywhere in the world, jalebi on the menu flags the cuisine as Indian. Even those who identify it as the Arabic jalabiya acknowledge the undeniably Indian imprint on this unparalleled sweet.

Some intellectuals identify it as the 'kundlika' mentioned in Raghunath's 17th century Sanskrit treatise Bhoj Kutuhal. In the context of its syrupy essence, we also find references to the descriptor jalvalika, phonologically altered to jalebi over time. In most of the sub-continent, the name jalebi prevails but in Maharashtra it is called jilbi and in West Bengal, jilpi.

The magical taste of jalebi lends itself to equally divine duets, with curds for instance. The creamy consistency and tart tinge of curds counterpoint the crunch and sweetness of jalebi. Another favourite combination is jalebi with raabdi. When eaten with curds or raabdi, the overpowering sweetness of jalebi is mitigated. It is also served alongside kachori or samosas, to offset their spicy tang.

Jalebi is thus a favourite accompaniment to savouries, be it samosas, pakoras (veggie pockets coated in gram flour batter) or kachori. In Bihar, the curds-and-jalebi combination rules, but in Benaras, jalebi dunked in hot milk is relished. In the story of jalebi, the supporting actors – curds or milk, raabdi or samosa – may well have helped to expand its reach and popularity.

A discussion on jalebi would be incomplete without sampling a Marathi folk song celebrating jilbi:

हरीच्या नैवेद्याला केली जिलबी बिघडली।

त्यातली एवढीशी उरली मळी त्याची केली बुंदी कळी।

तुपात तळली साखरते घोळली जिलबी बिघडली।

त्यातला एवढासा उरला पाक त्याचा केला साखरभात।

तुपात तळली साखरेत घोळली जिलबी बिघडली।

त्यातलं एवढसं उरलं पीठ त्याचं केलं थालीपीठ।

तुपात तळली साखरेत घोळली जिलबी बिघडली।

Jalebi is now universally accessible, and is part of the daily lives of many people, but at one time, it was available only at weekly bazaars and fairs. So popular was it that a fair was synonymous with jalebi. In tribal areas, it was part and parcel of fairs, bazaars and fêtes, and was essential as kitchen staples.

The entire household waited for the treat with great anticipation. A departure from the traditional sweets to which they were accustomed, jalebi allowed the whole family to immerse themselves in sheer enjoyment.

Ghewar

Aesthetic, Ambrosial, Epicurean

Embellishing sweet shops with its filigreed, lacelike appearance, ghewar is a universal favourite. A sprinkling of fresh cream on the amber-gold wheel-shaped ghewar resembles nothing so much as moonlight on a golden disk. An epicurean delight, it is included in the chappan bhog or offering of 56 foods to Lord Krishna.

Preparing ghewar is a multi-step process that calls for great skill. The main ingredients are refined flour, ghee, milk and brown sugar. To watch the master cuisiniers at work is a satisfying experience, and the end result is scrumptious. The syrup sinks to the crispy bottom making it extra sweet, while the top is softened by rabri and is less sweet. Thus the ghewar-rabri combination blends different textures while balancing the sweetness quotient. It is also visually appealing. At once crisp and soft, with differential levels of sweetness, it offers a unique gustatory experience.

Ghewar is usually prepared in the fifth month of the Hindu calendar (July-August), around the time of the Rakshabandhan festival. The version made in Rajasthan is especially popular. In Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, too, it is a much-acclaimed treat.

Every step in the preparation of ghewar calls for expertise. Even making the syrup is a tough exercise. The final coating of creamr rabri further embellished with dainty silver foil, demands a high level of artistry. Only then does the ghewar assume its perfect form, in terms of texture, taste and resplendence.

In the salubrious monsoonal months, when nature is at its scintillating best, social bonds are strengthened through rites and rituals in which sweets play an important part. 'Kothali' is one such tradition, whereby garments, cosmetics, bangles, henna, suhali (a dry savoury), ghewar and other sweets are sent to the daughter in her marital home. The care package symbolizes the blessings of her parents, brothers and sisters-in-law, and is referred to as a 'bundle of love'. The tradition finds expression in a folk song...

मीठी तै कर दे री अम्मा कोथली
जांगे बाहण कै री देस, पपैया बोल्या पीपली।
क्यांहे की कर दयूं रे बेटा कोथली,
क्यांहे म्हं जाओ परदेस, पपैया बोल्या पीपली
गुड़ की तै (सुहाली) कर दे री अम्मा कोथली
मोटर म्हं परदेस पपीहा बोल्या पीपली

The juicy Rasgulla

States often engage in tussles over water and land resources, but in the case of West Bengal and Odisha, there is a long-standing if good-humoured tug-of-war over the provenance of the rasgulla. In this joust, the former has carried off the palm. But truth to tell, the rasgulla no longer belongs exclusively to any region; the whole country lays claim to it, and it has become the standard-bearer of Indian sweets worldwide. While West Bengal has won the geographical indicator (GI) tag, the rasgulla now transcends geographical regions. If the laddoo is the king of everyday sweets, the rasgulla is the emperor among India's select confections.

The very name 'rasgulla' summons up an intense sensual experience that the English description, 'cheese ball dipped in sugar syrup', simply does not capture. The first sensation is the spongy mouthfeel, and then, when you bite down, a startling rush of sweetness drenching the tongue. The rasgulla is best described in terms of its literal meaning: ball of nectar.

With a shape that symbolizes wholeness and a taste that enslaves palates, the rasgulla stands alone. But it also serves as the substrate for an assortment of choice sweets, like chum-chum, pakeezah, chhena paak and ras malai. Indeed, it is the base camp from which new peaks of taste and flavour may be scaled.

Maternal Love, Candy-Coated

An enduring homemade favourite, the 'pua' speaks to the special love between mother and child. In times past, children were appeased not with chocolate, but with the pua. Generations grew up to nursery rhymes celebrating the tender joy of puas. Although the pua, pura and gulgula appear different in shape and form, the basic recipe is the same. Made with a dough of wholewheat flour and powdered jaggery and deep-fried, they are among the most wholesome of Indian sweets. Puas and puras are larger in size and rather crisp, while gulgulas are softer, in accordance with taste. From Assam to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to Rajasthan, these old favourites take varied forms.

On Ahoi Ashthami (a festival shortly before Diwali), mothers keep a fast for the well-being of their children, and after sundown, prepare a prasad of pua for them. The same significance attaches to gulgulas. In the worship of the mother goddess Sedhal Mata, revered in folk tradition, gulgalas are distributed among children. She is propitiated with a full five ser (a unit of measure equivalent to 28 ounces) of these wholewheat-and-gur roundels, fried in ghee or oil. The import of this sweet is described in verse:

करूं कढ़ाई गुलगुला सेढ़ल माता धोकन जाय।

इब म्हारी सेढ़ल माता राज्जी होय।

दादी दायला फूल्या नहीं समाय।

Healthy and Tasty Laapsi

If God has given humans the gift of taste through the medium of the tongue, humans have contrived foods to serve their tastes. In Rajasthan and other arid regions, cuisines have adapted to the scarce resources available, resulting in an immensely sophisticated food culture that does not compromise on taste. The lapsi is a classic example. The ecology of the region is such that while the quantity of wheat produced is limited, it is highly nutritious and has an excellent taste. It is from this robust, flavourful wheat that lapsi is prepared. As the grain is in short supply, it does not figure in daily fare but is used in the preparation of prasad or special foods. Lapsi, made with ghee from the milk of an indigenous breed, is one such sacred offering used in the worship of the deity.

Lapsi is a kind of halwa or porridge, made with wholewheat flour or cracked wheat, milk, ghee, raisins, nuts and dry fruits. The array of nutrition-packed ingredients makes it exceptionally wholesome. As a sacred offering, it has a special significance. A folk song explains its place in ritual worship:

भैरूंजी, काठे रे गवां री चाढूं लापसी
मायं तो गायां रो देसी घीव
कासी र वासी, एक अरज महा री हेलो सांभलो

The delights of *Modak*

Lord Ganesh is propitiated with a special sweet: the modak. A story drawn from Hindu scripture attests to the gustatory delights of this ambrosial aliment. The elephant-headed deity is the lord of intellect and wisdom, but when his divine mother Parvati prepares modak with her own hands, he loses himself in its delectable joys. So enamoured and addicted is he to modak! The scriptures have it that Ganesh is the lord of the west, so the modak is most widely prevalent in that region of India.

The sweet is prepared during the Ganesh Puja, a festival dedicated to the deity. Made with gur, fresh coconut, raisins, cashewnut, poppy seeds and caradmom, it offers a medley of delightful textures and tastes. At the same time, it is suitable for the health- and calorie-conscious. An additional blessing, perhaps, of Lord Ganesh!

A taste of Faith

Thekua

India has a rich and ancient cultural heritage. A shining imprint of this enduring legacy is the annual Chathh festival, accorded an exalted status in Indian tradition. The hallmark of this grand festival is the thekua. A purely indigenous and classic sweet made with wholewheat flour, gur and ghee or oil, it is offered as prasad, but is also a popular snack. Sweet and crisp, it is known by a variety of names, such as khajuriya, tikri and thokani.

On the morning of the first day of the three-day Chathh festival, preparations for making thekua commence. The washing, drying and grinding of wheat takes on a ritualistic aspect, with groups of women singing as they work. The folk songs chanted on this occasion pray for the well-being of husbands, sons and families as a whole. In one such song, a Bhojpuri woman entreats the Goddess with fervour, urging her to bestow merit and attainments on her husband and son.

कलसुपवा चढ़इबो छठिय मइया, ठठी मईया के सुहाग।
लोरिया रउरी चाहारो धन सम्पत्ति हमरा के दो
अमरूधवे चढ़इबो छठिय मइया छठी मैया के सुहाग।
खोरिया रउरी बाहारो पुतवा भोलि दी
भुरई चढ़इबो छठिय मइया, छठी मइया के सुहाग
लोरियाउरो बाहारों पातार के भौखि दी

Anarsa
Sweet Tradition

The anarasa is a tradition in itself. An indigenous sweet that evolved at a time when the village economy was immune to market forces, it was made entirely with home-grown ingredients. Every farm had an ample supply of rice flour, gur and ghee. The rice flour and gur were melded and deep fried to create the anarasa, an appetizing homemade snack.

The sweet has a long shelf life, which renders it an ideal parting gift to the bride leaving her parental home. The groom's entourage, too, is given packets of anarasa. A staple at weddings, the sweet is also prepared during religious or auspicious events. Apart from the dry, deep-fried anarasa, there is a mouthwatering version dipped in sugar syrup. From Uttar Pradesh to Bihar and Rajasthan to Maharashtra, the anarasa is a traditional sweet, integral to the cultural and social life of India.

Adding Taste to colour *The Gujiya*

The gujiya adds vibrancy to the festival of colours. In most parts of India, Holi is inextricably linked with the crescent-shaped pastry. The gujiya is traditionally homemade; the shop-bought version simply isn't as gratifying. Indeed, the entire household, young and old, are involved in the making of the sweet. One person might prepare the refined flour while another rolls out the dough, and a third puts together the stuffing. A novice or playful member of the household might be tasked merely with adding a little bit of dry fruit to the filling. But everyone must play their part. The result of these joint endeavours is proudly shared with neighbours, relatives or coworkers in the office, and enjoyed in a spirit of camaraderie. And when Holi has gone by, the taste of the gujiya refreshes fading memories of the festival of colours.

The filling of the gujiya is as diverse as the names by which it is known. Stuffed with khoya, semolina or grated coconut and cloaked in a dough of refined flour, the delicious pastry that emerges from its bath of hot oil is known as the gujiya in Uttar Pradesh. In Bihar, it takes the name of pedkiya. It is called kajjikyalu in Andhra Pradesh and kusli in Chhattisgarh. In the north, the gujiya marks the festival of colours and in the south, it adds sweetness to the festival of lights, Diwali. Known as karanji in Maharashtra, its delectable taste is described in song:

अक्कण माती चिक्कण माती
अश्शी माती सुरेख बाई ओटा तो मळावा
अस्सा ओटा सुरेख बाई जातं ते रोवावं
अस्सं जातं सुरेख बाई सोजी ती काढावी
अश्शी सोजी सुरेख बाई करंज्या कराव्या
अश्शा करंज्या सुरेख बाई दुरडी भराव्या
अश्शी दुरड़ी सुरेख बाई शेल्यानं झाकावी
अस्सा शेला सुरेख बाई पालखी ठेवावा
अश्शी पालखी सुरेख बाई माहेरी धाडावी
अस्सं माहेर सुरेख बाई खेळाया धाडीतं
अस्सं सासर द्वाड बाई कोंडूनी मारीतं

Of all the delightful fillings hidden within the golden-brown pastry, khoya is by far the most popular. To the granulated milk solids, sugar and dry fruits may be added, along with spices like cardamom and poppy seeds. Semolina, wholewheat flour or grated coconut may take the place of khoya in some regions. The gujiya is usually dry, but may be dipped in sugar syrup. The coating of flour must be rather thick, so that the stuffing doesn't spill out.

Taste, Nutrition and tradition in One Sweet Dish

Kheer or rice pudding is technically a sweet dish, but can serve as a meal in itself. It is offered to the gods on festivals, and is a mandatory feature at social events. Kheer satisfies both hunger and the sweet tooth. This matchless pudding gratifies the stomach and provides nutrition, without compromising on taste.

Kheer is the mellow answer to the oft-heard complaint that anything delicious must be bad for health. Supremely appetizing, it also stands the test of wholesomeness. The traditional combination of kheer and puri harmonizes texture, taste and flavour to create a matchless gustatory experience, while simultaneously providing balanced nutrition. A Marathi folk song celebrates the kheer-puri pairing....

चुलीवरची खीर एकदा पुरीला हसली
कढईतली पुरी मग गुरफटून बसली
काही केल्या खुलेना, जरा सुद्धा फुलेना
झा *यानं टोचलं, डेगीतलीली पुसलं
अशी थट्टा पुरीच्या काळजाला डसली //
पुरी झाली लाल, तिचे फुगले गाल

मन आले भरू, डोळे लागले झरू

तिथून उठून तरातरा ताटात जाऊनी बसली //

खीर थंड झाली, वाटीत बसून आली

लाडे लाडे खीर मग पुरीजवळ गेली

"पुरीताई पुरीताई बघ जरा इकडे

माझं म्हणमे ऐक गडे"...पण अं हं..

चार शब्द ऐकेल तर पुरी ती कसली//

तिकडून ताई आली, तिने युक्ती केली

खिरीची नि पुरीची खूप गट्टी झाली

तेव्हापासून त्यांची जोडी पक्की होऊन बसली

कढईतली पुरी मग कधी नाही रुसली//

(In this light-hearted lyric, the prestige accorded to kheer vexes the puri, as it simmers in its bath of oil. After much cajoling, the two come together in perfect harmony.)

Milk, sugar and rice, ordinary ingredients found in all kitchens, combine to form the extraordinary dish. All across India, kheer is prepared in many different ways and is known by as many different names. In some regions, it is prepared with wheat, pearl millet or vermicelli, and during fasts (when grains cannot be eaten), with tapioca. In the south, gur replaces refined or unrefined sugar as the preferred sweetener, and the dish is known as payasam. Phirni is a version that calls for a slight variation in the traditional recipe, to impart a finer consistency.

Kheer is invariably prepared in a festive and symphonious spirit, thereby strengthening and sweetening social bonds.

पक्की तले मैंने धनिया बोया, हॉ सहेल धनिया बोया

धनिये के दो किल्ले फूट्टे हॉ सहेली किल्ले फूट्टे

किल्लों की मैंने गउ चराई, गऊओं ने मुझे दुध्धा दिया

हां सहेली....

दुध्धे की मैंने खीर पकाई, हां सहेली खीर पकाई

खीर पका मैंने बीरन जिमाये, हॉ सहेली...

बीरन ने मुझे चूंदरी दी

चूंदरी मेरे झमकै सास मेरी चमकै

This monsoonal folk song expresses the love between brother and sister, in which kheer plays its part.

The following lyric offers a glimpse of the sublime taste and tender affections associated with kheer...

लाल को मीठी खीर जो भावे।

बेला भर के लावत यसुदा चूसे अधिक मिलावे।।

कनिया लिये जसोदा ठाड़ी रुच कर कोर बनावे। ....

Kheer has a cooling effect, and promotes the health of the gut. It also helps in soothing inflammation. On Sharad Poornima (full moon in autumn), freshly prepared kheer is placed in a moonlit space, in the belief that it receives a shower of lunar nectar. This moonlight-infused kheer is said to relieve respiratory ailments. The taste and wholesomeness of kheer is determined by the milk used in its preparation, as the lyrics of a folk song maintain...

भूरी भैंस का री अम्मा दूध काढ़ियो

हारे मैं खीर रँधायो री...

जितना पतीले मैं दूध घणा है

उतनी खीर चोखी री..

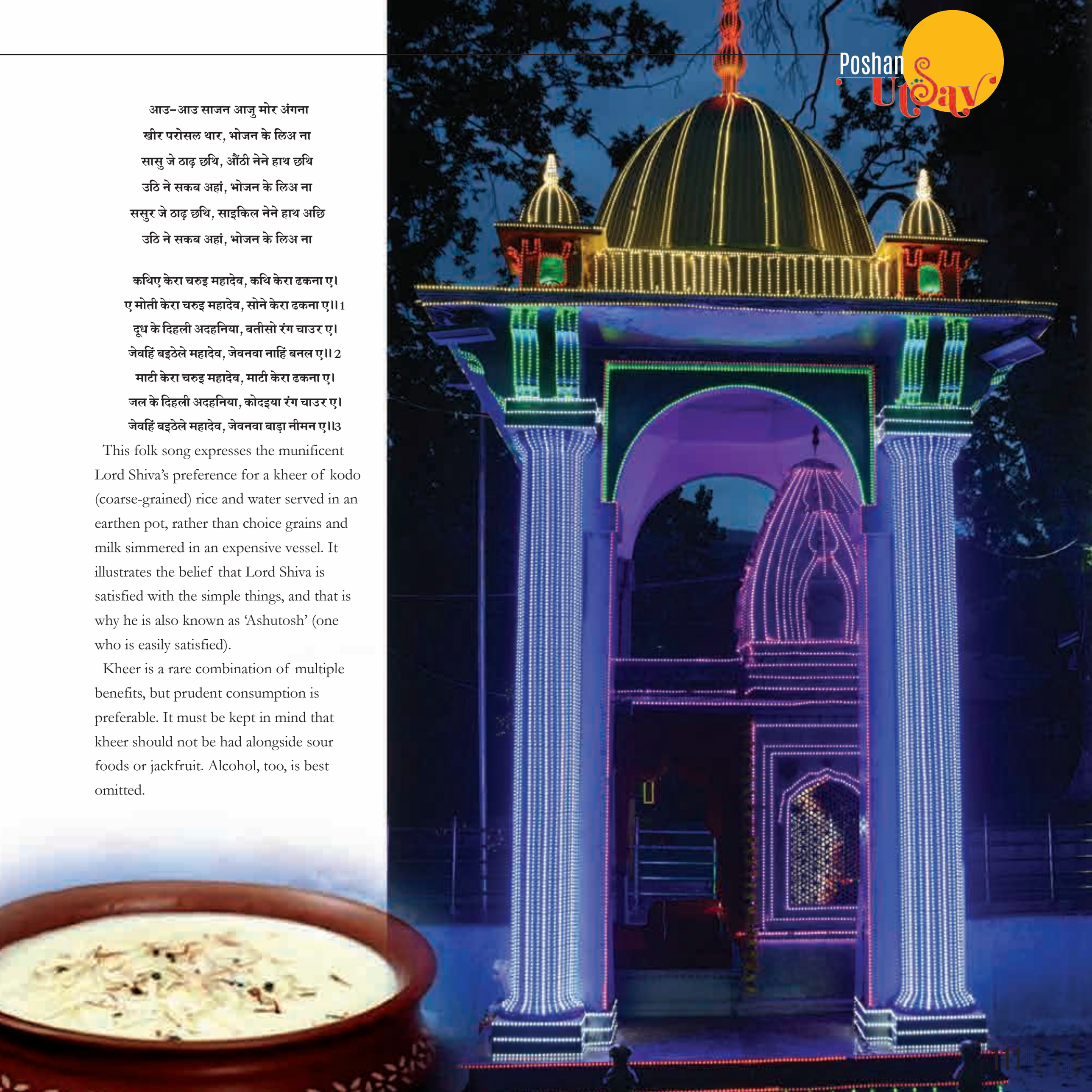
The historical origin of kheer is unknown, but it figures prominently in folklore. One such story relates to the Jagannath temple in Puri. It is said that some two millennia ago, kheer was prepared for the delectation of Lord Jagannath and from then on, became widely prevalent. In the form of payasam, it is distributed as prasad in the Ambalapujha temple in Kerala. Kheer is also closely associated with Lord Shiva:

आउ–आउ साजन आजु मोर अंगना
खीर परोसल थार, भोजन के लिअ ना
सासु जे ठाढ़ छथि, औंठी नेने हाथ छथि
उठि ने सकब अहां, भोजन के लिअ ना
ससुर जे ठाढ़ छथि, साइकिल नेने हाथ अछि
उठि ने सकब अहां, भोजन के लिअ ना

कथिए केरा चरुइ महादेव, कथि केरा ढकना ए।
ए मोती केरा चरुइ महादेव, सोने केरा ढकना ए।।1
दूध के दिहली अदहनिया, बतीसो रंग चाउर ए।
जेवहिं बइठेले महादेव, जेवनवा नाहिं बनल ए।।2
माटी केरा चरुइ महादेव, माटी केरा ढकना ए।
जल के दिहली अदहनिया, कोदइया रंग चाउर ए।
जेवहिं बइठेले महादेव, जेवनवा बाड़ा नीमन ए।।3

This folk song expresses the munificent Lord Shiva's preference for a kheer of kodo (coarse-grained) rice and water served in an earthen pot, rather than choice grains and milk simmered in an expensive vessel. It illustrates the belief that Lord Shiva is satisfied with the simple things, and that is why he is also known as 'Ashutosh' (one who is easily satisfied).

Kheer is a rare combination of multiple benefits, but prudent consumption is preferable. It must be kept in mind that kheer should not be had alongside sour foods or jackfruit. Alcohol, too, is best omitted.

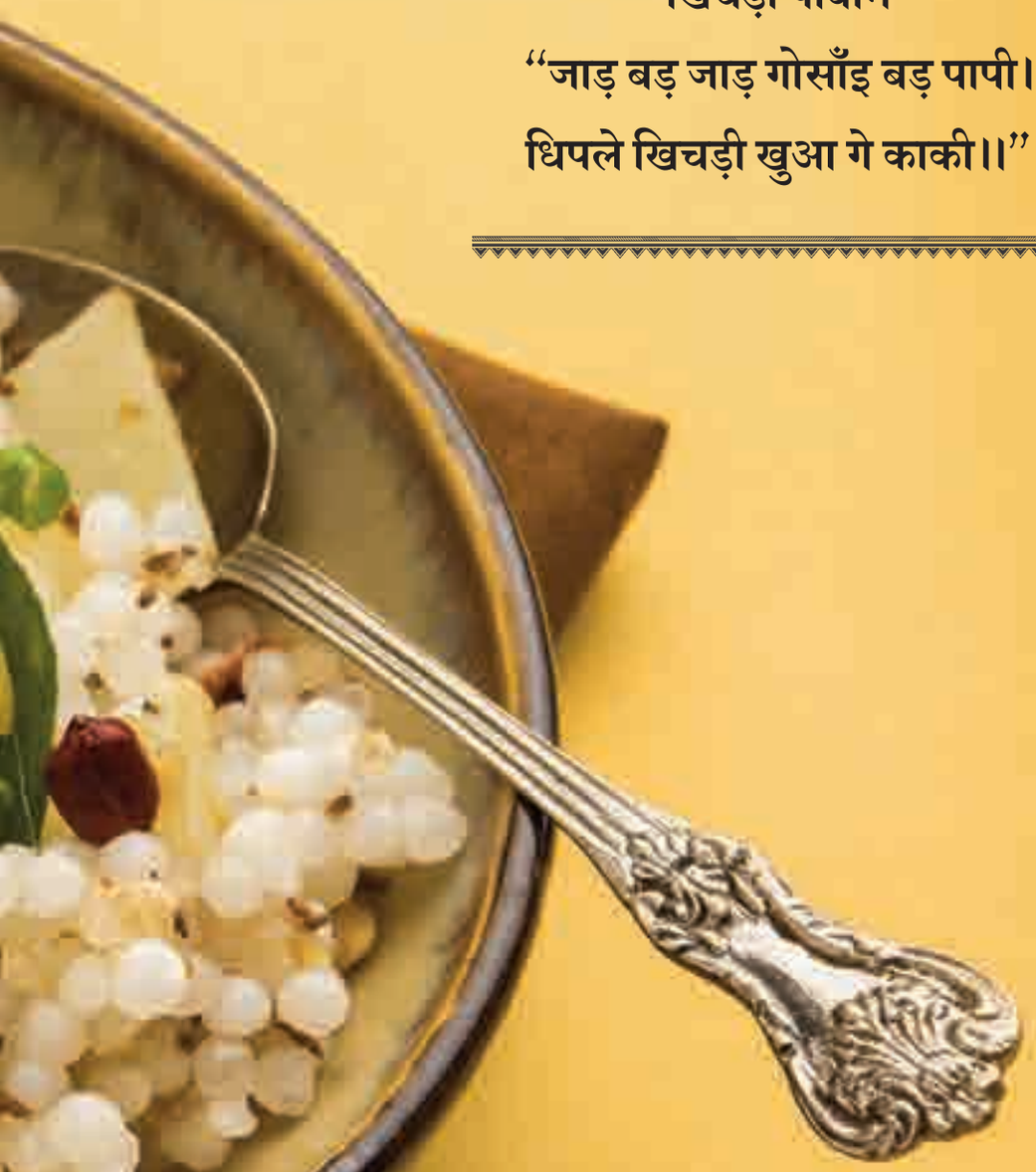


खिचड़ी बाबा

Khichhdi

A Stew Like No Other

Khichhdi is a great leveller. The simple stew of rice and lentils, flavoured with spices, is as prevalent among common folk as it is among sages and kings. In a village hut, it might be served in an earthen pot and in a palace, on a silver platter. But it is the same dish.



खिचड़ी पाबनि

“जाड़ बड़ जाड़ गोसाँइ बड़ पापी।
धिपले खिचड़ी खुआ गे काकी।।”

‘What is your favourite food?’ is a question often put to eminent citizens and so-called celebrities. A recurring answer is ‘khichhdi’. Be it politicians or IT barons, artistes or sportspersons, they have in common with regular people a love of khichhdi. The humble dish can serve as a daily staple or as festive fare, as prasad, or as a go-to dish in times of exigency. A wholesome meal in itself, it is easily digestible, and has an antacid effect similar to that of Pudin Hara (an ayurvedic remedy for indigestion).

Given its universal appeal, one might say all of India is the republic of khichhdi: from Kanyakumari to Kheer Bhawani, Koteshwar to Kamakhya, Somnath to Kashi Vishwanath; from Sammed Shikharji to Sravanabelagola and Bodhgaya to Sarnath; from the Golden Temple of Amritsar to Patna Sahib; from the Andamans in the Bay of Bengal to Ajmer in the Aravali hills; from Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea to Leh in the Greater Himalayas. That said, khichhdi varies according to season and region, and can be customized to individual needs and tastes. An all-in-one, incredibly versatile dish.

Khichhdi marks the first and last stages of life. The first food of infancy, the last on the cusp of passing on. Post quietus, it is the first gograss, or portion rendered to the cow in memory of the departed. It is the diet of convalescents. It is the name of a festival. And these days, it holds pride of place on the exotic menus of luxury restaurants.

Khichhdi lends zest to language as well. When Birbal, Emperor Akbar’s smartest advisor, taught his boss a lesson on jumping to conclusions by pretending to cook a pot of khichhdi, he gave rise to the idiom ‘Cooking Birbal’s khichhdi’ (spending too much time on a simple task).

When conspiratorial whispers were exchanged in the court, someone was bound to ask, ‘What khichhdi is being cooked up?’. Despite this semantic association with plotting and scheming, ‘cutchery’ was the favourite food of kings, according to 19th century British writers!

It was from khichhdi that the great Maratha king, Shivaji, drew inspiration in formulating a successful war strategy after several failures – namely, attacking the ‘cooler’ outskirts of a territory rather than the ‘hot’ interior! A similar tale is told of the warrior-king of Mewar, Maharana Pratap. Thus the virtues of khichhdi were universally acclaimed, all the way from Mewar to Marathwada.

Different names of Khichdi, the Festival

Makar Sankranti

Chhattisgarh, Goa, Odisha, Haryana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Gujarat and Jammu.

Lohri

Punjab

Makar Sankranti

Karnataka

Tai pongal, ujhavar tirunal

Tamil Nadu

Uttarayana

Gujarat, Uttarakhand

Maghi

Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab

Bhogali bihu

Assam

Shishur sankrant

Kashmir hills

Khichhdi

Uttar Pradesh and East Bihar

Paush Sankranti

West Bengal

"खिचड़ी के अछि चारि यार,
दही, पापड़, घी, अचार"।।

In fact, khichhdi is more than just a dish; it is a culture in itself and touches every aspect of our lifestyle. The savoury stew is said to have four 'buddies': curds, ghee, pickles and papad (papadam). All across India, it is usually served with these four accompaniments. The ghee may be substituted with coconut or sesame oil, but some healthy fats are the norm. The manner of dining is the same; the finger-licking repast is invariably eaten with the hands.

Until khichhdi began to figure on the menus of high-end restaurants, millennials tended to turn up their noses at it, deeming it as food for the ailing. In fact, it is a fortifying dish for every season, every phase of life. Toothless infants can slurp it down; so can toothless geriatrics.

If the stomach is upset, khichhdi comes to the rescue. Likewise, a too-heavy breakfast invariably calls for khichhdi in the evening. In Rajasthan, khichhdi takes

the form of khichhra, a robust version made with pearl millet rather than rice. In summers, it is made with chickpea, and in winters with moth beans. This recipe is much preferred over the wishy-washy rice-lentil stew prevalent in other regions.

One of the more attractive aspects of khichhdi is ease of cooking, particularly when the lady of the house needs some rest. If a guest happens to drop by, the khichhdi can be tempered with spices and served up in no time. Add a few veggies, and it is a tasty alternative to pulao (rice pilaf). Meat and chicken, too, can be added, as in non-vegetarian pulao.

From north to south, khichhdi rules the Indian gut. This simple dish is the embodiment of geo-cultural nationalism, in that it is universally loved and consumed. Transcending barriers of caste, creed and class, it promotes social harmony and a sense of unity. Some years ago, a 'samrasta (fellowship)' khichhdi feast was held at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan, where eminent chef Vishnu Manohar prepared a five-tonne batch of khichhdi in a single vessel – a world record that sufficed to feed 25,000 people. The humble khichdi is, without doubt, an exemplar of our cultural heritage.

Consider the range of nomenclature and the festivals associated with khichdi, which underlines its cultural significance. Simultaneously, they highlight the rich biodiversity of India.

Himalayan region - In Kashmir in the extreme north, khichdi is traditionally offered to the gods, and served to mortals with

खाला खाला दूल्हा मड़उवा में खिचड़ी

आज खाई लेबा तो काल जाई निसरी

काल जाई निसरी हो काल जाई निसरी

खाला खाला दूल्हा मड़उवा में खिचड़ी

pickled kadam (knol-khol). Neighbouring Himachal Pradesh loves its 'aala-baal' khichhdi made with kala chana (black chickpea), roasted coriander and buttermilk, while in Uttarakhand, it is prepared with urad dal (black gram), sesame and garam masala (a melange of spices).

Uttar Pradesh – India's most populous state has an interesting variation made with amla (the Indian gooseberry).

Odisha – Here, khichdi is termed 'khechri', and made with fresh ginger and heeng (asafoetida). It features prominently in the 'mahaprasad' of the Jagannath Temple. The range of accompaniments, apart from the standard curds and pickles, includes chutneys, vegetable dishes (brinjal and potato) and the traditional dalma, a spicy curry.

म्हारो मीठो लागै खीचड़ो
म्हारो चौखो खीचड़ो।
छुलक्यो छोड़यो बाजरो
म्हे दली ए मूंगा की दाल। मीठो खीचड़ो...
खद बद सीझै बाजरो
कोई लथपथ सीझै दाल। मिठो खीचड़ो...
दूध खीचड़ी खावा बैठ्या
कोई तरसै म्हारी जाड़। मिठो खीचड़ो...

Andhra Pradesh – Khichhdi is the main fare during festivals such as Sankranti. The addition of cashewnuts makes the pulagam khichhdi a bit heavy, but highly nutritious. Moving from the east to the west coast, khichhdi takes the form of maathan in Kerala, with red pumpkin as the main ingredient. Tamarind, coconut and curry leaves give it an added nutritive punch.

Karnataka – Besi bele bhaat is one of the state's signature dishes, a delectable khichhdi with tamarind. Huggi is another popular khichhdi, prepared with special care on the occasion of the grand 'Sri Krishna Muth' festival. A hefty dose of green chillies and coconut make it doubly savoury.

Khichhdi reigns supreme in the state of Tamil Nadu, in the form of pongal: ven pongal, khaara pongal, milagu pongal and sakkarai pongal, a sweet version made with jaggery. A different

Khichhdi, thou has names galore!

Jammu-Kashmir

Mong Khechir

Rajasthan

Bajra khichhri

North & Central India

tur dal (pigeon pea), moong dal and urad dal khichhdi is popular

Gujarat

Ram khichhdi

Maharashtra

Valachi Khichhdi

Bengal

khichhdi

Tamil Nadu

ven pongal, khara pongal, milagu pongal and sakkarai pongal

North-Eastern states

jo doi or Manipuri khichhdi or kali dal khichhdi

Odissa

khichhdi

Karnataka

bisi bele bhaat

Andhra Pradesh

pulagam, Keema Khichhdi

Kerala

mathan khichhdi

khichhdi for every occasion.

In the north-east, we find variations such as jo doi, Manipuri and kaali dal (black gram) khichhdi. During the autumnal Durga Puja festival, khichhdi is the main 'bhoj' or ritual meal. On one day, it might be made with sesame, on another with dates or with heavy cream. The base is a kind of rice known as 'Govindbhog', mixed with moong dal (green gram) and a variety of vegetables. The result is a delicious blend of taste and nutrients.

In Rajasthan, the state of warriors, khichhdi was soldiers' fare, served to the kings only when they were ill. So indispensible was it in times of war that farmers were expected to pay a 'khichhdi tax' (kheechra laag) to keep the soldiers well-fed.

For the people of Gujarat, known for their love

Khichdi is popular outside India also

Bangladesh

Shakrain/paush sankranti

Thailand

Songakaran

Laos

Pe ma lao

Nepal

Maghe or maghi or khichhdi sankranti

Myanmar

Thin yan

Cambodia

Moha Sangkran

Sri Lanka

Pongal, ujjhwar tirunal

of food, and drink, khichhdi is a gastronomic delight. In the Kathiawad region, khichhdi is a staple, be it 'Ram' khichhdi or Surat's 'sola' khichhdi. Then there's the Bharuchi vaghreli preferred by the Paris community. The main accompaniment is curry rather than curds.

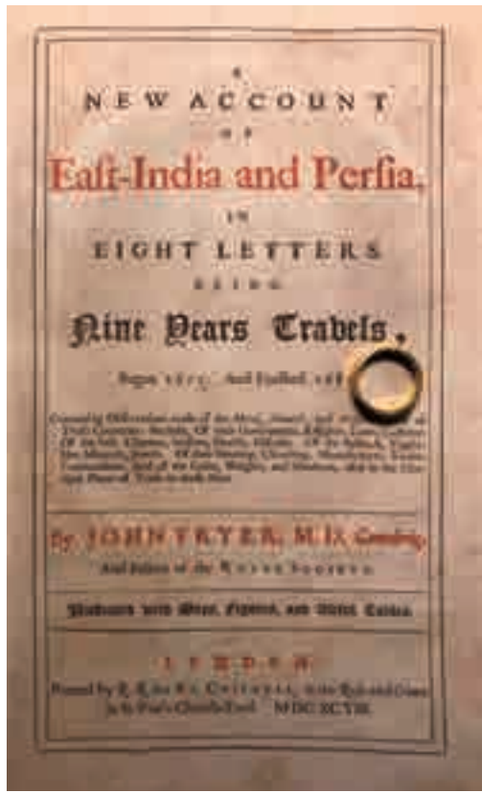
To describe the nutritional efficacy of khichhdi, here is a little slice of history: in the early 14th century, the Turkic aggressor Alauddin Khilji had attacked the north. The Nath Yogis mounted a strong defense. But they were few and the Khilji army was vast. Exhausted after the day's fighting, the warrior-yogis did not have the bandwidth to cook, and lay down to rest. Day-after-day, the battle continued and the yogis grew steadily weaker. They meditated on Baba Gorakhnath, and he directed them to throw rice, vegetables and lentils into a pot

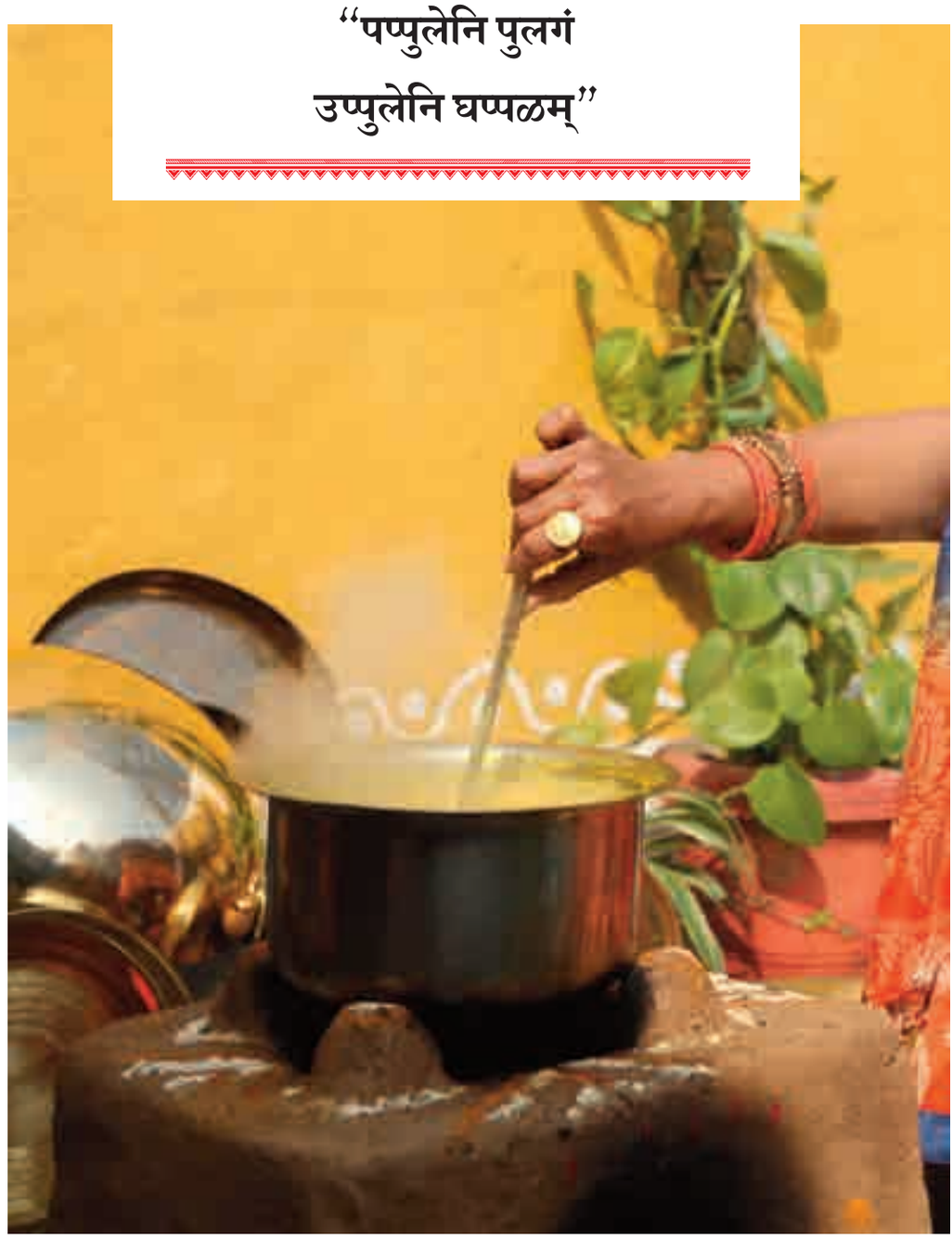
"घी खिचड़ी थाय

एक ने पापड़ बैठो जोए"

The origin of khichhdi

Khichchdi figures in the ancient Indian epic, Mahabharata. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya in the 3rd century BCE, mentions a popular dish of rice and pulses. Ibn Batuta, the 14th century Berber traveller to India, describes khichhdi as a mix of moong dal and rice. A century or so later, Russian merchant Afanasy Nikitin wrote of being served khicchdi with ghee and sugar. In the Mughal era, khichhdi was immensely popular; even the abstemious Emperor Aurangzeb is said to have enjoyed his Alamgiri khichhdi, made with eggs and fish. In the 19th century, the English colonizers took the dish back with them in the form of kedgeree, which became a breakfast food and is popular to this day. The Nawabs of Awadh added almonds and pistachios to enhance the taste of khicchdi. The humble dish also occupied pride of place in the palaces of the Nizams of Hyderabad.





“पप्पुलेनि पुलगं
उप्पुलेनि घप्पळम्”

and let it all cook together. In no time at all, the meal was ready. It was not only tasty, but incredibly energizing.

Khichhdi By Any Other Name

Khichhdi has as many names as it has forms: Ram khichhdi in Gujarat; Valachi khichhdi in Maharashtra; Keema khichhdi in Andhra Pradesh; Besi bele bhaat in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu; khichra in Rajasthan. The latter has bajra rather than rice as its base and is primarily a winter dish.

Welcome to the World of Khichhdi

In most parts of India, khichhdi is made with rice and moong dal. In Uttar Pradesh, urad dal is preferred and in the south, black chickpea. In Kashmir, it is tempered with whole spices and bay leaves while in UP, peas, carrots and cabbage are added.

A Special Khichdi for Sankranti

Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have a tradition of preparing a special khichhdi on Sankranti, which marks the transition of the sun from one zodiac sign to another. In Gujarat, vegetables are added to the rice-lentil mix and the khichhdi is eaten with Undhiyu, a regional specialty comprising winter vegetables.

Khichhdi is a food for all seasons, for all people. Perfectly adapted to regional tastes and traditions, it is universally consumed and loved.

Makar Sankranti, which marks the transition of the sun to makara rashi (Capricorn), is celebrated all over India in different ways. The modes of celebration are more diverse than for any other festival.

A huge mela (fair) is held in Bageshwar on the confluence of the Saryu and Gomati rivers. People also congregate in towns such as Rameshwar and Chitrashila for a dip in the sacred Ganga. Thereafter, sesame sweets are offered to brahmins and spiritual

adepts. Fairs are also held on the ghats of the Ganga and Ramganga. Across Uttar Pradesh, this ritual is known as khichhdi, and to consume and distribute khichhdi on this day has a special significance.

In Bihar too, Makar Sankranti is known as khichhdi. Donations of foodstuffs like black gram, rice, sesame and flattened rice, blankets, woollen clothes, gold and cows on this day are highly auspicious.

In Maharashtra, married women who are observing their first Sankranti offer cotton, sesame, salt, etc to other married women.

A confection known as tilgul halwa is distributed, and people offer each other til gur (jaggery with sesame seeds), saying, - **"तिळ गूळ घ्या आणि गोड़ गोड़ बोला"** "Take this sweet and speak sweet words". Women exchange sesame seeds, jaggery, turmeric and vermillion.

Tamil Nadu – Known as pongal, the festival spans four days. The first day is bhogi-pongal, the second surya-pongal, the third mattu-ponga or kenu-pongal and the fourth is kanya-pongal. On the first day, refuse is collected and burnt, and on the second, the Goddess Laxmi is worshipped. On the third day, domestic cattle are worshipped. On the final day, a ritual bath is taken and kheer (rice pudding) known as pongal is prepared in an earthern pot in an open courtyard. The sun god is propitiated, after which the kheer is distributed as prasad. On this day, the daughter and son-in-law are accorded a special welcome.

A Class at the Defence College!

We all know Shivaji as a valiant Maharaja of the Maratha Kingdom. But in his attempt to win back a lot of forts that his father Shahaji had lost to the Mughal invades, the young Chatrapathi Shivaji was also keen on expanding his empire. He fought brave battles and acquired many forts in quick succession, but there came a phase amidst these conquests that he failed in winning back some strategic battles and forts. It was because the territories he wanted to annex were of far more powerful kings, who had the backing of the bigger powers but Shivaji did not recognise the need to change his strategy.

Legend has it that once, after one such failed conquest, Shivaji stopped at an old lady's hut in a village and asked for food. The woman, not knowing that it was her king Shivaba and not a soldier mavla, served a plate full of steaming hot khichdi to him. As hungry as he was, Shivaji put his fingers right in the middle of the plate to grab a morsel and immediately pulled back his scaled hand. The old lady watched and shook her head and said, "Oh soldier! You are just like our Maharaj. You began eating this khichdi from the centre, which is always the hottest. Just like Maharaj attacks the central forts of kingdoms, instead of acquiring their periphery to weaken them first. Why don't you eat from the corners of the plate first, which will cool faster than the center and as you progress the center will be in your hands." It is said that Shivaji could only smile as he ate his khichdi. From there on, he first captured peripheral territories before attacking forts as part of the guerilla warfare, including Sinhagadh.

The same story is narrated in Rajasthan to spell out the change of strategy by great Maharana Pratap.

Courtsey
the better india
Doon Chetin
Pyaz Imli ki Chutney
Chamba Chukh
Bhaang ki Chutney
Kachri ki Chutney
Lehsun ki Chutney
Amchur Gur ki Chutney
Bhune Tamatar ki Chutney
Dalle Chilli Chutney
Likok Chutney
Kordoi Chutney
Tungtap
Akhuni Chutney
Gor Keri Nu Athanu
Amrud ki Hari Chutney
Beng Saag Chutney
Aamsotto Khejurer Chutney
Hmarcha Rawt
Chaprah Chutney
Amba Khatta
Mosdeng Serma
Mirchi Thecha
Allam Pachadi
Coriander Coconut Chutney
Hurali Kalu Chutney
Gongura Pachadi
Paruppu Thogayal
Thenga Chammanthi
Chutney Map of India

Sketch: Dhananjay Pimpalkhute

Virtues of *Dehydrating*

On a train journey, you happen to have a Gujarati or Marwari co-passenger. He opens his tiffin box, and mouth-watering fragrances permeate the entire coach. So appetizing does it smell, that you cannot but hope he will offer to share his meal. And sure enough - as if he's read your mind - he extends his hand with a smile, saying, "Try some, sister! You too, brother! It's all home made. All vegetarian." Then, from the depths of his sac, a veritable buffet

emerges: thepla, khakra and khoba roti (flatbreads), kair sangri and crisp gwar phali (dry vegetables), kachri chutney and so on. All are long-lasting, but they don't last very long, disappearing into hungry mouths! The chutney, achaar and various kinds of papad last until the next day's meal. As does the conversation on food. By the end of the journey, you have enough information on the intricacies of Gujarati or Marwari cuisine to write a recipe book. These days, such well-stuffed tiffin boxes are opened not only on bus or train journeys, but on domestic flights.

A combination of the geographical conditions obtaining in the sub-continent, and the food cravings of its denizens, have led to a tradition of drying and storing seasonal greens and vegetables for later use. India gets plenty of sunshine – Rajasthan gets over 325 days of bright sun – and communities across the country have learned to harvest the medicinal effects of solar rays. Enterprising individuals figured out ways of drying vegetables and fruits in the strong, hot sun, either under its direct rays or in shade, so that throughout the year, they could be cooked without losing their taste, flavour, freshness and nutritional qualities. To ensure that the nutritional benefits of all kinds of food were accessible even out of season, dietary experts initiated the tradition of dehydrated foods.

Everyone likes fresh fruits, greens and vegetables. A green mango that drops from the tree tastes so good that it is cut, smeared with salt and chilli, and consumed in the orchard itself. But the pangs are felt throughout the year. So, myriad varieties of mango pickle are prepared. Home processing of food is a culture in itself, aimed at ensuring that the body receives a range of nutritious foods all year-round. Every housewife in India is a culinary expert and connoisseur. She knows which greens and vegetables can be dried, roasted, pickled, or turned into chutneys, papad or sun-dried dumplings, so that they can be served up all through the year.

Commonly preserved foods: fali, fofaliya, khelra, saangri, kariya, mamatiya, chirmi boriya, beej, khokha, mangori, papad and vari-papad.

Knowledge of how these vegetables can be processed so as to retain their nutritive elements is obtained through practical experience, for instance while rolling out papad or making mangori. It is then passed down the generations. Social customs that foster community bonds have also helped in discovering new ways of processing greens, vegetables and fruit pulp so that their taste and nutritional qualities remain. If a wedding is to be held in a village, preparations begin a month in advance. All the women gather in the bridal household to prepare dry foods like vari (lentil dumplings) and papad (poppadams). Making the mangoris (a kind of vari) is a strenuous ritual, from soaking the dal and preparing the paste to drying the nuggets of hand-dropped lentil batter. Songs are sung, gossip is exchanged and all kinds of new

experiments attempted, so that the whole exercise takes on a festive aspect.

While the women are at work making varis, children play alongside. Young girls soak up the recipe while singing wedding songs with their mothers and aunts. Every region has a specialty. In Rajasthan, during the high summer, the vadi lends itself to a glass of sherbet within the cool confines of the home, while in Bengal the winter chill demands a vari that goes well with hot tea. India's national vegetable – the pumpkin (kadu)– and its cousin, the ash gourd (petha), add potent nutrients and flavour to the vari. It must be emphasized

that vari-making is customarily a community effort, invariably accompanied by folk songs. The lyrics may not refer to the vari or its ingredients, but it is deeply embedded in the social psyche.

The same is true of other home-processed foods like papads, chutneys and pickles. They figure in the idioms, colloquialisms and folklore of every language and dialect, all the way from Gujarat in the west to Mizoram in the east. Every chutney on the Indian platter has its own story, be it an onion-garlic, coriander-mint or green or red chilli concoction. If an Assamese tale describes the banter between a mother and her son-in-law over a fish chutney, in Chhattisgarh a folk song extols the virtues of ant-based chutney, and in Mizoram, a charming fable recounts how a simpleton achieves his desire for a delectable crab chutney.

In Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, we find a group of girls culling kachar (wild cucumber or snap

melon, often used to make chutney) and exchanging riddles that enhance awareness of its virtues. When the summer crops are ripening and the kachar-kakri vines snaking on the margins of the field begin to show a tinge of yellow, young and old crave its sour and tangy taste. At harvest-time, usually in autumn, these tangled vines are not cut and thrown away; they are pulled up, root and all, and kept carefully in a hut for later use. They take a long time to cook. This wild vegetable is bitter when raw. So, one girl puts a riddle to her friend, asking when it will become sweet:

काची नार कचकची, भर जोबनियै खारी।

म्है थनै पूछू बालमा, बुढ़ापा में लागै प्यारी।।

बोलो क्या?

The girl replies: Kachri

Then the village elders ask: When will it become sweet? When will it ripen?

दीपावली रा दीया दीठा।

काचर मोर मतीरा मीठा ।।

During the Govardhan puja, held on the day after Diwali, kachar, matira (a wild, watermelon-like fruit) and bajra spikes are offered. When they ripen, they are dried so that they can be used to make chutney or vegetable dishes through the year. Dried kachar, kakariya and matira are referred to as kachri, khelri and fofaliya respectively.

Similarly, the nutritious gwar phali (cluster bean) is known as ram phali when dried. It is said that the taste of dry gwar phali beats even that of the fresh green beans! The dry beans are fried, and a touch of chaat masala (blend of spices) added to make a crispy snack. When boiled, the dry ram phali, fofaliya and khelri become like fresh vegetables.

पतळी सी पातळी, सुवा पंखी रंग।
ग्यारै देव छोड़ै, गीवी जेठ रे संग।।

After 11 months of waiting, in high summer, the Khejri tree (an emblem of Rajasthan) puts forth tender young fruits. But you may well have eaten its fruits even in the peak of winter. The pods, along with the berry-like ker and other species of fruits form ker sangri, a much-sought after dish among the wealthy. The fruit-set only occurs when temperatures cross 45o celsius. Women welcome the sangri pods with a song:

झीणी गोरी पातळी, उभी खेजड़ हेट।
ग्यारै देवर छोड़कै, बारवां संग जेठ।।

Sangri is a summer fruit, plucked when raw, boiled and then shade-dried. From a scientific standpoint, shade-drying ensures that the nutrients are not lost. The dried version is called khokha, and like ber and khelri, is eaten as a dry fruit. In this context, a folk song:

खोखा म्हांने चोखा लागै, खेजड़लो ज्यूं खजूर।
निंबोळी–अंबोळी सिरखी, रस देवै भरपूर।।

The 'berries' now available in high-end stores were once known simply as ber, and are said to be a mine of iron and anti-oxidants. Craving the fruits of the thorny jharberi bush, nubile young girls sing:

रातौ–रातौ देख सरखी, चार जण्यां चुगबा जाती।
बारै रातौ मायं कठौर, क्यूं सखी साजन नहीं सखी बोर।।

Papad vadi

The craving for different tastes and flavours is not limited to Indians alone, but transforming a single variety of dal into many different forms is a uniquely Indian skill. Rendering the vari into puréed or curried dishes has been a custom in Indian kitchens from times immemorial. From the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh to the deserts of Rajasthan, from Maharashtra to Bengal, the ubiquitous vari is used in every region for a change of flavour or to whip up an untimely meal. It is more prevalent in the deserts of Rajasthan and the Baghelkhand and Bundelkhand regions of Madhya Pradesh, which suffer from water stress. As a result, vegetable production is severely limited. The drought-resistant dals and gourds that are produced lend themselves to a variety of varis, which allow a change of taste and bring a little diversity to the everyday meal. In Marwari food, apart from varis, dishes of papad and 'gatta' (gram flour nuggets) also figure prominently.

If water stress has rendered the vari a fixture in arid regions, an over-abundance of water has made it a go-to dish in flood-prone Bengal and Odisha, because vegetables cannot grow in water-logged fields. Village kitchens are stocked with varis ahead of the rains. Women in colourful rainment sing songs as they prepare varis made of dal and petha. In a country known for its

rich tradition of arts and crafts, Bengal stands out as an exemplar. The matchless artistry of the state's denizens is brought to bear on everyday artefacts, and even on comestibles like the vadi. The women of Rajasthan may give the khoba roti a decorative shape, but in Bengal, the culinary aesthetic is taken to a different level. The humble vari is known as 'gohana' or jewelry, because the artistic village women sculpt the batter into traditional jewelry designs. So charmed was poet Laureate 'Gurudev' Rabindranath Tagore that he compiled a catalogue of the famous 'gohana vari' at his Shantiniketan University.

From cultural enrichment, let us move on to the utility of the vari, particularly in times of crisis. Uttarakhand is familiar with catastrophe; when dark clouds gather and rain bullets

down, nature just might take on a destructive avatar. In the blink of an eye, a mountain slope might slip, depositing tons of earth on a highway and bringing traffic to a halt. At such times, the nutritious vadi comes in handy. It tides over the crisis and adds a new taste to the meal.

Our wise forebearers had understood the necessity of processing food to extend its shelf life. That explains why Uttarakhand has such a rich diversity of vadi, made from gourd, potato, taro and a variety of other produce. The naal vari is made by wrapping the taro leaf stems in dal batter and is said to be finger-licking good!

The gahat dal, a staple of Uttarakhand, also lends itself to tasty varis. In Odisha, we have the saag-vari-nariya, a delectable dish made of greens and vadi.

When temperatures fall below zero in the Himalayan states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal and Uttarakhand, fresh greens and vegetables aren't easily accessible. But robust nutrition is required in cold weather. The vadi provides the requisite nutritional boost. When the weather turns and bright sunshine floods the hills and valleys, women come together to prepare vadis, singing songs:

भुजेलू बड़्यों कु, ठंडू पाणी पीजा छैला, बाँज की जड़्यौं कु।

Similarly, in Haryana, groups of women chant while making mangori and papad:

एक पापड़ा की जेट बढ़ जो, मंगोड़्या का बढ़ जो माटला जी....

And when papad is served, the following folk song comes to mind….

... आधा पापड़ घी मां तलियो, आधो पापड़ करारो रे.....

Another folk song refers to the joys of papad, which aids digestion:

चांद–सा चकला, पान–सा पतला।

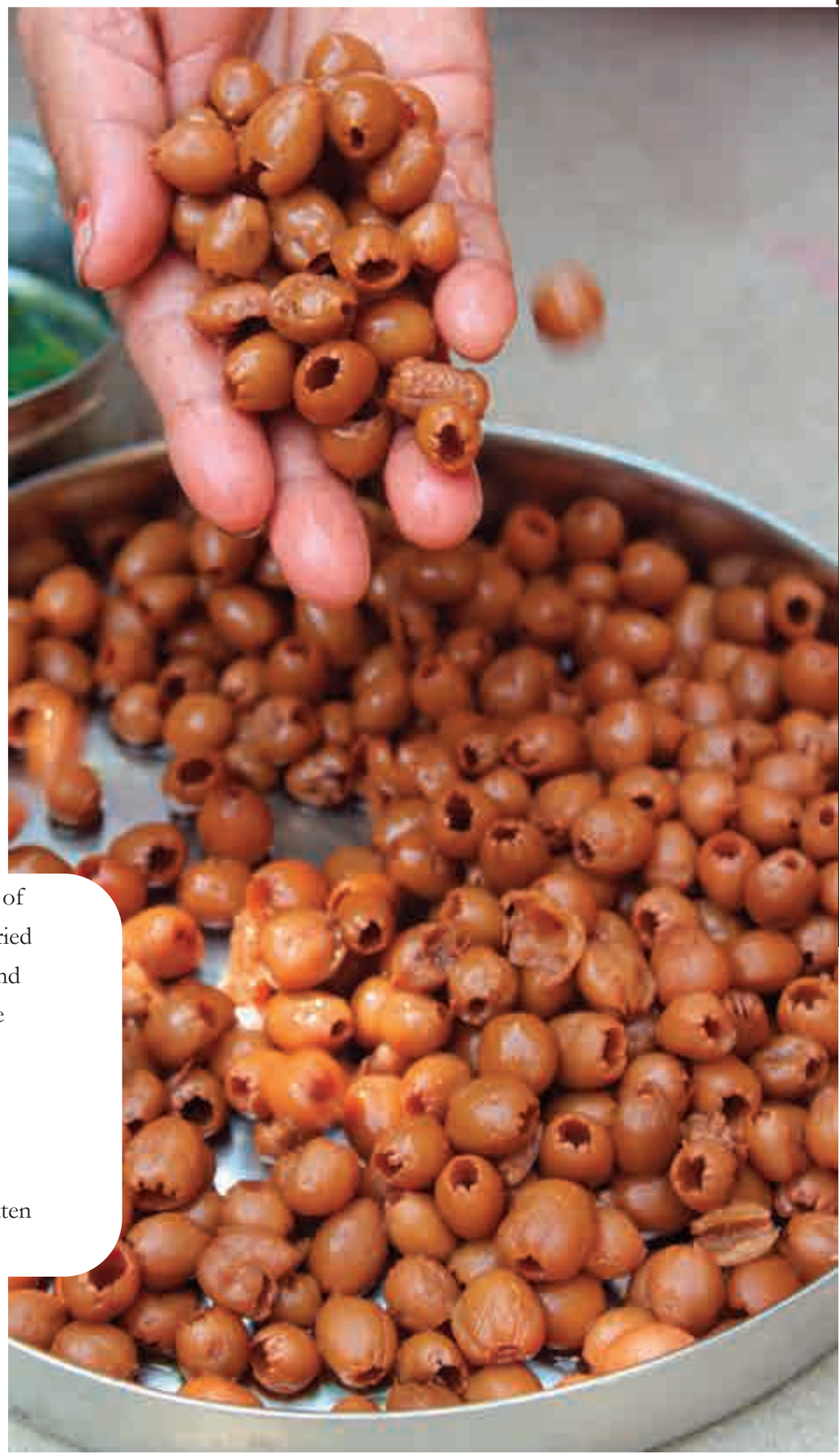
जो न बताये उण री, आंख में तकला।।

The importance of dried vegetables in Bihar, Maharashtra and Karnataka, is expressed in this saying:

आकाल गेलो सुकाल एलो, खेये काँठा कोष।

एखन कि बले पालाबे बोनपो, दिये मासीर दोष।

'Dried jackfruit kernels sustained us in the drought.' That is why, wherever jackfruit grows, the kernels are saved and stored.

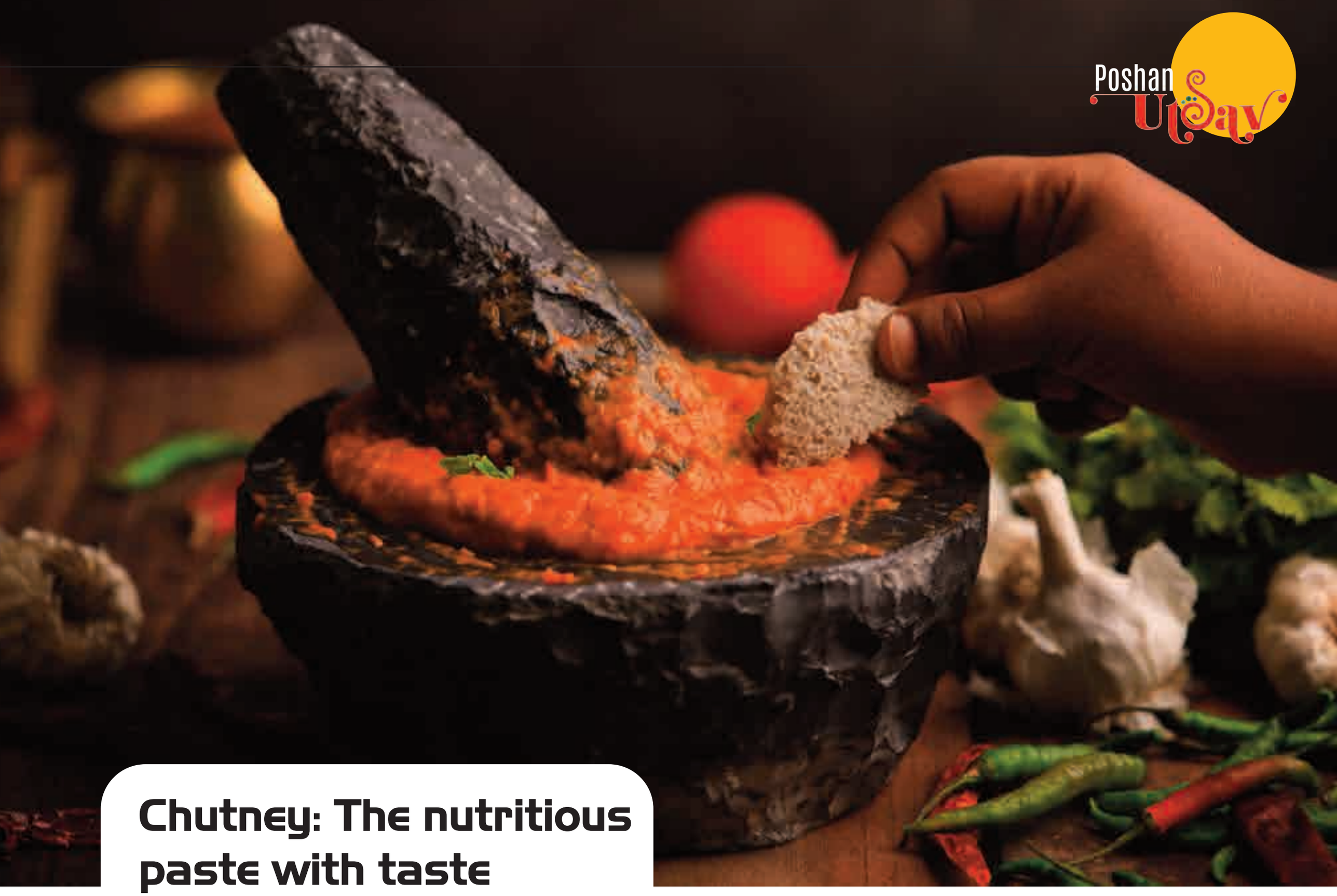


Mahua

In the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh, the fruits and flowers of the Mahua tree are consumed in various forms, and are also dried and stored for later use. The dry mahua is roasted or boiled, and then pounded, after which various dry fruits are added and the resulting paste rolled out to form a roti, known as 'laata'. It is unique to this region. A saying in Bundeli underlines its importance:

मउआ मोरें भुँजे धरे हैं, लटा धरे हैं कूट ।

In the tribal areas of Chitrakoot, entire verses have been written in praise of Mahua.



Chutney: The nutritious paste with taste

The Indian palate is so accustomed to lip-smacking flavours that a bland meal is deeply unsatisfying. If nothing else, a tongue-tingling chutney of ground red chillis mixed with water and a dash of salt will serve to pep up the repast. Chutneys have captured Indian taste buds as effectively as sweets. Now, they have conquered the globe. Most Asian peoples have long been fans of chutney, but the West too, has succumbed to their savour. Call it sauce or ketchup or a 'dip', the tangy paste is still a chutney and Indians crave its enticing piquancy.

Chutney implies something sour, sweet, sharp. A medley of piquant flavours that brings the tastes buds to life and evokes lip-smacking sounds. Indians are unrivalled in this respect; the entire country loves its chutney. From south to north and west to east, innumerable forms of chutney tantalize, titillate and gratify the palate. There's mango chutney, tomato chutney, karonda (black currant) chutney, apricot chutney – even a chutney of ants, relished in tribal areas and a chutney of crabs,

very popular in the north-east. So long is the list of chutneys that it could fill an entire tome.

In many parts of India, chutneys are the stuff of ballads. The sapid joys of chutney are celebrated in tales, anecdotes and folk songs, and in turn, impart a zestful spirit to these songs. Chutney was once a necessity, but now, packaged snacks have made it an addiction. The 'dip' is an essential accompaniment to wafers and crisps, pita bread and crackers. But the 'dip' has a 'deeper' meaning.

The hand-ground chutneys of yore, produced in every home, have become industrial products. The sublime fragrance of freshly ground mint and coriander leaves that once permeated our homes now lingers only in memory. A mortar and pestle graced the courtyard of the home, and every member of the family would take a turn at pounding and grinding, exercising their wrists and arms in the process. At weddings, women would sing folk songs while turning out masses of chutney in a jiffy.

छत्तीसगढ़ के गुरतुर बानी
छत्तीस हावे जात
बिन चटनी के नहीं मिठावे रे
अरे बासी होवे चाहे भात रे
अहो मोरे दाई,
चटनी बिना भात बने नइ लागय हो

सिल लोढ़वा के ठूकुर–ठूकुर मिरचल डारे तिरखी

एक गढ़ी नून ला डारे पताल भूंजे कुन–कुन
लसुन डारे, धनिया डारे
लकर–धकर पिसाई
अहो मोरे दाई,
चटनी बिना भात बने नइ लागय हो

बइठे उकरू चाटत सुखरू
चट–चट–चट चटनी ला रे
चट–चट–चटनी कहाँ जाबे कटनी
मिलही छत्तीसगढ़ मा रे
माई पीला जामो खाइन
हाय सू–हा–सू कराई
अहो मोरे दाई,
चटनी बिना भात बने नइ लागय हो

In Chhattisgarh, chutney with day-old rice has become an integral part of the lifestyle. It serves as an early-morning meal for the farmer heading to his field, and as a quick-fix dish for one and all. Simple yet savoury, it has become the state's signature dish.

चटनी अऊ नून संग बासी खाके गा भइया, चलो खेत जोते बर जाबो ।
तम्भे त खेत हमर सिधियाही गा के सोन्ना कर धान उपजाही गा भइया ।

Far to the west in Rajasthan, where fierce heat and swirling hot winds make life almost insupportable in May-June, the cooling effect of mint and the blessed relief it brings to young women, is celebrated in song...

ओ लुळ ओ झुक
ओ लुळ जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
ओ तने सिल पे बटांऊं हरिया पोदीना
ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
क्यारियां में बाऊं केवड़ो खेताँ में बाऊं हरियो पोदिनो
ओ लुळ ओ झुक
ओ लुळ जाई रे हरिया पोदीना

ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
माथा पे ल्याई केवड़ो झोळी में ल्याई हरियो पोदिनो
ओ लुळ ओ झुक
ओ लुळ जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
सासूजी ने भावे केवड़ो सुसराजी ने भावे हरियो पोदिनो
ओ लुळ ओ झुक
ओ लुळ जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
जेठजी ने भावे केवड़ो जेठाणी ने भावे हरियो पोदिनो
ओ लुळ ओ झुक
ओ लुळ जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
देवेरजी ने भावे केवड़ो देवरानी ने भावे हरियो पोदिनो
ओ लुळ ओ झुक
ओ लुळ जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना
ओ तने सिल पर बटांऊं हरिया पोदीना
ओ झुक जाई रे हरिया पोदीना

At weddings, there is a veritable song and dance over chutneys…

दो काली मिर्च, दो भूरी मिर्च
एक हरी मिर्च, एक लाल मिर्च,
मिर्च है मज़ेदार …बन्ना चटनी बँटवादो जी…

थोड़ा पोदिना मंगाओ, थोड़ा जीरा दाना मंगाओ..
सरसों रो मंगाईजो तेल बन्ना, छमको दिलवा दो जी..
दो काली मिर्च, दो हरी मिर्च …..।

ल्याओ सिला लोढ़ी, बन्ना उठाई लोढ़ी
रगड़का लगाओ दो चार बन्ना चटनी बँटवादो जी।
दो काली मिर्च…..।

ल्याया सिला लोढ़ी, बन्ना खाई गोडी
रगड़का लगाया दोए चार, बन्नो चटनी बँटवादी जी।
दो काली मिर्च….।

थोड़ी खावे बन्नी, घणी खावे बन्ना

आ तो लागे स्वाद, बन्ना घणी सारी बँटावादो जी।

दो काली मिर्च ....।

From the sands of Rajasthan emerged the Banjaras, living emblems of the noble nomads. These itinerant pastoral communities wandered far afield. Some settled in the historic city of Hampi in Karnataka, some gave their name to the elite Banjara Hills locality of Hyderabad. However diverse they might be, they are united in their love of chutney. The Banjaras have left their imprint across Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telengana and Karnataka, in the form of khodi chutney. Made with chillis and dried fish, it is a favourite comestible. Whenever Banjara women go to the market, their longing for khodi is expressed in this song:

चाल ये भोजाई हाटेन जावा

बुंबला न झिगा लावा

मरच्यान कांदा मोलावा घर आयी पामली ये

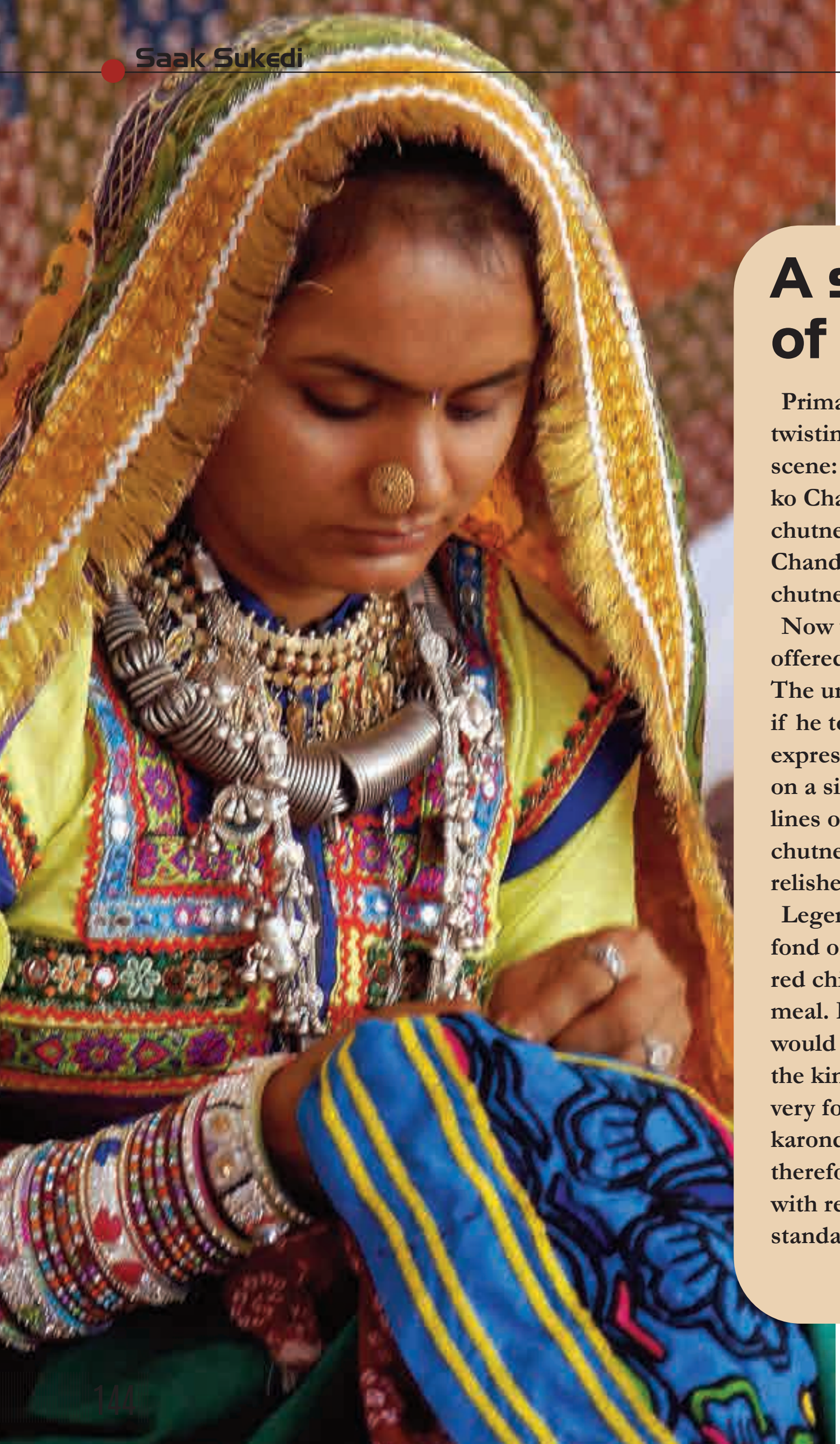
ओन बुंबलारी खोडी खरावा

चाल ये भोजाई हाटेन जावा

Across India,the diversity of the humble chutney is expressed in folk culture – from Assam and Mizoram in the north-east to Andhra Pradesh in the south.

Among the Bodos of Assam, where fish chutney is a staple, a folk song takes the form of banter between a mother-in-law and a son-in-law:

In the food culture of the Bodos, fish chutney serves as a repast



A silver spoonful of chutney

Primary school children invented a tongue-twisting alliteration, drawing on a domestic scene: 'Chandu ke chacha ne Chandu ki chachi ko Chandni Chowk mein chandi ke chamach se chutney chatai'. Literally, it means that young Chandu's uncle offered Chandu's aunt a taste of chutney on a silver spoon in Chandni Chowk.

Now who Chandu was and why his uncle offered his aunt a taste of chutney is a mystery. The uncle must certainly have been well-heeled, if he took his wife to Chandni Chowk for the express purpose of presenting her with chutney, on a silver spoon no less. Reading between the lines of this childish chant, we can conclude that chutneys are not the province of the poor but are relished by the wealthy.

Legend has it that a queen of Rajasthan was so fond of bajra rotis with a chutney of garlic and red chillis, she insisted on having it for every meal. If the palace chef failed to deliver, he would find himself in serious trouble. Similarly, the king of another province in Rajasthan was very fond of having red meat and rice with a karonda chutney. The farmers of the state can therefore be said to eat like royalty, for bajra roti with red chilli-garlic chutney and onions are their standard meal!

बिजामादैः – आये आये नोंनि फिसाजोआ
ना बाथोनखौनो देनो रोडा
आयै देनो रोडा ।
बिखुनजौ : – रोड़ासो जावसौ
जोले मोजां ,
गावनो लाइनो रोडा गावनो
जानो रोडा बिजामादैः – आये नोंनि नोंसाजोआ फानलु
बाधोनखौनो देनो रोडा आये देनो रोडा
बिखुनजौ : – रोड़ासो जाबायगोन जावैसो
जोलै मोजां
गावनो मावनो रोड़ा ,
गावनो दांनो रोडा '

in itself, and is consumed with great relish. So, the son-in-law complains to his mother-in-law of his wife's ineptitude in making chutney. The lady retaliates by telling her high-and-mighty son-in-law that her daughter's culinary skill is not in doubt, but alas, the poor girl's husband does not provide her with fish of good quality.

In Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, the festival of Ugadi marking the Telegu new year is celebrated with pomp. On this day, purnapoli is the principal sweet dish, but the essential feature of the festival is the dagadi pachadi chutney, made with fresh tamarind, jaggery,

water, raw mango and margosa (neem) flowers. All the ingredients are mixed in an earthen pot, which is decorated and placed in front of the clan deity. After the prayer, it is consumed as prasad, followed by a collective meal. In the Hindu calendar, the annual festival falls on the first day of the bright (waxing) phase of the lunar month of Chaitra/Chait (March-April).

At around the same time, the festivals of Akha Teej or Akshaya Tritiya are observed in the north, calling for a savoury chutney of tamarind and raw mango. This sweet-sour chutney is considered healthful during the changing season. A popular folk song in the Bhojpuri dialect rejoices in the sharing of chutney:

चैतो में आजा राजा तोह के खिलाईव सतुआ सान के हो,

की सतुआ सान के हो

पीसी पीसी चटनी चटाईभी टीकूरबा आम के हो.. ई मत जॉनीहां ए ओ सैया आसही सब खियाईब.

घर ही कटनी लागल बाटे खूब खटबाइब.....

अर्थात् चैत के महीने में आओ मेरे राजा ... सत्तू का सान खिलाऊँगी साथ टिकूरबा के आम की पिसी हुई चटनी खिलाऊँगी.....

In Chait, oh my prince, come to me
I will make sattu for you to eat
And chutney made of raw mangoes

In the same month, denizens of the Garhwal ranges in the Himalayas celebrate the flowering of the apricot tree, which is their main source of chutney. The pinkish-white blooms herald the children's festival of Phooldeyi. Singing and dancing, children emerge from their homes early in the morning to gather the fallen flowers. They go through the village, embellishing the thresholds of houses with the flowers, and receive gifts in return. In May-June, the apricots ripen and as their colour morphs from yellow to orange, the taste also changes, from sour to sweet.

The pulpy coat is eaten by itself or with salt. Most people eat the semi-ripe fruit in the form of chutney, with garlic and green chillies. The nutritious chutney adds zest to their meals all year round. The seasonal and abundant fruits ripen simultaneously, and are sun-dried and

stored in summer. For the rest of the year, they spice up the local cuisine. The process is accomplished in a light-hearted spirit and provides children with an occasion for fun and frolic.

No matter how many chutneys you sample, your cravings will not be satisfied until you have sampled bhang (cannabis) chutney. That doesn't mean it is intoxicating, for it is not made from the leaves of the plant, but from the nutritious seeds which do not contain pyschoactive compounds. The fragrance of bhang chutney permeates every kitchen in Uttarakhand.

Mizo Folk Story

Chhura and Aai Um story

Once upon a time in Mizoram, there was a young man called Chhura who lived in a village. He was simple and forgetful. One day, he went to a neighbouring village to see a friend. He received a warm welcome, and was served rice with all manner of vegetables and a pickle called 'aai um'. Chhura liked the aai um very much. He decided that as soon as he returned to his village, he would prevail on his wife to prepare the same pickle. So, he asked for the recipe. His host told him that aai um was specially prepared by the local tribals with crab meat and sesame seeds.

On the way back, Chhura was afraid he would forget the name of the pickle, so he kept repeating 'aai um' to himself. But his fears came to pass. While climbing a hill, he slipped and fell. Distracted by his fall, he forgot the name of aai um.

He was quite upset. He knew he had lost something but for the life of him, he couldn't recall what it was. Bewildered, he began looking for the lost item. While searching, he cleaned up the entire area, but couldn't find the missing object. It so happened that a Poi tribal was passing by and spotted Chhura desperately searching for

something. The passerby concluded that the distressed-looking individual must have mislaid something of great value. He joined Chhura in the search. All at once, he caught a distinctive scent, and said, 'There's nothing here, but isn't there a strong smell of aai um?"

As soon as he heard the word 'aai um', Chhura jumped in excitement. 'Yes, yes. That's it! That is what I was searching for!' he yelled. The Poi was stunned. He couldn't see anything of value, just an elated Chhura running and chanting 'aai um'. Breathless and puffing, Chhura reached his home. At once, he told his wife about 'aai um', just in case he forgot the name again. The sharp-witted lady, well aware of her husband's forgetfulness, immediately made him some aai umm. Chhura ate it joyfully.

This simple tale made aai um popular across Mizoram. And every forgetful individual was dubbed 'Chhura'.

Tastefully yours:

The Thali

उनपतु नाडी, उड्डुप्पण इरंडु

A handful of rice and an unstitched garment

When the meal is ready, everyone in the household is summoned to dine. In westernized settings, 'Mummy' will call out, 'Food's ready, come to the (dining) table', but in more traditional households, the directive is simply, 'Eat your food'. Different languages have different ways of summoning the family to a meal. In an affectionate mood, a mother might say coaxingly, 'Come baby, come, have your food'. It varies from region to region, but by far the most refined way of indicating that it is time to eat is the idiom, 'Thali saj gayee hai (the platter is ready)'. One may imagine that implies a gourmet meal, featuring choice dishes. That's not the case, as the thali will contain regular fare – vegetables and roti, or rice and dal, with

some chutney. Simple food, sometimes enlivened with pickles or green chillis, and a pinch of salt. The same spartan fare will be found in the huts of the poor, and in the palaces of the rich. It may be a result of privation, or of lifestyle preferences or health concerns, but springs from the same social mores.

In Tamil Nadu, the saying 'Unpaty nadi, udappan erandu' refers to the abstemious lifestyle of the region – a handful of rice and an unstitched garment (from waist to ankle) are adequate. A banana leaf is the plate from which one eats. Even those at the pinnacle of wealth prefer austerity, so that everyone gets a share of produce and the refectories of temples are always full of grain. This reflects the essence of Indian culture. The Sanskrit verse 'Anna bahu kurvita' (grow food in abundance) is exemplified in Tamil Nadu's Chengalpet district where the enormous yield of rice astonished the British, and was described in their archives.

But simultaneously, our seers preached:

Food must be regarded and consumed with reverence. The very sight of food should delight the spirit. Whatever the circumstances, food must always be cherished.

पूज्येदशनं नित्यं अद्याच्चेनमकुत्स्यन्।
दृष्ट्वा हृष्येत् प्रसीदेच्च प्रतिनन्देच्च सर्वशः ॥
पूजितं ह्यशनं नीयं बलमूर्जं च यच्छति।
अपूजितं तु तद्भुक्तं उभयं नाशयेदिदं ॥

Before eating, one must salute the platter of food and pay obeisance to

Lord Brahma, the Creator. One must feel a sense of gratitude and pray that everyone receives adequate food. Then comes nutrition. In that context, every region has its own ideal platter.

Only in India is the serving of food an art, a science and an expression of folk culture. Our ancient texts adopted a scientific perspective vis-a-vis food, and made it a part of our folk culture. Of this regimen of offering food, it is written:

पात्राधो मंडलं कृत्वा
पात्रमध्ये अन्नं
वामे भक्ष्यभोज्यं
दक्षिणे घृतपायसं
पुरतः शाकादीन्

(On the floor, make a mandala or circular pattern with water and place the thali on it. In the centre of thali, place the rice. To the left of the person dining, place foods that must be chewed. On the right, place ghee-infused payas (kheer). In front place the curry, the salad and other foods.)

Our sages decreed that bodily fluids and humours – vata, pitta, kapha – must always be in equilibrium. To keep all the elements and the tridosha (humours) in

balance, food must contain all the six tastes (shadrasa).

सर्वरसाभ्यासो बलकराणाम्

एकरसाभ्यासो दौर्बल्यकराणाम्....

The amalgam of tastes is essential and imparts energy: madhura (sweet), amala (sour), lavana (salty), kattu (pungent), tikta (bitter) and kashya (astringent). But over time, the direction and locus of each taste on the platter, became a part of folk culture, knowledge and art. A charming Marathi folk song offers a sample:

काय वाढले पानावरती

ऐकून घ्यावा थाट संप्रती,

धवल लवण हे पुढे वाढले.

मेतकूट मग पिवळे सजले

आले लोणचे बहु मुरलेले

आणि लिंबू रसरसलेले

किसून आवळे मधुर केले

कृष्णा काठचे वांगे आणले,

खमंग त्याचे भरित केले,

निरनिराळे चटके नटले,
चटण्यांचे बहु नवे मासले,
संमेलनची त्यांचे भरले,
मिरची खोबरे ती सह ओले,
तीळ भाजूनी त्यात वाटले,
कवठ गुळाचे मिलन झाले,
पंचामृत त्या जवळी आले,
वास तयांचे हवेत भरले,
अंतरी अण्णा अधीर जाहले!
भिजल्या डाळी नंतर आल्या,
काही वाटल्या काही मोकळ्या,
काही वाटुन सुरेख तळल्या,
कोशिंबिरी च्या ओळी जमल्या,
शुभ्र काकड्या होत्या किसल्या,
मुळा कोवळा मिरच्या ओल्या,
केळी कापून चकल्या केल्या,
चिरुन पेरुच्या फोडी सजल्या,
एकरूप त्या दह्यात झाल्या,
भाज्या आल्या आळू-घोसाळी,
रान कारली वांगी काळी,
सुरण तोंडली आणि पडवळी,
चुका चाकवत मेथी कवळी,
चंदन बटवा भेंडी कवळी,
फणस कोवळा हिरवी केळी,
काजुगरांची गोडी निराळी,
दुधी भोपळा आणि रताळी,
किती प्रकारे वेगवेगळी,
फेण्या, पापड्या आणि सांडगे,
कुणी आणुनी वाढी वेगे,
गव्हल्या नकुल्या धवल मालत्या,
खिरी तयांच्या शोभत होत्या,
शेवयांच्या खिरी वाटल्या,
आमट्यांनी मग वाट्या भरल्या,
सार गोडसे रातंब्याचे,
भरले प्याले मधुर कढीचे,
कणीदार बहू तूप सुगंधी,
भात वाढण्या थोडा अवधी.....

In Bengal to the east, the arrangement of food on the platter is codified, and followed to the letter. The customary Bengali platter is a charming combination of diversity and austerity. The various tastes – sweet, sour, salty, bitter and savoury – are arranged in a set pattern. First, shukto (bitter gourd) or a bitter variety of greens is placed on the platter, and at the end, a sweet, usually misthi doi (sweet curds). Likewise, all of south India has a set of gustatory rules. Himachal, too, has a similar tradition. All of these follow the science-based imperative of shadrasa (six tastes), which has become part of our cultural traditions.

In the Sushruta Samhita, a compendium of the teachings of the ancient Indian (7th-6th century BCE) physician and surgeon, the ideal sequence for consuming foods and the importance of the six tastes is explained. According to the text, to preserve physical and mental health, one must begin the meal with a sweet, followed by sour and salty foods, and finally, something bitter and savoury. This regimen is observed in the Mandyali Dham.

In villages to this day, meals are served in the cooking area, or in the verandah, just outside the kitchen. Rotis are served fresh off the stove by doting wives, mothers, sisters or sisters-in-law. In the east, rice and dal are served with the same affection. Rather than asking whether you would like another helping, the hosts gently urge you to have just a little bit more. If you eat less than expected, the host may conclude that the food is not to your liking. 'Is the food alright?' comes the anxious query. This tradition obtains across India, and the question is asked in the same tone and cadence. Only the language and type of food varies.

The tradition of eating until one is full but not in excess, prevails in every part of the country. Food must be eaten fresh and never wasted, and preference must be given to seasonal and local foods. A light diet is also part of folk culture.

The market economies of western nations have floated the concept of 'Farm to Fork'. In other words, a supply chain that brings farm produce to the plate. By contrast, India's folk culture takes note of the entire process of food production, from sowing to the harvest...

'सय्यां म्हारी में हरियाली बूठीजै क्यूं
यूं म्हारा साजन यूं जी यूं
सय्यां म्हारी में हरियाळौ वाईजै क्यूं
यूं म्हारा साजन यूं जी यूं
सय्यां म्हारी में हरियाळौ निनांणीजै क्यूं
यूं म्हारा साजन यूं जी यूं
सय्यां म्हारी से हरियाळौ रुखालिजै क्यूं
यू म्हारा साजन यूं जी यूं।"

The song also describes the post-harvest regimen, in which not just a single company, but the entire community participates. Women play a

OmJi Soni, Chitralaya, Udaipur

critical role in ensuring nutrition for their families. Rajasthan's 'Terahtahli' (thirteen claps) folk dance presents a charming picture of India to the world. These thirteen claps are a musical representation of nutrition-related processes.

Women of the Kamar tribe in Rajasthan use 13 kinds of cymbals to express 13 different sentiments through song and dance; hence the name of the dance. It refers to:

1. Cleaning grain
2. Pounding grain
3. Grinding grain
4. Sieving flour
5. Making dough
6. Making rotis
7. Churning curds
8. Extracting butter
9. Winding yarn
10. Spinning
11. Balancing a pot on one's head
12. Scything crops
13. Churning buttermilk

The women of India sing as they undertake strenuous exercises like grinding grain.....

'रांमजी सणण सणण बोलै रात
घरटी री वेळा होयगी जी राम
रांमजी पीयूं पीसू लीलोड़ी जंवार
पाड़ोसण पीसै बाजरौ जी राम
रांमजी ऊनालै री ठाडी ठाडी लैर
घरटी पे आवै नींदड़ी जी राम
रामजी सासूजी रौ बाळण जोग संभाव
मण भरियौ सूपै पीसणौ जी राम।'

This chapter presents a glimpse of the nutrition-related traditions prevalent in different regions of the country. Nutrition may take different forms, but the food culture of India represents a common thread on which these diverse traditions are strung.

Rajasthan

The mention of Rajasthan evokes an image of sand dunes and whistling hot winds. Tales of water scarcity are often told and books on general knowledge contain only the occasional reference to agriculture. Yet, Rajasthan boasts an exceptionally rich food culture, noted for the diversity and excellence of its cuisine. Limited natural resources evoked a longing for divine tastes and flavours, and gave rise to culinary artists whose imagination took wing and produced the most exquisite dishes.

Production of wheat and rice is limited, just about enough for the performance of rites and rituals. But there is an abundance of 'Shri Anna' or superior grains, such as bajra (pearl millet) and jowar (sorghum) - dubbed as 'coarse grains' by the British - as well as chana (chickpea). The descriptor 'coarse' ensured that these millets were classed as inferior. But Rajasthan's lively society transformed its grains into such delectable forms that the same bajra now stands tall and is much sought after. The 'gutta' (gram nuggets) made from chickpea flour have captured taste buds across the world.

The diversity and distinctive tastes of Rajasthani fare can be glimpsed in folks songs and rituals. In Jaisalmer, we find a dish of bajra khhichdi or roti mixed with curds, so delectable that it is preferred to all other foods...

बाजरा हंदा रोट दही में ओलणा।

इतना दे करतार, फेर नहीं बोलणा।।

It is mashed and eaten by hand, which is regarded as a healthier way of eating, because when a morsel of food is picked up and transported to the mouth with ones fingers, all the senses come alive. In fact, this is a form of yoga, which aids breathing and digestion. The hand signals the brain which in turn directs the body to release digestive juices that add to the taste of food. Scientific research has shown that eating by hand strengthens the sympathetic nerves and increases appreciation of food.

In Shekhawati, the afternoon meal includes bajra roti, buttermilk, seasonal vegetables, chutney and onions, followed by jaggery (gur). A folk song captures the taste thus:

बाजरे की रोटी पोई रै हालिड़ा।

बथुए का रांधा साग।।

Along with bajra roti, the song describes seasonal greens. The roti is dipped in

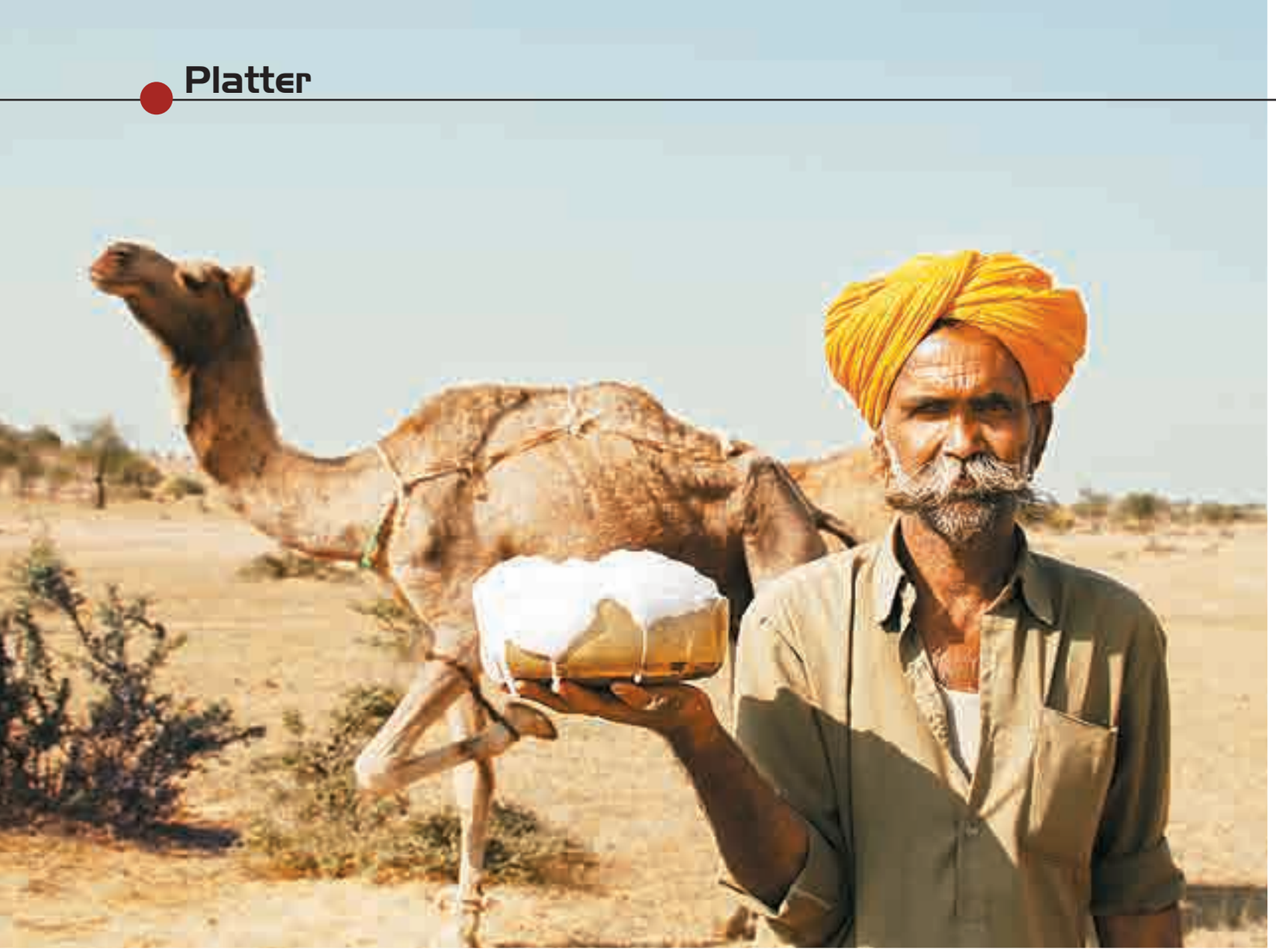
butter, and broken with wet fingers, as referenced in a riddle...

घर–घर तालियां बाजै।

In the Marwar region, bajra raabdi (made with curds or buttermilk) is a popular drink, prepared in accordance with the weather. In winters, 'kutta raabdi' is made from bajra flour and buttermilk and has a warming effect. A folk song attests to its taste...

मीठी लागै बाजरे की राबड़ी रै
दल चक्की से हांड़ी पै गैरी
नीचे लगा दी लाकड़ी रै
मीठी लागै ...
रांधे–रांधे थाली में घाली
ऊपर आ गई पपड़ी रै
मीठी लागै ...

Raabdi is also eaten with unpasteurized milk. This folk song says that bajra raabdi is prepared in an earthen vessel and cooked on a stove. Anything cooked in an



earthen vessel is more nutritious, because it absorbs calcium and potassium.

मेवाड़....ज्वार छोड़ कदै गेहूं नहीं खाणो
मेवाड़ छोड़ कठै नहीं जाणो।

Rajasthan may be poor in terms of agriculture but is rich in cattle. Water may be scarce but it is awash in milk and milk products. Even in the midst of scarcity, its hospitality is world-famous. Guests are served lapsi, a sweet dish of cracked wheat, ghee and jaggery; it may be low on wheat but is rich in ghee…..

मीठी थूली ओ सायबा दूद से
जेको अजब सवाद
लाडू पेड़ा हो सायबा लापसी
जेको बड़ो रे सवाद
गोदी भरी हो सायबा पूत से
जेको अनन्द उछाव
मेलां फूले हो सायबा केवड़ो
जेकी आवे परमल बास।

मीठो धान।।
मीठा चावळ, मीठी बाजरै की मकड़ी,
गुड़ घाल मीठो बाजारो, मीठो दळियो,
लापसी, लपट्यो, हीरो, गुड़वाणी,
जौ को मीठो दळियो, गुड़धाणी

In Rajasthan, we find geographical and cultural variations in food and nutrition. There are five such regional cuisines: Shekhawati, Dhundhar, Mewat, Marwar and Harauti. Each has a distinctive culture, with degrees of similarity and dissimilarity. This is more or less a reflection of differences in soils and geoclimatic conditions and the food crops that they support. Thus, the cuisine of these regions is also different. Shekhawati and Marwar have almost the same geoclimatic conditions, so the crops grown are much the same. Moth (a legume) and bajra are the main produce, as the sandy soil and erratic rainfall are not suited to less hardy crops. A proverb aptly describes the distinctive features of the soil and the crops that grow in it…..

मोठ–बाजरो वांगड़ निपजै।
गेहूंड़ा निपजै खादर में।
नित बरसो, मेहा, बागड़ में।
जवड़ा निपजै खादर में।

Sandy soils support moth and bajra, while fertile soils produce wheat and sorghum.

Farmers practiced mixed cropping, so dals are grown along with the main crop. Vegetable seeds are also scattered here and there. The winter harvest thus includes fruit, greens and wild vegetables like matira, kachar, tindsee and loiya, with the vines spreading in between the main crop.

If western Rajasthan is colourful, so is neighbouring Gujarat, where the vibrant garba (folk dance) and the sweetness of kansaar (a wheat-based dessert) add fragrance and zest all year round. The Gujarati thali spreads its sweetness the world over, thanks to an entrepreneurial society that has popularized its rich culinary tradition.

Gujarati women try to entice Lord Ram with a variety of foods in this folk song…..

राम आवो अमारे गामड़े रे.....
जुवो जुवो मारा गामडीयानी रीत
मैं तो रांधी छे अड़दनी दाळ, राम आवो.....
मैं तो बाजराना रोटला बनाव्या रे, राम आवो.....
मैं तो काळी कुरड़ीमां भरी छाश, राम आवो.....

When Lord Ram realizes that an assortment of foods is being prepared, he is drawn towards it….

नागली जुवार डोडा दाणा आमां खाणो रा,
कोदरा बोटी मोरने रालो हारो आमां खाणो रा
छेअदी बाकला आंबा–छुंदो आमां बोपरीयो रा,
उळदे तुवी चोवले डा आमी खानारा
माटनो वेडो चाबर्यो नालो हारो आमा खाणो रा,
माहने मासे कुअने हिमडे शक्ति वालो खाणो रा
हुना वाकडा थपलीया मांडा तहेवारो आपी खाजी रा,
दारू ताडी शरबत नीरो ई आमां पीणो रा

The foods mentioned in this song comprise the traditional cuisine of the Vasava adivasis of southern Gujarat. The produce is grown organically, without the use of agrochemicals. The dishes prepared from this produce are integral to Vasava's food culture.

One can witness the chappan bhog or offering of 56 different foods to Lord Krishna in Dwarika on the coast of Gujarat. In terms of hospitality, resource-rich Gujarat and resource-poor Rajasthan have two things in common: laapsi and milk.

गोळ विना कंसार नहीं ने स्त्री विना संसार नहीं

Just as laapsi (prepared from jaggery, wheat flour and ghee, a sweet that serves as prasad on auspicious occasions) cannot be made without gur, an individual's world cannot be made without a woman.

Thus, the importance of gur is extolled.

Another aspect that Gujarat and Rajasthan have in common is the Gujar community. The lifestyle and cuisine of the community are the same, regardless of where they live. They are extremely fond of dal-baati-churma, perhaps Rajasthan's best-known dish.

''अथाळु चुरमु तथाळु घी फुकतनु मळे तो हाणो इनी भी।''

Fresh churma, made with raw sugar and mashed roti, and topped with a huge dollop of ghee, is a dish no member of the community would ever refuse.

Neighbouring Maharashtra in the west also boasts of a rich food culture.

Varan Bhat is a comfort food that evokes memories of childhood.

वरण भात म्हणजे सुख ! वरण, भात, तूप, मीठ, लिंबू, कढी , मध्ये घातला भात,
भाताचं केला आळ, त्यात घातलं वरण, तूप, मीठ, लिंबू आणि कढी, मऊमऊ
कालवल, एक घास बाळाला, एक घास आईला, मग कढीची पार फुटली फुटली
गोविंद गोपाळ हे दोघे बंधू, जेवीत होते वरणभात लिंबू
जेवता जेवता चमत्कार झाला, साक्षात गोविंद भेटून गेला

रसाळ लिंबू परिपाक त्याचा, पोटात घ्यावा रस पिंपळीचा

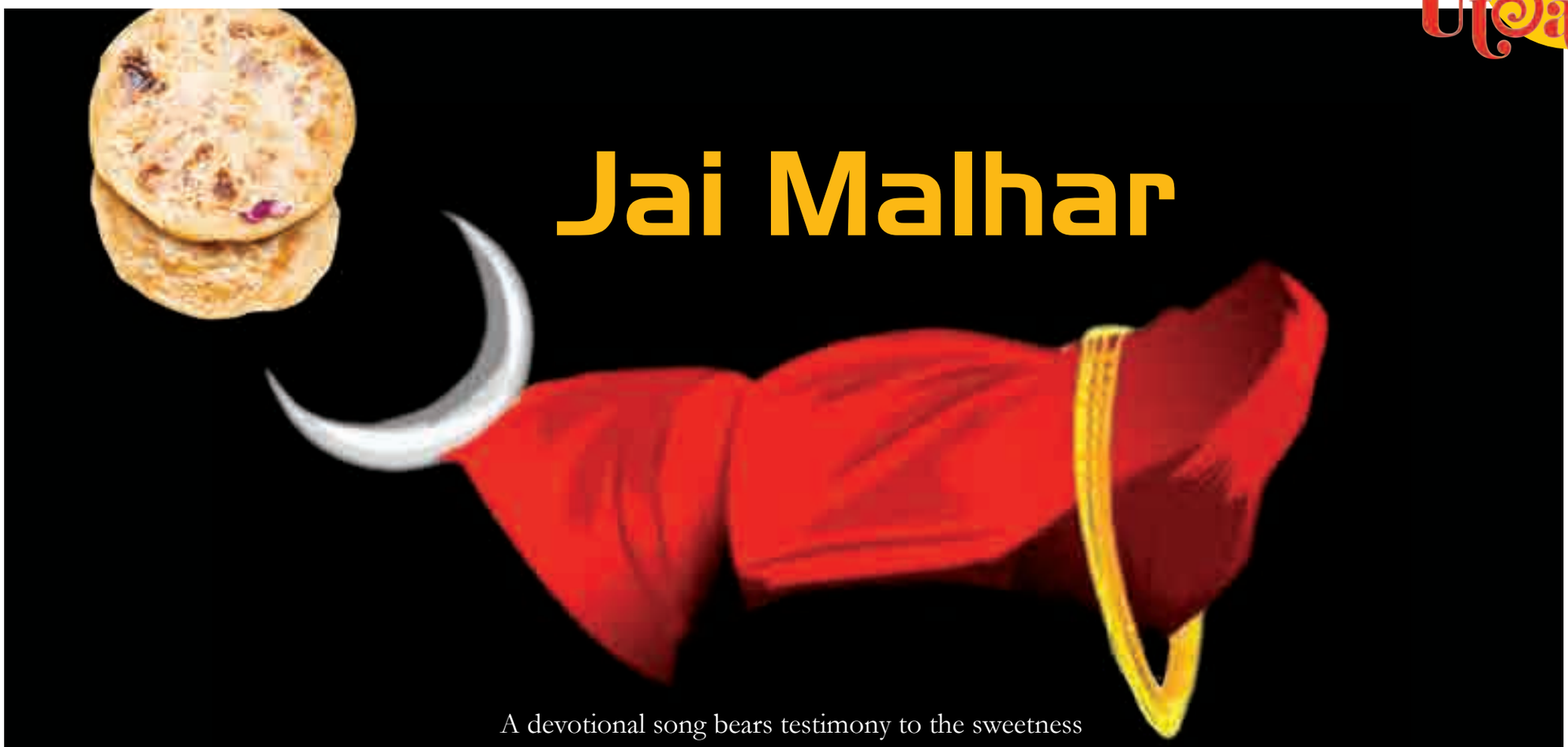
From Chandrapur to Sindhudurg, that is, from one end of Maharashtra to the other, the pooranpoli reigns supreme. No native of the state can resist the dish, made from dal, jaggery, ghee and milk. Small wonder it features in folk songs...

जनी म्हणे देवा, केलीया पुरणपोळी

जेवून घ्या आता, पुरे झाली लाडीगोडी

On the festival of Holi, children anticipate the taste of pooranpoli...

होळी रे होळी पुरणाची पोळी



Jai Malhar

A devotional song bears testimony to the sweetness and nutritional virtues of pooranpoli…..

पुरणपोळी भक्तीगीत

मनी भोळा भाव रं, देवा मला पाव रं
मानून घे देवा माझी सेवा भोळी
ज्योतिबा ला केली पुरणपोळी……
तूच माझी माय रं, दुधावरची साय रं
मायबापा वानी माया लाभलिया खंड
कुंकवाचं लेण माझे ठेव भाळी
ज्योतिबा ला केली पुरणपोळी……
सासर न माहेर देवा तुझा डोंगर
बसलास देवा तू माझ्या काळजात रं
भक्तीत तुझ्या मी येडी खुळी
ज्योतिबा ला केली पुरणपोळी……
काय तुझा थाट रं, जगाचा मालक रं
इंद्रा परी शोभे तुझा दरबार रं
सुखानं भर देवा माझी झोळी
ज्योतिबा ला केली पुरणपोळी……

Konkan is a coastal area. Logically, fish should be a staple. But the Konkan platter which forms the daily fare of the Chitpavan brahmin community, is predominantly vegetarian. Paddy, coconut and cashew are the main produce of the region, while jackfruit and arbi are the most abundant vegetables, and add to the nutritional profile of the Konkan thali esteemed by the Chitpavans.

The Malvani community of Konkan, however, are pescatarian. Rice and fish is their favourite dish. Varieties of sardines, mackerel, pomfret, lady fish, sting rays, etc are found in the coastal waters. To lend a festive touch to everyday fare, the Malvanis have visualised the marriage of the tarli (sardine) and bangdo (mackerel), in which other species of fish play their part. One acts as the pundit, another arranges the wedding tent and the others provide music. This imaginative folk song expresses the joy of living in harmony with the ocean sphere.

तारली व्होकल । बांगडा नवरो
शेतकी करवली । चिटकन उडावली
सुळो भट म्हणता सावधान ।।1।।
गरगांटो कर्णो वाजवता ।
पापलेट लाकडा फोडता ।
नालो स्वयंपाक रांदता । मुडदुशी ढवळी वराण ।
सुळो भट म्हणता सावधान ।।2।।

Uttarakhand, located in the stunning Himalayan vistas, is hard to reach. The simple people who live here do not regard this as a handicap. Their traditional knowledge is part

of their cultural identity. Their cuisine guards them against the bitter cold. It comprises unique dishes like gehat dal (a legume), kandali saag (a puree of stinging nettles or bichua) and jakhiya aloo (potatoes with spicy seeds of Cleome viscosa), eaten with makki (maize flour) rotis.

Bichua or scorpion grass is a highly nutritious weed, but must be collected with extreme caution, as the slightest touch of the prickly leaves on bare skin results in an unbearably painful rash. Only experienced hands can gather up the leaves without fear. That's why the food culture of Uttarakhand is inculcated in childhood itself. Festivals centred around children are celebrated. One such festival is Ghugatiya….

On Makar Sankranti, Ghughatiya is observed in Uttarakhand. A hallmark of this festival is a sweet called ghughut, made with jaggery, semolina, wheatflour, water and milk. It is shaped in the form of Hindi numerals, or hand-held drums, mounds, etc. Children wear a garland of ghughut and call out to crows.

काले कौवा काले घुघुति माला खा लें।
लै कौवा भात में कै दे सुनक पात।
लै कौवा लगड़ में कै दे मै बनों दगड़।
लै कौवा बौड़ में कै दे सुनौक धवड़।
लै कौवा क्वों में कै दे भली भली ज्वें।

In the towering mountain ranges of neighbouring Kashmir, agriculture is not productive. In times past, some greedy monarchs sold what little

rice was produced to other regions, so that the common people had none. But the mountainous region is blessed with water bodies, which produce water chestnuts in abundance.

The British associated the lack of rice with poverty, and dubbed the nutrition-packed singhada or water chestnut as poor man's fare. It was assumed that people ate it out of necessity. In fact, water chestnut flour is much sought-after. Many kinds of ritual fasts that allow consumption of non-cereal foods, so preparations made from singhada flour are eaten with relish. Many an adage on the singhada and its necessity figure in Kashmir's folk culture…….

Geri hai nero Tcharni Sarnei,
Kely ho sarinei.che mernui lo.
Gareu setein yed chem bernei,
Kely ho sarinei che marnei ho

In the lower ranges of the Himalayan region lies Jammu, where the Dongri community resides. Here, a jocular folk song refers to a repast:

दपनस क्युतुये रथ मंगवोवमय,
सोव न्योछतुर है वुछनोवमय।
दीवकी मजिक्युत रथ मंगनोवमय,
सोवन्येछतुर है वुछनोवमय।।

तुझे निमंत्रण देने जाना है तो तेरे लिए रथ मंगवाया है। इस शुभ अवसर के लिए शुभ मुहूर्त निकलवाया है। देवकी मां जैसे ही तुम। तुम्हारे लिए रथ मंगवाया है। शुभ मुहूर्त तुम्हें शुभ हो।

To deliver an invitation to a feast, I have to summon a chariot for you. For this auspicious occasion, an auspicious time must be found. You are like Mother Devaki (Lord Krishna's birth mother), so I must summon a chariot. May this auspicious time be auspicious for you.

The mehndi (henna) ceremony is an essential feature of Kashmiri weddings, and involves embellishing the hands and feet of the bridal

couple with dye at a community gathering marked by singing and dancing. The women of the neighbourhood assemble at the bridal home and prepare colours with which to paint an auspicious pattern on the threshold.

वरि करेथय वरि सोन्दरिये
करि सोन्दरिये कोसमन क्राव।
वरि करेथय वरि पद्मनिये
करि पद्मनिये कोसमन क्राव।।

Oh, beauty! You have prepared a spicy khhichdi. Roses have bloomed in your garden today. Like Padmini, you have made 'ver' (spice cakes) for guests. Oh, Padmini! Look at the beauty of the flowers.

भति–भति ति पियादी पति
भति देग आसनाई
भति कथि आसनाई
भति बेछि आसुन
भति शोपिये कथि शोपीयेना
भति फलेन पियोन
धरि हा नेरो चारनाई सारनी
कालाई हो सारनी, चे मारनेइ
धारेन सातिन यड छम बरनाई
कालाई हो सारनी, चि मारनुई हो

Food culture has another aspect, still widely prevalent - the community meal. In the same region, we find an enormous diversity of cuisines, as each community has its own kind, invariably vegetarian. This has been described elsewhere in the book. To cite an example, in Rajasthan the Shekhawati, Marwar and Mewar regions all swear by guttay ki sabzi (gram flour nuggets in gravy). It is regularly served up in most households. But the Oswal, Maheshwari and Rajput communities have distinctive ways of preparing it. The Oswals prefer it rather bland, whereas the Maheshwaris cook the boiled gutta in

buttermilk. Gram flour nuggets or strips prepared in this fashion are known as pitod. In Maharashtra, the same dish is known as patawari or maswadi, a spicy version. Rajputs like their gutta fried, in a thick gravy of garlic, onion, tomato and heavy spices. The dish is extremely filling. The recipe was intended to fire the blood and ensure the Rajput warriors were always battle-ready.

The brahmins and baniyas (priestly and trading) communities of Uttar Pradesh generally prefer simple and bland fare. In contrast, the kayastha community cook their vegetarian dishes in the same spicy curry used to prepare chicken and mutton. In Maharashtra, where the palate craves red-hot chillies, non-vegetarian dishes are served in a red tambda curry or a white padhra curry. The same curries add to the taste of vegetarian foods.

Maharashtra's love of hot chillies has influenced Buhranpur in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. The northward march of the army of Emperor Aurangzeb (17th century CE) from Aurangabad to Agra was arrested at Buhranpur courtesy the red-hot cuisine. Enchanted by the taste of the uber-spicy dal gandori (a dish of dals and greens) tempered with garlic and red chillis and served with jwarichi and

Dr Narmada Prasad Upadyaya

kalanyachi bhakri (millet flatbreads) the Mughal troops decided not to pillage Buhranpur.

Let us turn our gaze eastwards, to Lord Jagannath's Odisha. Located on the hot and humid east coast, it is regarded as a poverty-stricken region. But it is blessed with vast natural resources, including a treasure trove of minerals. Also known for its spiritual and cultural heritage, it is the home of famous classical dance forms, amazing architecture and unique traditions. The taste of traditional cuisine is not confined to the Mahaprasad offered at the Jagannath temple, but is available in every household. The people of Puri refer to the temple meals, which have had a profound influence on their culinary habits, as 'abhara'.

Pakhal, one day-old fermented rice mixed with water and vegetables, is eaten with such relish that it's believed to have captivated not just their taste buds, but their hearts. In a popular romantic folk song, a youth compares his lady love to a 'pakhal kansa', that is, a pakhal-bearing vessel. A number of ditties in Oriya films are based on this song.

ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ, ମୋର ପଖାଳ କଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ, ମୋର ପଖାଳ କଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ
ସଜନୀରେ, ତୋ ବିହୁନେ ଉଡ଼ିଲା ହଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ, ମୋର ପଖାଳ କଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ

ବହିଲାଣି ଅନା ସଖି, ଝଞ୍ଜା ପବନ
ଅଠା ମାରିଗଲା ତୁଣ୍ଡ, ଯାଏ ଜୀବନ
ତୋ ବିନା ପଖାଳ ଗୋ, ଫାଟିଲା କପାଳ ଗୋ
ତୋରାଣି ସାଥେ ମିଶି, ହର ମୋ ତୃଷା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ, ମୋର ପଖାଳ କଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ

ସଙ୍ଗ। ଠାକୁରାଣୀ ପିତା ଶୁଖୁଆ ରାଣୀ
ତୋ ଲାଗି ନିଆଁରେ ସତୀ ଝାସ ଦେଲାଣି
ପିଆଜ ଥରି ଡରେ, ଛାଲ ଛିଡ଼ାଇ ମରେ
ମରିଚ କହୁଛି ମୋତେ, ତୋ ତୁଲେ ମିଶ।
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ, ମୋର ପଖାଳ କଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ

ଓଡ଼ିଆ ଜୀବନ ଦୁଆ, ଶାଗ ପଖାଳ
ଜଗନାଥ ରସି ଖାଏ, ମନେ ତୁଭାଳ
ଚାଖିନାହିଁ ଯେ ଠାରେ, ଧିକ ତା ଜନ ମରେ
ମଣିଷ ଜାକରେ ସେ ତ ଅଣପୁରୁଷ।
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ, ମୋର ପଖାଳ କଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ
ସଜନୀରେ, ତୋ ବିହୁନେ
ସଜନୀରେ, ତୋ ବିହୁନେ ମୋ ଉଡ଼ିଲା ହଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ, ମୋର ପଖାଳ କଂସା
ଆସ ଜୀବନ ଧନ

Pakhal found recognition in 16th century Oriya poet Arjun Das' authoritative text Kalplata, and thereafter, began to feature in Oriya literature and folk tradition. One of the 56 foods offered to Lord Jagannath, it has taken many forms. Kanji, a dish prepared from the flavourful pakhal stock or torani, also a pride of place in folk culture, as we see in the following song:

Kartik Maasare Ashila Kaanji.....
Madaa Daani Dhaana Chaula

In folk songs like this one, we find enticing descriptions of the regular fare in Oriya households.

A folk ditty explains how moori-nadia, a puffed rice and coconut-based street food found all over Odisha, should be consumed,

The song explains how the snack can be made even more tongue-tingling.

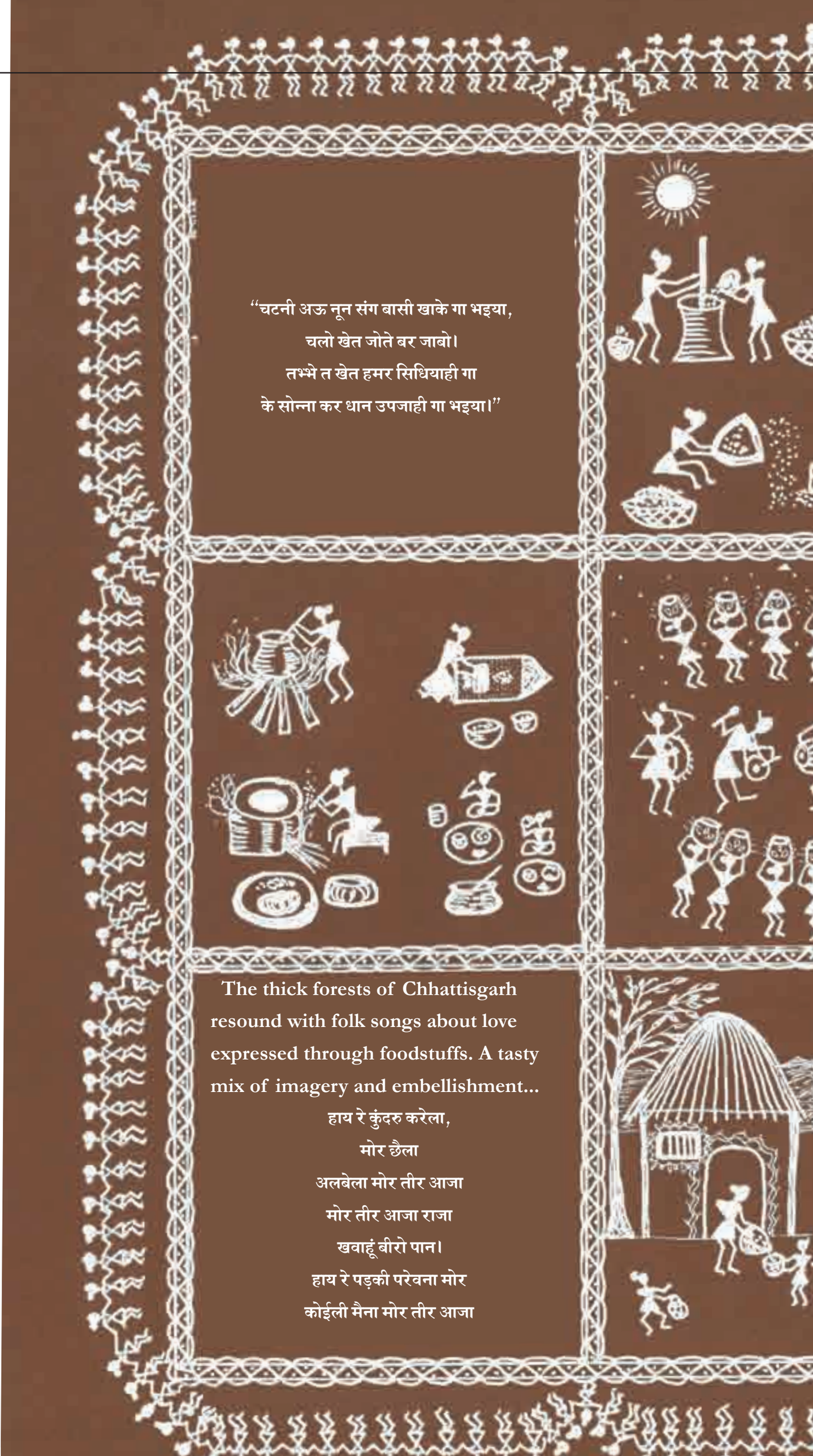
Another folk songs describes a feverish and hungry Radha (Lord Krishna's beloved) asking her friend Duti to bring her a range of foods,

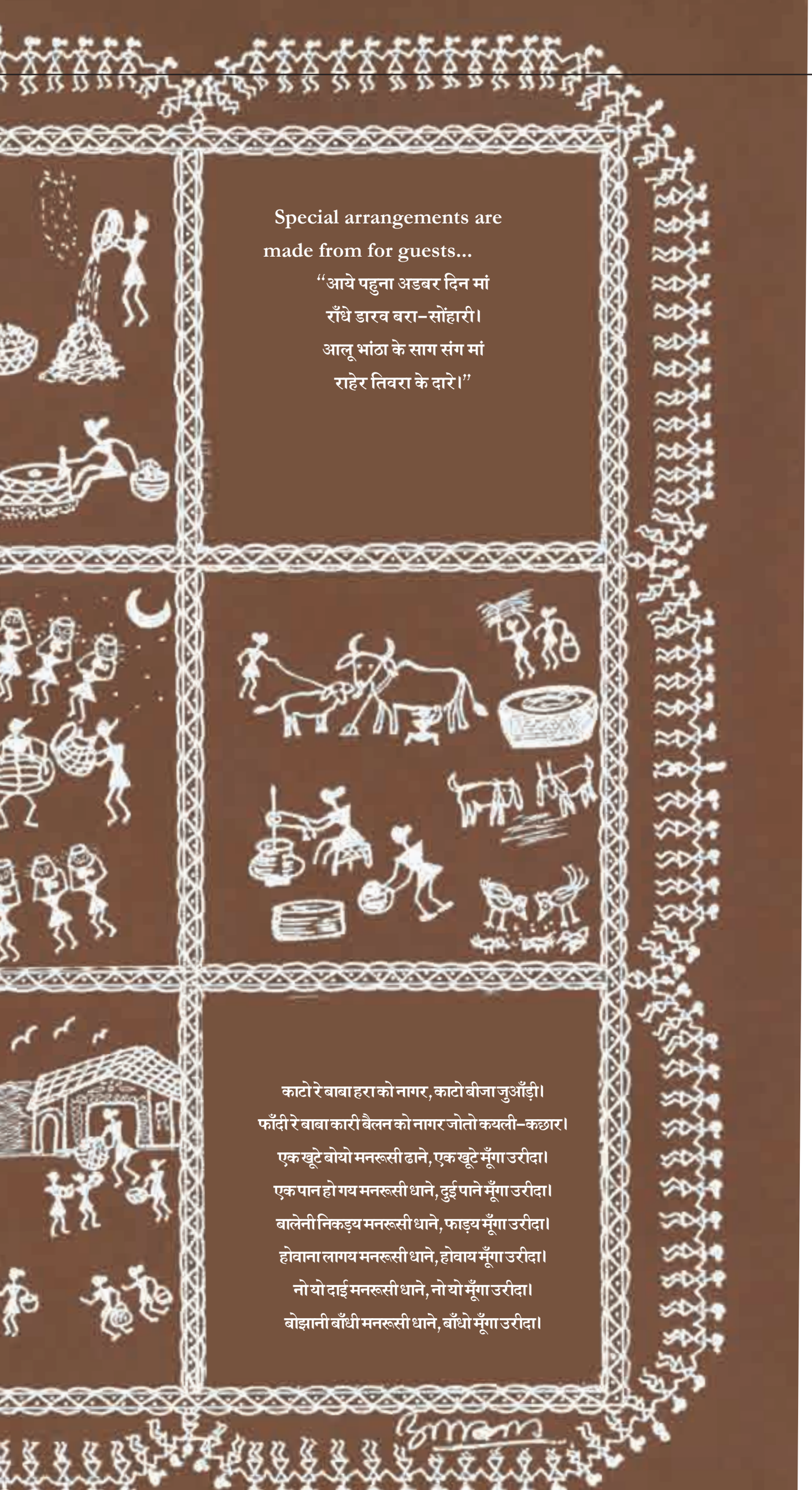
so that she can take Krishna's name with each one.

राधिका बोइले दुति गो .....

In neighbouring Chhattisgarh towards central India, dal, rice and vegetables are the everyday fare. In poor households, leftover rice is immersed in water and eaten the next morning. The danda folk songs of Chhattisgarh describe the different cuisines of various communities.

(ओ ! मेरे कुंदरु और करेला की तरह
मजेदार अलबेले छैला तुम
मेरे निकट आओ





मैं तुम्हें बीड़ा पान खिलाऊँगी।
पड़ूंगी और कबूतर की तरह सुन्दर
कोयल और मैना की तरह गाने वाली
मेरी रानी
तुम मेरे करीब आ जाओ
मैं तुम्हें अपने हाथों से पान खिलाऊँगा।
कुम्हड़ा की बातीं (छोटा फल)
उसकी बेल में ही खराब हो गई।
और तुम्हारे बिना मेरे हृदय में आग लगी हुई है।
कचालू की सब्जी बनाने के लिये मठा (छाँछ)
की जरुरत पड़ती है
पर तुम्हीं बताओ मैं अपने इस मतवाले मन
को किस प्रकार बाँध कर रखूं।
अमारी की भाजी खट्टी लगती है,
मेरे जीवन में तुम्हारे बिना खटास आ गया है,
यदि तुम मेरे दरवाज़े आ पाओ
तो मेरी फूटी किस्मत जाग जायेगी।
ककड़ी को खाने से पहले उसके अगले (कड़ुवा)
भाग को काट कर फेंक देते हैं
मेरे प्रिय तुम भी कड़वाहट छोड़ और अपनी प्यार भरी
बोली बोलो।)

The baiga folk songs of Chhattisgarh reflect the variegated colours and joys of life.

The north-east is noted for its bio-

diversity, natural beauty and wealth. For historical and geographical reasons, meat and fish are the primary fare. The heavily forested hilly terrain, bisected by rivers, is difficult to traverse. Farmland is limited as a result, but the hardworking people of the region treasure the little that grows. Thousands of varieties of rice grow here, spreading a veritable rainbow of colours across the landscape. Black, red, purple – endless varieties of rice. Beyond every mountain we found a plethora of foodcrops, rendering the north-east the epicentre of biodiversity. A song in the Bodo language calls out to the Goddess Laxmi….

आय' बिमा माइनाव
फैदी नों जोखौ अन्ना
दे आयै जोंनि नआव
दाथा आय जोंखौ बावना

दाथा आय जोंखौ बावना
दाथा नोडण् ध्ध्ध्ध् बाव स्रि जाना
हे आयै बाव स्रि जाना
थायो नोंलाय जेबो महराव
गोजा गोसोम बाइदि बाइदि
हे आय जेबो महराव।

ओ माँ लक्ष्मी माइनाव
हमारे प्यार में चली आओ.
ओ माँ हमारे घर में।
मत भूलना हमें
मत रहना दूर हमसे
रहती हो माँ तुम विभिन्न रंगों में,
काले, लाल सभी रंगों में,
हे माता ! विभिन्न रूपों में

The song evokes the many colours of rice, numerous varieties of which are grown by the Bodo community.

When the people of Mizoram speak of food, it brings to mind chhura, a crab-based dish, which features even in children's songs.

Hmakhawsang nghaleng dawi Chhurbura kha,
Zaiin ka hril dawn e;
Suihlung a rualpui lenrualte zawng khan,
Zamual an liam zo ta.
Kir zai rel thei lo, liam zai rel thei lo,
Chung tur-a ni thlangtiangah a liam dawn e;
Vangkhawpui umkawng zalam huam luaiah.
Sial ang a ngir an ti.

In Bengal too, fish and rice are staples, and are consumed in a festive spirit.

ওরেট্যাংরাতবুকাটোনযায়
মাগুরমাছেক্যাতক্যাতায়,
ওরেট্যাংরাতবুকাটোনযায়
মাগুরমাছেক্যাতক্যাতায়,
আবারশিঙিমাছটামারছেকাঁটা
পরানযায়জ্বলিয়ারে ।
হা য়রে , কি মা ছ ধরি ছ বড়শিদিয়া?
ওদরদীকিমাছধরিছবড়শিদিয়া?
ওগুরুজীকিমাছধরিছবড়শিদিয়া?(x2)

The famous baul singers of Bengal centre their songs around fish...

वाडल

ढेंरा फिर भी आसान हैं काटना
ओर मांगूर थोरा मुसकिल हैं
और काटा मारे सिंगी मछली
प्राण मेरे जले रे

पकड़ी कौनसी मछली काढे से ?
ओ दरदी ओ गुरुजी
पकड़ी कौनसी मछली काढे से ?

भेदा मछली किचर खाय
ओर पुँढी मछली का प्राण जाय,
और फिर वारिस में तो कई मछली
उछले वाहर पानी से...

पकड़ी कौनसी मछली काढे से ?
ओ दरदी ओ गुरुजी
पकड़ी कौनसी मछली काढे से ?

गुरु बोले झुढ नहीं ये
पकड़ा मैंने चें साबुत छः
मैं खाउंगा मछली कारी...
दो बैंगन, डालकर रे।।

पकड़ी कौनसी मछली काढे से ?
ओ दरदी ओ गुरुजी
पकड़ी कौनसी मछली काढे से ?

Uttar Pradesh is India's most populous state, with a variety of populations. The truth of the saying that water changes over every mile and speech over every four, is proven here. When the water changes, so does the nature of the crop, which in turn influences the cuisine of the

area. And when the dialect changes, so do expressions of folk culture. On either side of the 1,000-km stretch of the Ganges, from Meerut in the west to Ballia in the east, the culture of the region is reflected in its food. In Kannauj, invitations to a feast are made through songs that stimulate the taste-buds. The folk song evokes a beautiful picture of the distinctive regional cuisine...

कंचन थार कटोरी कंचन कंचन गिलास मंगवाय।
कंचन धरी सुराही सब इतर दओ छिड़काय।
आवै खसवोय भारी।
पुरी अउर कचउरी खस्ता बिढ़ई दई सिंकाय
मालपुआ रसगुल्ला परसे पेड़ा परसे आय
इमरती हैं प्यारी।
खुरचन पेड़ा बालूसाही कलाकंद ढबदार
गुझियां बरफी लड्डू रबड़ी नानखताई त्यार
धरी आगे सारी।
मोतीचूर बेसनी लड्डू रबड़ी खोयादार
मठरी पापर कचरी परसी फली दई परसाय
मूली और जिमीकंद टिंडी परमल मेथी लाय
बनी है प्यारी सारी।
पालक बथुआ कुलफा कमरख सबै दए परसाय
कैत की चटनी करी चटपटी सुंदर सुघर बनाय
बनाय सवादिल सारी।
दालमोठ समोसा पिसता मिरचौनी निमकीन
दारि चना की बड़ी कुरकुरी खस्ता है बड़ी रसीली
टीकिया आलू की।
दही बड़ा और पकौड़ी मैं अदरख दई डरवाय।
सोंठ अउ रउते सब परसा के कह लौं देयैं गिनाय
सीखरन परसि दई।
मोहन थार गजर को हलुआ पेठा है रसदार
गजक बढ़िया प्यारी।

Folk songs describe all manner of foodstuffs, and indicate a general preference for simple foods. In western UP, dal, rice, roti and ghee are regarded as the ideal meal. So, when a brother visits his sister, that is the food she wants to serve him, and she asks her mother-in-law for permission to do so, as we learn from the following song:

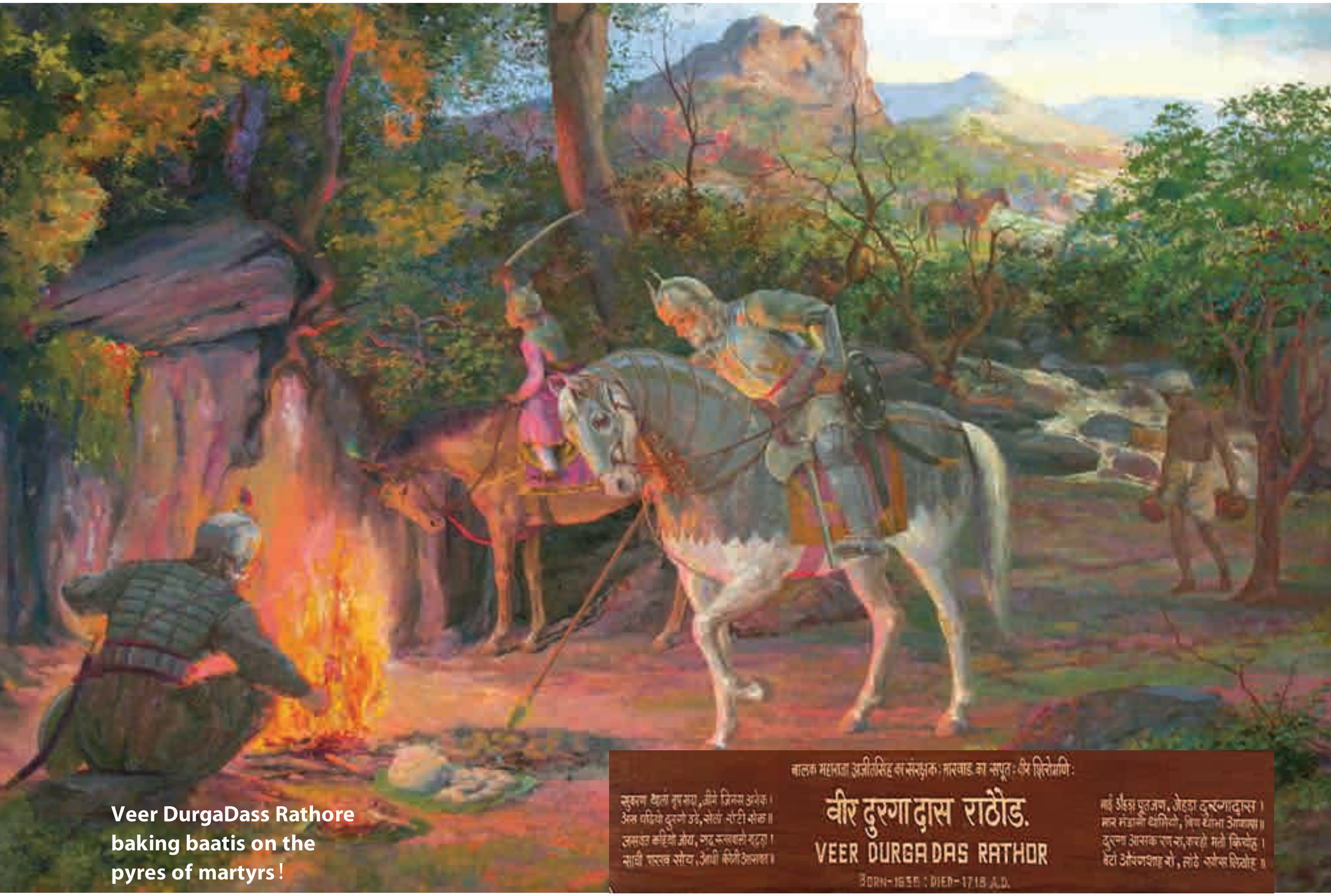
रांधौं न बहुअरि मोरी मोतीछर भातू और गेहुंन की रोटी जी।
रांधौं न बहुअरि मोरी दारि उद्दन की डारी उइपै घी की धार जी।

Everyday meals mainly comprise barley, chickpea, peas and red, green and black gram (tur, moong and urad dals). But every few days, there is a festival or celebration of some kind which calls for dahi-balla (spicy curds with dumplings) and kheer. The people of the state eat with gusto, and take great delight in feeding guests. A popular folk song from Kannauj portrays a sister imploring her brother, who is on the point of departing to fight the Mughals, to have his meal in a tranquil manner before he leaves.

धीरे धीरे जेमौं मेरो वीरना बलइया लेय।
वीरना मुगिल लड़इया मैं ठाड़े।
बलइयां लेय वीर की।

Bundelkhand is equally divided between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The region has a unique culture, in every aspect of life, and its denizens pride themselves on it. The folk songs of the region give a lyrical description...

हतो पैल बुन्देलखण्ड सारी दुनिया में न्यारो।
ईसें हमे लगत तो भइया जो प्रानन सें प्यारो।
खुबईं नानो नाज होततो, कोऊ न भूखो रत्तो।
कूटपीस बेरन खा नोनो बिरचन खूब बनत्तो ।
कर मुखाई भोरऊंसें उठके घोर खातते सतुआ।
चौरई चना चंदूली पोला हतो नोनिया भतुआ।
मिलत हतो इनकी भाजी में भोजन को रस
सारो, ईसें हमें लगततो..
पालत हते भैसिंया गइयां ताजो दूध पियतते।
खूब बडे परिवार केसंगै,भौत खुशी सें रतते।
कोदे कुटकी समा बाजरा और लठारा राली।
रोटी चांउर खातते इनसें सेहत हती निराली।
लपटा मइरोऔर घोरूआ लगो मठा संग प्यारो
ईसें हमें लगततो भइया जो प्रानन से भइया जो प्रानन से प्यारो
मउआ मेवा बेर कलेवा मिलत हते मनमाने
मुरका डुबरी लटा सिमंइयन सें न कभऊंअगाने।
लुचंइ पपरियां बरा ठडूला लगे मगोरा नीके।
जिनके आंगें आजके ब्यंजन लगत स्वादमें फीके



Veer DurgaDass Rathore baking baatis on the pyres of martyrs!

The people of Bundelkhand describe dietary restrictions in the same lyrical manner.

Bihar's culture is just as enchanting. Often, Bihar is said to transcend its geographical limits and is described as a 'state of mind'. But this has a positive connotation, because Bihar's hardworking people and their Chhath festival have left their stamp all over the country. After a hard day's labour, the workers of Bihar repair to their habitation and after a meal, bring out their drums and tambourines and lift up their voices in songs that reflect their love of folk culture.

In the eastern reaches of the Gangetic plains we find the culturally rich region of Anga, steeped in history. The Angika folk songs picturize its entire culture, and some of them give a glimpse of its cuisine...

बान्हल जाइछै संखेर लाडुआ औंटल जाइछै दूध।
पीबी लेहो आँरे दुलरुआ, जाय छअ बड़ी रे दूर॥1॥
अम्माँ से मिलि रे दुलरुआ, जाय छअ बड़ी रे दूर।
बाबा से मिलि ले रे दुलरुआ, जाय छअ बड़ी रे दूर॥2॥
इमली घोंटी ले रे दुलरुआ, जैबे बड़ी रे दूर।
ऐंगना बूली ले दुलरुआ, जैबे बड़ी रे दूर॥3॥

Angika wedding songs have a distinctive feature, that is, of posing riddles. The genre is known as 'Angika bujhoval'.

सुइया एन्हों सोझो
माथा पर बोझो। [ताड़–गाछ]
सुइया एन्हों सोझो
डाँड़ा पर बोझो। [मकई के पेड़]
तोर गदगद ऊपर फेन
तेकरो बेटा रतन सेन [भात]

In Bhojpuri, too, we find songs that attempt to string together many aspects of social life. Here, a description of foodstuffs is imparted in a lively manner through the medium of riddles.

काजर अस कजरारी बेटी, अंगुर के सिंगार
। बइठल बाड़ी पतरी डाढी, देखत बा संसार ।। (जामुन)
सावन फरे चइत गदराय । ताकर फर सुग्गो ना खाय ।। [बबूर]
राजा के बेटी रजमतिया नाँव । घँघरी पहिरि के बंजारे जाव । [मूली]
लरबरा के डाली टनटना के निकाली। [रोटी]

गोइठा जोरी गोलाकार, लिटिया लट्टू के आकार

The stove is round, but the litti is shaped like a top

The signature dish of the eastern region, comprising Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh, is litti chokha. The combination of wholewheat flour cakes stuffed with roasted, spicy chickpea flour and mashed vegetables with mustard oil, green chillies, onions and garlic, is wildly popular even outside these states.

Even though litti has become synonymous with Bihar, it is neither ubiquitious nor popular across the state. By and large, it is confined to the Bhojpuri-speaking region. Here, we find a conjunction between litti-chokha and the story of Lord Ram. As a young prince, Ram came to Buxar in the Bhojpuri region to be educated under the tutelage of the great sage Guru Viswamitra. Buxar celebrates its connection to Lord Ram and its favourite dish in the form of a festival. A huge fair is held, attended by those who are traversing the Ram circuit (comprising all the places associated with Lord Ram) and those whose roots are in the Bhojpur region.

Legend has it that Ram and his brother Lakshman themselves prepared and ate litti-chokha. So, devotees congregate in their hundreds of thousands and do as the Lord did. They get together to prepare and consume the dish. The fair is held at the time of the Panchkosi Parikrama, a spiritual journey that involves undertaking a circuit of holy places on foot. The one held in Varanasi is famous, but Buxar's has the added advantage of being a journey of tastes! The event lasts for five days. It begins from the temple of Ahilya in Ahiroli village near Buxar. Lord Ram is said to have released Ahilya from the curse that her husband, the sage Gautam, had cast on her. The devout gather at the temple to sing praises of Lord Ram's compassion. They cook and eat their evening meal, and rest there for the night.

On the second day, they traverse the three-km stretch to the Nandav village. Here, khhichdi and chokha are offered to the Lord. The third day brings the pilgrims to the ashram of the sage Bhargava, also known as Bhargaveshwar Mahadev. Here, curds and flattened rice are eaten. The penultimate day involves a trek to Barka Nuanv village, where the ashram of sage Uddalak is situated. On the fifth day, the fair is held at the Chitravan grounds in Buxar. Here, the devotees prepare a prasad of litti-chokha. It is said that the sage Viswamitra bestowed divine weapons on Ram and Lakshman at this very spot, to so that they could annhilate the demon Taraka. After doing so, Ram prepared and ate litti-chokha. Hence the fair celebrating the dish!

Although the tradition of the Panchkosi pilgrimage and the litti-chokha fair is ancient, the popularity of the dish is more recent. The story goes that when Mahatma Gandhi, who had an abiding interest in nutrition and food therapy, first heard of sattu and litti-chokha when he came to Champaran in Bihar. His associate Rajkumar Shukla, who had brought him to Champaran, absented himself one day. The Mahatma wanted to know where he was, and was told that Shukla was unwell. The litti he had eaten in the heat of the day did not agree with him. Gandhiji then wanted to know more about litti.

His inquiries led him to conclude that litti, or rather the sattu inside it, was excellent from the health point of view. It could be consumed all year round, provided certain precautions were observed. In summer, spices should be avoided and sattu should be eaten only with salt, sugar or gur. It should be uncooked, and mixed with water to make a drink or a ladoo. Salt or sugar could be added to the mix, as per taste.

It is said that sattu became popular thanks to pilgrims and workmen. For one thing, chickpea was widely available so sattu could be prepared in every home. For another, it was ready-to-eat and long-lasting. One had only to add salt and chillies. Until recently, it was customary for people

Chandigarh, Museum

who were traveling for work to carry sattu in their knapsacks. Whenever and wherever hunger struck, they could mix it with water, add spices and gulp it down. While sattu is suitable all year-round, litti should be consumed in cold weather. A folk song sung at the time of the winter harvest says:

गोइठा जोड़ी गोलाकार, लिटिया लट्टू के आकार
तले खिचड़ी मजेदार, अगहनवां में
धनकटनी के बहार, अगहनवां में

In the chapter on prasad, we have seen that Lord Krishna, in contemporary slang, is something of a 'foodie'. In Brij, where he spent his infancy and boyhood, Krishna left his stamp on every aspect of life - including and especially, its cuisine. A folk song in the vernacular of the region discusses food….

चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?
लिसोड़े की सब्जी और फुलका तीन–चार ?
घी में तलो जिमीकन्द
और संग में दार
चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?

अजमाइन की घुइयां
सूखी या रसेदार
भिंडी की चटनी,
छुंको रायतो धुआं बघार
सूखे आलू, संग में
उरद चना घी डार
चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?

बाजरे की पनपती,
खट्टी कढ़ी पकौड़ादार
लुचईन के संग में
आरू–टमाटर मिर्चदार
बेड़इन के संग
बेछिले आलू धुआंधार
चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?

डोकरा कौ फोरो कपार
जे कच्ची अमिया की चटनी, खीचरी घी में तरमाल
चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?

आलू–मैथी, मैथी–गाजर,
मटर को झोर
दही कौ तोड़,
भरेमां मिर्ची कौ अचार
परामठे धीमी आंच पे
देसी घी में हों तैयार
चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?

पूड़िन के संग
मीठो कासीफल कौ साग
बथुआ कौ रायतो
कचौड़ी आलू भरमार
हींग छुंकी अरहर संग
चामर, मिर्च अचार
चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?

मिर्च ते लाल खट्टो सन्नाटो,
नुक्ती के लड्डू बजनदार
जो लड्डुआ हाथन ते फोरो,

दही में बूरे की भरमार,
इमरती पे रबड़ी कूं मार
आम की ठंडी बनी सिकन्न, मलाईपूड़ी रसादार
इलायची ते सजे मालपूआ,
कैसो लगौ बिचार ?
चों रे लल्ला खाबेगो टेंटी कौ अचार ?

During its golden age, Tamil Nadu was described as a land where rivers of milk and ghee flowed. It was blessed with abundant food grains, fish and meat. The Chera kingdom on the western coast (2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE) was reknowned for its buffalo-milk, black pepper, turmeric and jackfruit. It was said of the people and their lifestyle, "Unput nadi, uddupun eradu", that is, those who eat a handful of rice and wear an unstitched cloth up to their knees lead an untainted life.

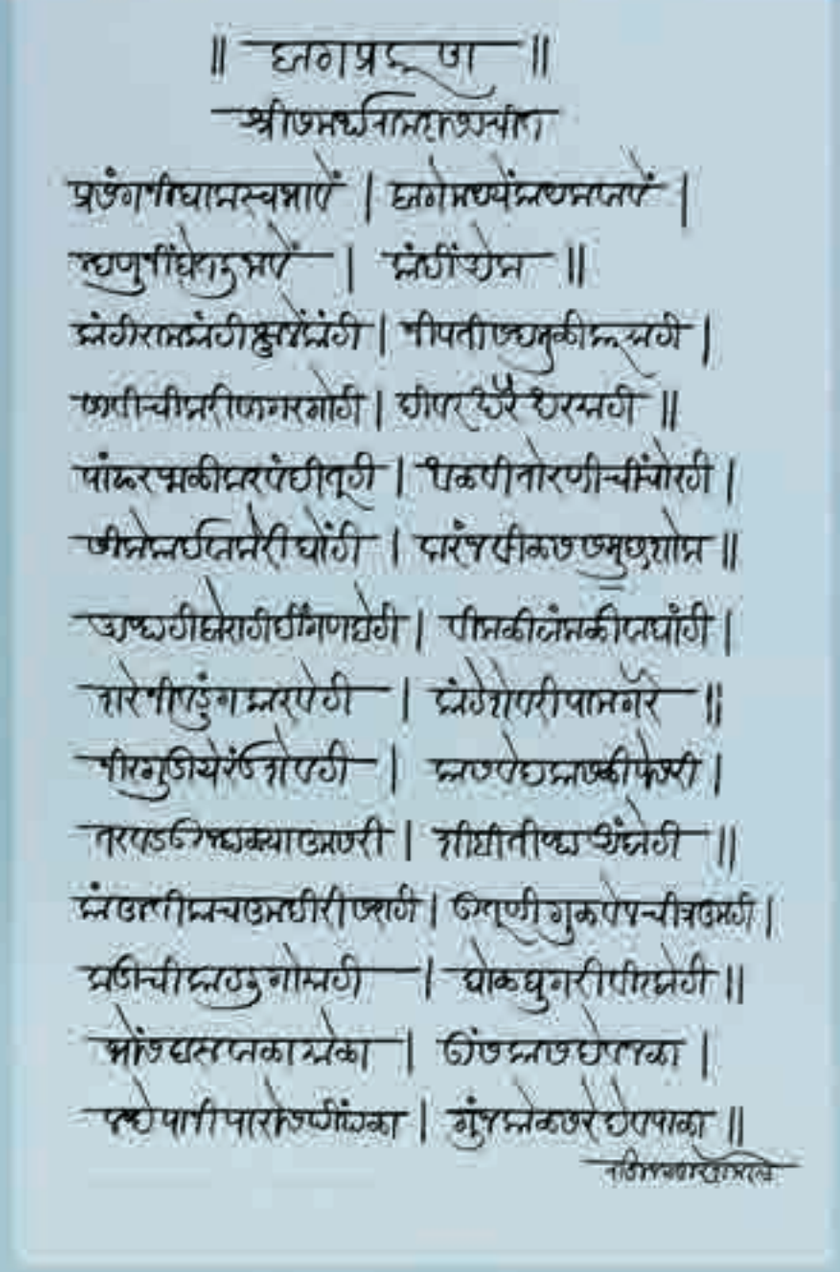
The goddess Mariamman is traditionally propitiated with boiled ragi (finger millet). Her festivals are held in the summer months. In every household, rice, pearl millet or chickpea are sprouted in an earthen pot. A mass of rice cooked with gur is shaped into a lamp and placed before the deity. It is distributed as prasad after the festival rituals.

Among the famous consecrated foods are the panchamrit (five nectars) of Palni, the pittu of Tiruchendur, the milk-based prasad during the evening prayers to Lord Ram, the katirukkanmadhu offered at the Parthasarthi temple in Triplicane (Chennai), the Vankar dosa (black gram, coconut and golden rice pancake) of the Alwarthirunagari Permual temple, the pongal of alona rice at the Oppiliappan temple, the Kanchipuram idli at the Sri Vardaraj Perumual temple at Kanchipuram and the kali prasad at the Natraj temple in Chidambaram.

The Hindi proverb 'jaise ann, waisa man' broadly translates as 'you are what you eat'. It is echoed in the Tamil proverb 'ujinala buddhi puninala jati', that is, your intellect is determined by your diet and your community by your ornaments.

In Tamil Nadu, while cooking a curry, fenugreek is added. It is said, 'vedayam podad keriyuman keriall, shaden illadauram ur all', that is, 'there is no curry without fenugreek and no village without a weekly fair'.

The first bottle gourd and the first greens to be grown in any field or kitchen garden are offered to the temple, so that those who eat in the refectory receive adequate nutrition.



॥ छगप्रश्न ॥

श्रीज्ञानेश्वरमहाराजकृत

प्रउंगघाम्रस्वप्नाएं । छगोमण्यंम्रण्यनजपें ।
लणुघिंघाहुभएं । म्रंहीसंज्ञप्त ॥
म्रंहीरात्रम्रंहीम्रुसंम्रंहीं । पीपतीज्ञयुकीम्रूम्रणी ।
ज्ञतीचीम्ररीज्ञागरगोंगी । घोपरघेंरे घेरम्रणी ॥
पांढरम्रकीघरपेंहीतूणी । पेकपीतारणीचीघोरणी ।
जीम्रोम्रघ्तिम्रेरीघोंगी । पारंपरीकघ्ज्ञमुछ्योम्र ॥
ज्ञघ्ज्ञगीछेराणीघींगिणघेंगी । पीम्रकीजंम्रकीम्रघांगी ।
तारेगीम्रुंगम्रम्रपेंगी । म्रंहेगोम्ररीपाम्रनॅर ॥
पीम्रुडियेरंघेगोपेंगी । म्रम्रप्पेघम्रम्रकीफेम्ररी ।
तरघडिंग्घम्रक्याघम्रणरी । गीघीतीघ्घ ओंम्रेगी ॥
म्रंघतरीघ्म्रचघम्रघीरीज्ञागी । ज्ञगणी गुकपेपचीत्रघम्रगी ।
म्रघीचीघ्म्रघ्घुगोम्रगी । घोकघुनरीपीघ्म्रगी ॥
ओंघघस्रघ्मकाघ्मंका । ओंघघ्म्रघघ्घम्रकाका ।
म्रंघेपाणीपारोज्ञणींका । शुंघघ्मंकंजरेघ्घपाका ॥

वाळिबाबा देशमुख

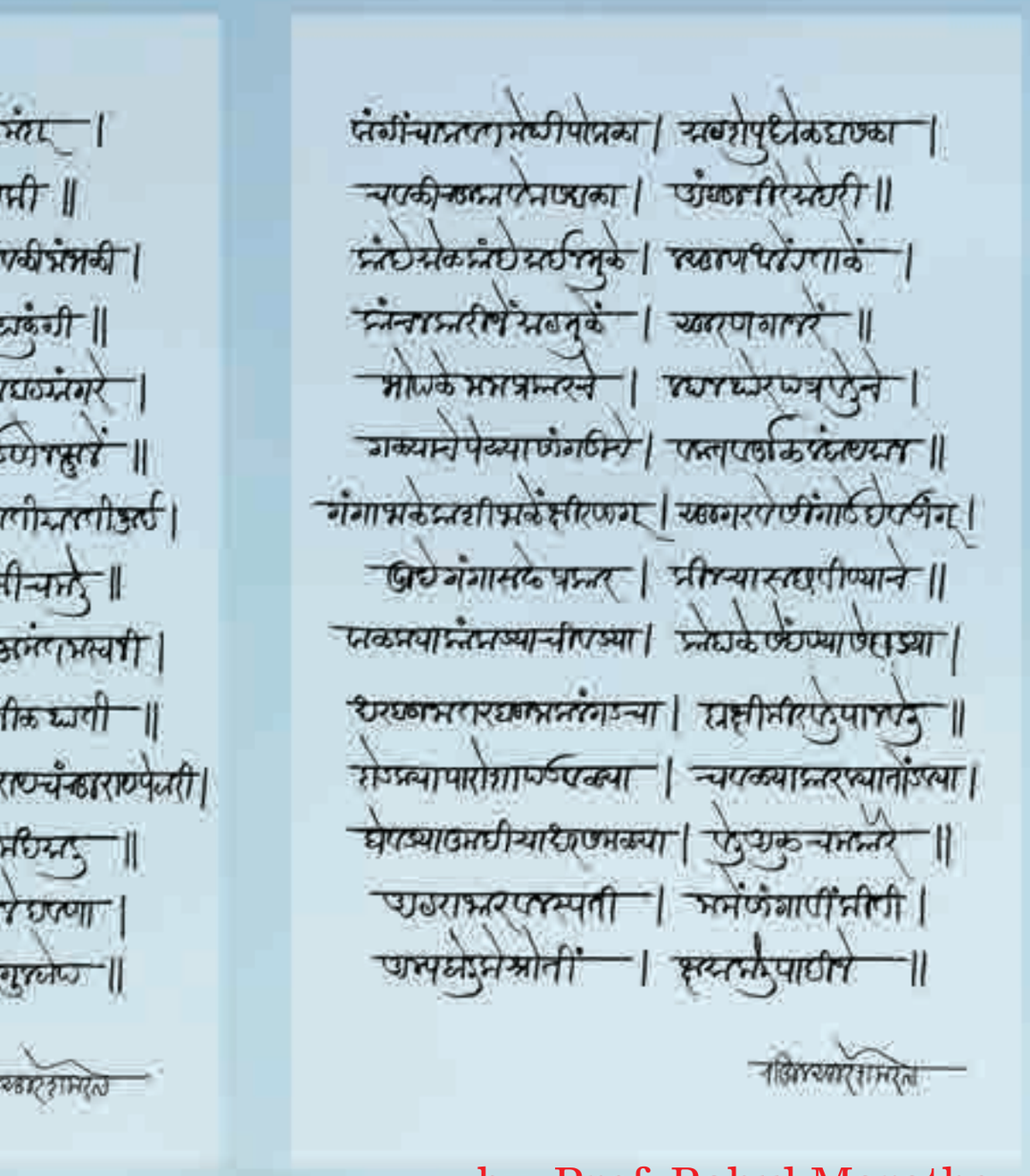
पेगमकडीचीजरी । ताप्यिरंडपामरीघ्जींगरी ।
ओंघरीघंघरीगंभरी । अडकण्यरेणीभोज्की ॥
ज्ञारतीज्ञरेणीघ्ज्ञगे । म्रंकडंम्राघाघ्ज्ञपिघ्रंगे ।
घ्रम्कज्ञणीभुताघ्रघ्रगे । ज्ञगरणीघरंगीघ्रनेंघंगी ॥
पीघ्रकणीकीडंभुरणी । ज्ञागिज्ञेणघ्रनेंजरघ्रणीची ।
घोकीहारचीणी । घ्रघघ्रचीणीघ्र ॥
पिंजरगोंडपींघ । घ्रघ्रनकाघ्रहघ्रतकंघ ।
गोरक्षचींचघ्रगांघ । घरोज्ञरीचा ॥
गोधरीशेवंतीभोज्री । म्रंहेघीघ्रीघ्रराघ्रघ्री ।
घोरघ्रणेघ्रभंघघ्रघ्री । चींचपिंघ्रणेघ्र ओंघ्रगे ॥
चोंभेचंघ्रघरारांघ्रघ्र । ज्ञगांगघ्रनगारघ्रंचा ।
पोपडेघेंरेघेपाघ्र । पठजीभिकणिंॅर ॥
पेंघेपींघेज्ञेर-पींघें । रेघ्रत्याघेरज्ञरीडाएंजकींघें ।
ओंडेपीडिघ्रतींगे । शॅरघ्रतीडघेंशीएंशीताघ्रभकें ॥

वाळिबाबा देशमुख

भंघज्ञाघ्रघेंडार । रज्ञरघ्रतेंज्ञघ
पेंभरेरंगडघ्रनरपुरे । ओघ्घेचीच
घ्रेकीघ्रकीपोघ्रकी । पेंपकीराघेंपी
ओघ्रणघ्रीगगुकीज्ञारघ्रकी । घेरघ्रकीघ्र
भुर्ज्याघ्रघ्रगचाघ्रघ्रगरे । पारीघ्रताघ्र
रांज्ञघ्रकघ्रम्रकेघ्रगरे । ज्ञेघ्रारघेंघ
भरेंज्ञेंघ्रभरेंघ्रीघ्रगघ्रेंभ । त्रीपीघ्रशेंघ
पाकीघ्रज्ञघ्रडघ्रज्ञेंघ्रेंड । घ्रेनकीशेंघ्रघ्र
रज्ञर्यघ्रनघ्रकीघ्री-चंघ्रघ्रनकीघ्री । घ्रम्रघ्रीघ्र
घ्रेगारओरज्ञंघ्रीघ्रनकीणी । घेंडिरंगघ्र
ओंकडीघ्रनकात्रीजेंघरी । त्रीपेंगी
गुरेंघ्रणीघ्रिघ्रचीघ्र घ्रारी । घ्रघ्रतीघ्र
घ्रम्कज्ञनकाघ्रघ्रराघ्रज्ञघ्रघ्र । घ्रघ्रचोरंगघ्र
पांचरघ्रतगरघ्रघ्रभघ्र । एकडीघ्रडी

वाळिबाबा देशमुख

Devine Diversity



How important biodiversity is in our daily life was lyrically and vividly described by Swami Samarth Ramdass in his poem Bagh. He was a great inspiration for Chhatrapati Shivaji in latter's statecraft. It was mainly spiritual. But how he transformed it into a practical aspect of life becomes evident from this episode on Bagh. It has been scripted into Murhi.

by Prof. Rahul Marathe.

Shabri's Bér

Fruits of Labour

The Indian scriptures tell us that one should work without anticipating the fruits of one's labour. But some fruits are essential in order to work. They provide the necessary energy and nutrition, and aid mental and physical development. Their importance is evident from the fact that a purely fruit-based diet allows one to live a long and healthy life. It is said that fruits are the key to longevity.

While observing a fast, when one cannot consume regular foods, the body may become sluggish. Eating fruits that impart energy will have a revivifying effect. Fruits form the primary diet of ascetics and other spiritual folk and are among the consecrated foods offered to gods and goddesses. As the following prayer says....

मैं नारियल जो चढाउ मैया तेरे लिए,

मेरी लाल से गोद भरी रहे.....

Expectant mothers are asked to consume a variety of fruits, in order to nurture the infant within. The qualities of the fruits are believed to assist in shaping the nature and tendencies of the child, as exemplified in the following....

खटिया बैठी हैं सासू, तो जच्चा से अरज करें रे।

ओ मेरी बहू, कौन–कौन फल खाए, लाल बड़ा सुंदर रे।

ओ मेरी सासू,

खायो मैं दाख बादाम और फल नारियल,

छील छील खाईं नारंगी

लाल भयो सुन्दर रे

Here, the daughter-in-law converses with her mother-in-law, attributing the health and beauty of her child to the consumption of fruits.

Long before the discovery of fire and cooking, fruit was an essential part of the human diet. In the present fast-paced lifestyle marked by poor diet, fruits can play an important role in maintaining health.

The variety of fruits is as numerous as the proverbs they have inspired. For example, it is said that 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away'. Eating a nutritious

fruit every day prevent illness, so one can steer clear of doctors. Many a juicy story is centred around the apple. It is said that the great scientist Isaac Newton discovered gravity thanks to an apple, which fell on his head when he was lying under a tree. Consider the fact that the founder of the world's most valued company, which has legions of fans the world over, decided on a bitten apple as its logo, thereby giving the succulent fruit a whole new level of fame and meaning.

Fruits not only signify food and nutrition but are hallmarks of the region where they grow. Kashmir and Kangra are known for their apples, and Nagpur and Pasighat in Arunachal for their incomparable oranges. Jaipur and Prayagraj are guava country,while the litchis of Dehradun and Muzaffarpur are famed for their exceptional sweetness. In coastal areas, the coconut is the very basis of everyday life.

Fruits can also be a bone of contention, sparking many a fierce debate on their relative virtues. The mango, in particular, is always in the arena. The denizens of Malihabad near Lucknow maintain their famous Dussehri variety is the king among mangos. This is hotly contested by Marathis, who believe the Alphonso or Hapus mango deserves that title. The Gujaratis sing paens to the Kesar, and the Bengalis extol the Malda. But for Benares folk, there is no mango as sublime as their very own Langda, and rise to the challenge if anyone says otherwise. Whatever be the outcome of the ongoing duels, the fact is that the fruit makes every meal satisfying. A saying from south India correctly observes....

हासिदु हालासिना हन्नु थिन्नू उंडु

माविना हान्नू थिन्नु

That is, when the stomach is empty, one should eat jackfruit and when it is full, one should have a mango. The jackfruit is

the answer to hunger and the mango is the delicious finale.

The role of fruits in everyday life is described with a humorous touch...

आकाल गेलो सुकाल एलो, खेये कांठालेर कोष,
एखन कि बले पालाबे बोनापो, दिये मासीर दो।

One lived through the drought by eating dried jackfruit kernels. Now that better times have come, the nephew can't criticises his aunt's cooking.

Fruits are associated with social rituals. For example, if the household has acquired a brand new item, or a submarine has been commissioned in service of national security, or the Indian space agency has launched a mission, the new beginning is celebrated by cracking a coconut. Fruits play in role in every auspicious event. No ritual is complete without them.

In western India, while preparing for the Ganpati festival, a special structure is made with wild fruits (a wooden canopy

suspended over the idol's head, decorated with fruits and herbs). It is known as maati in the Konkan region and matoli in Goa. Similarly, during the Makar Sakranti festival in Maharashtra, children are given a special bath called bornahan. A batch of fresh ber (jujube), pieces of sugarcane, revdi sweets and murmura (puffed rice) are mixed in water, and poured over the children.

It is believed that the bornahan stimulates pressure points in the body that have to do with mental development. Soon after comes the festival of Basant Panchami, in which the goddess of learning, Saraswati, is venerated. Fruits such as ber, bananas and jamun (Indian blackberry) and fresh grains are offered.

फुलो–फूलो भवानी तेरा केवड़ा,
रात न आड़ो आनंदी तेरा केवड़ा।।
जाम पके, जामुनीया पके और पके अनार
नारियल के बल पे मैय हैं दयाल।।1।।

Life lessons drawn from the story of Lord Ram, the embodiment of India's inner consciousness, are a guiding light for people to this day. One such story touches the heart and triggers a flood of emotions, and it has to do with the

ber. Mother Shabri yearns for a sight of the Lord...

रामा रामा रहते–रहते बीती हैं उमरिया
रघुकुल नंदन कब आओगे,
दासी की झोपडीयां।।
रोज सवेरे वन में जाकर
फल चुन–चुनक कर लाउगीं–2
अपने प्रभु को सम्मुख बिठाकर
प्रेम से भोग लगाउगीं–2
मीठे–मीठे बेरों से
लीला अपनी दिखलाना–2
लाली दुध–माखनी की।।
रटना लागे तेरे दर्शन की।।

Mother Shabri, while waiting for Lord Ram to pass by, gathers wild fruits for his repast. She finds ber, but resolves to serve him none but the sweetest fruits. So she tastes each one, keeping only the best, and these she offers up to the Lord.

Coconut: the complete fruit

The coconut is not so much a fruit as the expression of an entire ecosystem, or culture. Imperative in rituals performed on auspicious occasions, the coconut is part of everyday fare and is also used for medicinal purposes. Every part of the fruits has its uses. That is why the coconut is known as the kalpvriksha (celestial tree).

In other words, the tree fulfills all needs and desires. Thus, it is the 'tree of life' and the 'tree of heaven'. The 'tree of life' provides a beverage (coconut water), a delicious comestible (coconut meat), edible oil and medicinal products. The 'tree of heaven' adds beauty to gardens and landscapes, and divinity to prayer rituals. Small wonder it is deeply rooted in the culture of India. The coconut is regarded as so pure that it is never felled, nor is the wood ever used as fuel. In Tamil Nadu, felling a coconut tree is regarded as equivalent to killing ones own child.

The care and caution exercised in planting a coconut tree finds mention in folk culture….

हाटे हाटे छोय ना, मोआर जाति सोय ना,

खाना बाले जाखम जाय, ताखन केनो लोय ना

When planting a coconut tree, make sure that there is enough space around it.

The coconut figures in the epics Ramayan and Mahabharata, in the Puranas and in the Buddhist Jataka tales. The origin story of the coconut has to do with the great sage Vishwamitra. To aid King Trishanku in fulfilling his desire to reach heaven, Vishwamitra conducted a yagya (powerful prayer ritual). But when Trishanku reached the borders of heaven, Lord Indra, the king of the gods, threw him back. He would have crashed to the earth, but the sage conjured a very long pillar to save him. The pillar was transformed into the coconut palm, and Trishanku's head became the coconut fruit. The fibres of the coconut are said to be Trishanku's beard,

and when they are removed, the 'eyes' of the coconut are revealed.

In south India, it is believed that the Almighty has taken the form of a coconut to ensure complete nutrition for expectant mothers, who are encouraged to consume a lot of coconut water to ensure the health and beauty of the child within. In Kerala, it is believed that the goddess Bhagwati is the soul of the coconut tree.

The fact that coconut fossils date back some 20 million years, when the human species had yet to appear, give these ancient tales a certain authenticity. No auspicious occasion is complete without the coconut, which joins several other fruits in consecrated offerings to the gods…..

फुलो–फूलो भवानी तेरा केवड़ा,
रात न आड़ो आनंदी तेरा केवड़ा।।
जाम पके, जामुनिया पके और पके अनार
नारियल के बल पे पैया हैं दयाल।।।।

From the utility point of view, the coconut palm figures as one the ten most useful trees. Of the five sacred trees in Indian culture, one is the coconut, because it provides nutrition for millions of people and is integral to the lives of those living in coastal areas.

Coconut water and meat is used in a variety of beverages and foods, and coconut oil is south India's traditional cooking medium. The oil is also excellent for the skin and hair. Ayurveda describes a spectrum of medicinal uses for the coconut. The Sushruta Samhita also contains many coconut-based therapies. Coconut water is therapeutic in itself. It balances the body's pitta, and contains more electrolytes than much-touted sports drink brands. It is close to the human blood in terms of chemical composition – a readymade transfusion! In fact, during the second world war, when wounded soldiers were low on blood plasma, they were given coconut water.

The coconut palm is also a source of jaggery and sugar.

Mahua: Nature's incredible gift

Providing nutrition is Mother Nature's duty, and she never shies away from it. The Mahua tree is the gift that keeps on giving, in all its parts and at every stage of its life cycle. Easily accessible, it has provided nutrition for succeeding generations for thousands of years. It can be eaten raw or cooked, or turned into a refreshing drink...

अरे लागे चैत चरेरा आन, जौलौ डारे महुवा पान
तब लग उठे खेत खलिहान, जल्दी आ गए महुवा ज्वांन,
कच्चे ल्यावे, पक्के खावें, लटा बांध हारै ले जावैं
डुवरी खा खा कें सुस्ताने, मुराक आन घरे, मरदानें,
महुवा टबक गुलैदो लागो, गुली फोर तेलन कें डारी,
तेलन बिटिया घानी पेर, तेल वरै सव रात,
महुवा तो मै दो गुन हैं, एक रस के दियला जरै,
दूजें मतै गवां कौ लोग, मोरी नगर कोट वारी हां।

Mahua has been an important part of the human diet since time immemorial. For the economically underprivileged in particular, it is a boon which not only satisfies hunger but provides essential nutrients.

Fruiting begins around springtime. Edible when raw, it can also be dried and roasted. Seeds, dry fruits and roasted mahua are mixed and pounded

into a flour, from which a tasty and flavourful roti called kuchaiya is made during the rainy season. Roasted mahua is also useful in the autumn. It is powdered and mixed with roasted sesame seeds to make a dry snack called murarka. It has a long shelf life and makes an excellent breakfast. As the heat sets in after winter, dried mahua is cooked, often with wheat or gram flour. Known as dubri, it is mixed with curds after it has cooled, and is said to protect the body from the searing hot winds of summer.

After the flowers fall, the fruit and seeds form. The fruit or 'gulli' is split and the seed oil extracted by cold pressing. The oil is used in cooking and in lighting lamps, and the leftover gulli is fermented to make liquor. The self-fermenting nature of mahua has earned it the name 'madhavi' (sweet beverage). Mahua is deeply embedded in Indian culture and appreciation of its many virtues finds expression in folk songs….

गजव महुआ राजा बडो है गुण भाई
मुर्गा बोलत घर से निकली
बिन के महुआ डलीया भरली
लोपी न पोती लई डोभरी पकाई।। गजव महुआ राजा
सूखे महुआ भून के लाई
उसमें भुजी तिली मिलाई
सूपे में जल फिर लटा बनाई।। गजव महुआ राजा
सिल में पिस आटे मिलाई
तेल में पका मॉल पुआ लई बनाई
बऊ दददा भईया को दई हैं जेवाई।। गजव महुआ राजा
महुआ झडे गोलैदा फर आये
अषडा लगत तुरंत झड़ आये
बौऊ दददा भईया बीन गुलिया ले आई।। गजव महुआ राजा
कौउ घर लोगन ने दारू बनाई
कक्का, दददा भईया को दई है पिलाई
कुत्तन सो भूकत आपुन सुध सुध विसराई।। गजव महुआ राजा

The inherent qualities and comprehensive uses of mahua have made it a necessary feature of the traditional adivasi lifestyle. When grains and other staples are not easily accessible, the nutritious fruit of the mahua tree assumes prime importance. The fruit is shaped like the parwal (pointed melon, a green vegetable) and is also known as kalendi. It is peeled or boiled before eating, and may be de-seeded prior to cooking. Butter is extracted from the leftover seeds, which are a source of 'good

fats'. Mahua oil is a source of Vitamins, particularly Vitamin B. It strengthens the muscles, and when used to massage the body, relieves fatigue and pain. In fact, Mahua has a therapeutic effect on the entire body. In that respect, it can be referred to as sanjeevani or life-giving herb. The mahua flower is an anti pyretic, boosts haemoglobin and relieves stomach ulcers and bronchitis.

Thanks to its comprehensive uses, the Mahua tree is venerated. A saying in Bundelkhand sums up its importance….

मउवा मेवा बेर कलेवा गुलगुच बड़ी मिठाई।
इतनी चीजें चाहो तो गुडाने करो सगाई।।

The concise meaning of the saying is that while other regions may be

known by their foods, Gondawana (the land of the Gonds) is known by its mahua, ber and gulguch (ripe fruits of the mahua tree). These two trees – mahua and ber – are revered, and dried mahua, ber and gulguch are accorded pride of place in the cuisine of the region.

मउआ मोरें भुँजे धरे हैं, लटा धरे हैं कूट,
ग्योंड़े होकें साजन कइ गये, कौन बात की चूक।।

These lines capture a young woman's grief over the fact that her beloved, for whom she has prepared a special repast, has thrown a tantrum for some unfathomable reason and passed by her village without coming to her home.

अरे साल करोंट लै गई, और राम बांध गए टेक।
वेर मकोरा जा कहैं भैया मरन पावै एक।।

In Bundelkhand, wild ber and makora (jackal jujube) grow in profusion. Fruiting begins in winter, with the shift in temperatures. In rural areas, these fruits are eaten with relish. Highly nutritious, they are a powerhouse of energy and are proof against hunger. A little ber and makora charges the batteries and fuels a hard day's labour. To this day, these wild fruits are an essential part of the adivasi diet. And have become integral to their cultural habits. They boost the immune system and protect against diseases.

Every fruit has its season

Fruit, apart from its obvious attractions, is also a source of complete nutrition. During fasts, when one cannot eat grains and other regular foods, fruit provides energy to keep the body active. From ancient times, fruit has been the staple fare of ascetics and saints. But care must be exercised in the consumption of fruit, because the nature of each one is different. So, a particular fruit must be consumed in a certain season or at a certain time of the day. If one does not follow this tradition, then eating fruits can have an adverse effect. An Assamese saying refers to the importance of eating fruits in season, and at the correct time….

जेठोत पोसोला, आहारोत आम कोथाल
हाउनोत मोरापाट, भगोत कुमुरा
आहुनोत अठियाकोल, कातित कोलाखार
आघूनोत तुह, पुहोत जुई
माघौत माघिपंता, फागुनोत तेल,
सतौत बेल, बोहागोत लारू पीठा
हेलातेई गेल

In connection with this:

क बुलिबो नेजाने रत्नावली साई,
पोसोला खारोर जूति नेजाने, भुज रानधीबोले जाई

Many people are fond of grapes, which are not only delightful and

convenient to eat, but lend themselves to various beverages and dry fruits. The grapes of western India, notably Maharashtra, are famous. The Nasik grapes in particular are said to be delectable, but they must be consumed at the appropriate time, as the following lines observe:

द्राक्षे मधु कुठची
नाशिकची
मौज चैत्र मासाची
द्राक्षे मधु कुठची

The point is that the sweet grapes of Nasik should be eaten in spring. If Nasik prides itself on its grapes, then Pune's matchless figs are just as worthy of praise.

पुण्याचे अंजीर
चवदार
खाताना मौज येते फार
पुण्याचे अंजीर

In other words, the figs of Pune are delicious and eating them brings joy.

It appears that this region of Maharashtra is singularly blessed in terms of fruits. Quite as famous as the grapes of Nasik and the figs of Pune are the chikus or sapotas of Gholwar. The chiku is grown in Karnataka, Gujarat, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh as well, but those of Gholwar have been given the GI tag in recognition of their sublime sweetness and supremely satisfying taste. The joys of the Gholwari chiku are described as follows….

चिक्कू घोलवड़ी
गोड किती
खातना मजा येई
चिक्कू घोलवडी

इसके विषय में कहा गया है.....

Between Maharashtra and Goa lies a sort of buffer state called Konkan. A cultural zone in itself, it is a region of natural beauty and outstanding scenery drenched in a variety of colours. To its beauty and culture, another dimension - that of flavours – can be added. The mango of this region is said to be something special, and finds mention in this epigram….

आंबा कोकणचा
सुफळांचा राजा की
ज्येष्ठाचा
आंबा कोकणचा

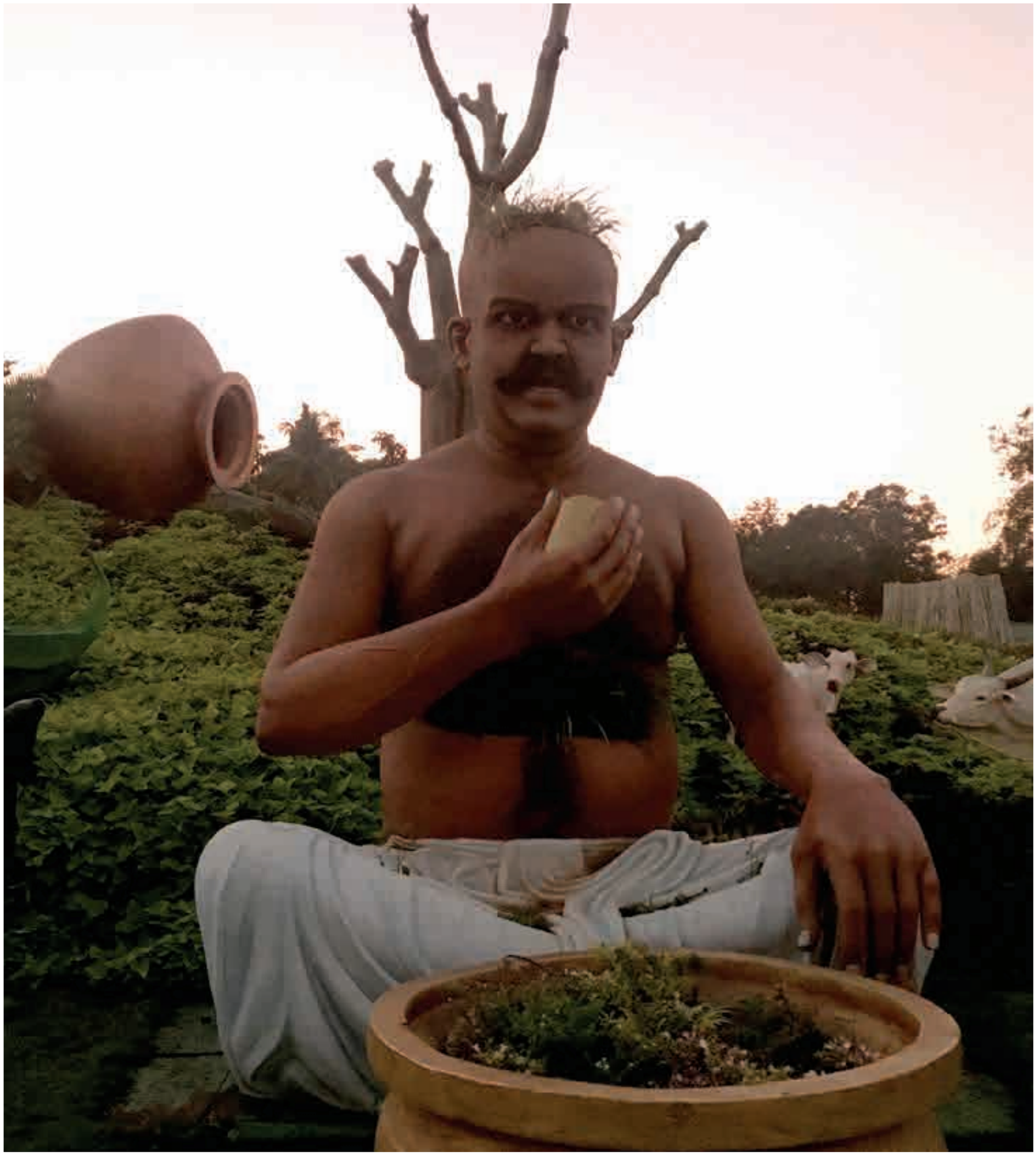
It says that the mango of Konkan is the king of old people or the king of fruits.

If western India is known for a variety of delicious and nutritious fruits, then eastern India, notably Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal and Tripura, gifts the rest of India its incomparable pineapples.

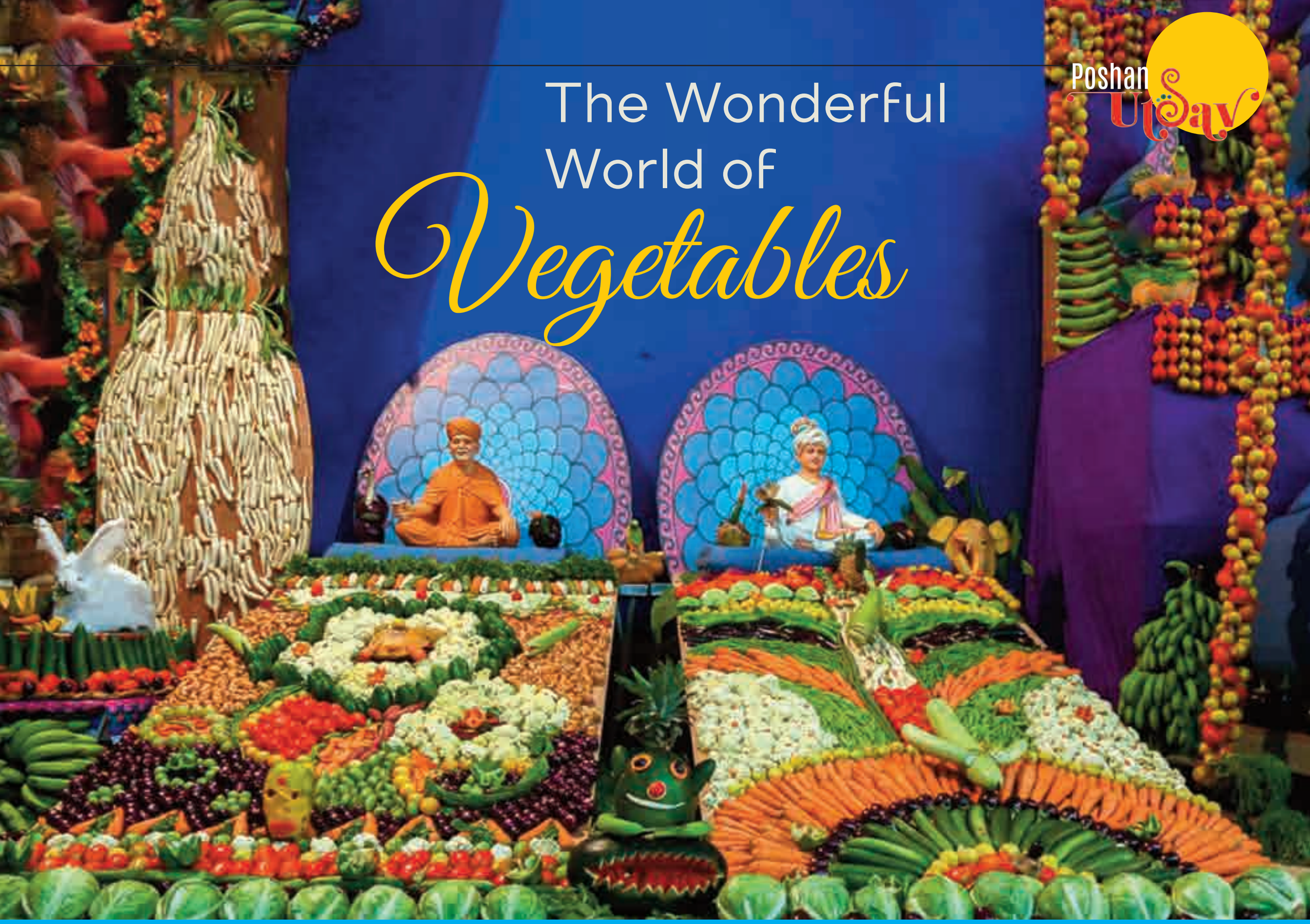
The pineapple, peerless in taste and flavour, is packed with nutrients. Admittedly, it is hard to prepare for the table, but every bit of effort is worth it. The fragrance and taste delights the senses. It is said of the pineapple….

अननस पपनस ते
रसररले
खाताना पाणी सुटे
अननस पनपस ते

In other words, the juicy pineapple is mouth-watering.



The Wonderful World of *Vegetables*



What's on the menu today? A question invariably asked in every Indian household at least once a day, sometimes more often. Roti, dal and rice are generally taken for granted, but the big concern is: what are the vegetables of the day? A valid question, given the enormous diversity of vegetables available, and the number of ways in which each one is cooked. Every day entails decision-making, taking into account numerous factors.

One person in the household may want brinjals roasted and mashed, another may want them stuffed and a third may want them sauteed or fried, while a fourth will look boot-faced at the very mention of brinjal. Any vegetable lends itself to multitudinous recipes, thereby creating a headache for the home manager, who must decide not only what to cook but how to cook it. This daily dilemma isn't just true of the urban middle-class, but of rural households as well, and has become a feature of folk culture. It leads to light-hearted banter and high spirits, the flavour of which is captured in a folk song from Bundelkhand.

...केले की भई सगाई, सकरकन्दी नाचन आई।
कासीफल के बने नगाड़े, भिण्डी की चोब बनाई।
गोभी फूल के गढ़े शामियाने, मूली के खम्ब लगाये।
गाजर बिचारी के लाल भये, ये आलू छोछक लाया।
गौड़र बिचारी ने थेले भराये, गेहूँ ने गंगाजल भराये।
बेर कुरकुली के भाँड बराती, मूँगफली रेड़ी बनाई।
मल्का बिचारी के साल दुसाले, ज्वार लडुए बँधाए।
ज्वार बाजरे के डोम मिरासी, नटनी नाचन आई।।

The different kinds of fruits and vegetables and their nature are presented in a mirthful spirit, with a description of the cuisines of rural folk. The imagery depicts the awareness of rural folk vis-a-vis their health and diet.

The taste of any vegetable depends on the tadka, or tempering. The better the mix of tempering spices, the more tasty it will be. In the process of tadka, or baghar, the symphony of oil and spices captivates not only the taste buds but all the senses. We find a lively description of tempering vegetables in a song from Chhattisgarh.

करेला असन करू होगे का ओ तोर मया
ये सनानना करेला असन करू होगे य मोर मया
करेला असन करू होगे का ओ, करेला असन करू होगे का य मोर मया
ये सनानना करेला असन करू होगे य मोर मया
हाय रे तिवरा के ड़ार , टुरी तेल के बघार
ये गजब लागे वो गजब लागे
ये गजब लागे सँगी , जेमा मिरचा मारे झार
गजब लागे,
ये सनानना करेला असन करू होगे य तोर मया
हाय रे धनिया के पान, मिरी बँगाला मितान
गजब लागे वो , गजब लाबे
ये गजब लागे वो ये गजब लागे
ये गजब लागे सँगी , जेमा मिरी के बरदान
गजब लागे,
ये सनानना करेला असन करू होगे य तोर मया

हाय रे जिल्लो के भाजी, खाय बर डौकी डौका राजी
ये गजब लागे वो गजब लागे
ये गजब लागे सँगी , जेमा सुकसी मारे बाजी
गजब लागे,
ये सनानना करेला असन करू होगे य तोर मया

The description of tempering vegetables is as enticing as Chhattisgarh's famous khera vegetable dish, about which it is said

"मथुरा के पेड़े भुलाए नहीं भूलते,
वैसी ही कहानी छत्तीगढ़िया खेड़ा की है।"

Vegetable or subzi dishes, also referred to as bhaji or tarkari, are an integral part of India's agricultural society, where they are consumed not just for taste, but for essential nutrients. Vegetables play a primary role in our cuisines, as even the briefest description of Indian society attests. Apart from their role in nutrition and food culture, vegetables have become a part of tradition and mental well-being. We get a sense of this from the following:

काबर बनाए ओ, करू करेला ला–काबर बनाए ओ
कोहड़ा मखना तबला बनाए, गोंदली काट मंजीरा जी
लसुन धनिया के चुनुन, चानन, हरदी करथे बड़ाई जी
खोटनी भाजी ये मूंड़ मूड़ाए, चुन चुनिया झुलुप रखाये जी
खेहड़ा बपुरा जनम के रसहा, मही में बहुत मिठाये जी।

The song mentions karela (bitter gourd), kumhara (ash gourd), khothmi (coriander) and other local vegetables and greens. The kumhara looks like a tabla (drum), the sliced onion like manjira (cymbals). The murmur of garlic and coriander is said to be enhanced by turmeric. The khera is succulent. Delectable foods are made with buttermilk.

This folk song gives a vivid picture of agricultural life. It is a heart-warming account of the farmers' simplicity, honesty, hard work, struggles and faith in the Almighty, as well as their aspirations, festivals, lifestyle, appearance, implements and fields.

The farmers weave the imagery of vegetables into merry narratives based on human relationships and traditions....

कचरिया, तोरो ब्याव री, खरबूजा नेवते अइयो।

मूला, दूला, भटा बराती, चिरपोटा सज ल्याइयो।

सजी गड़ेलू, बजे तूमरा, कुम्हड़ा ढोल बजइयो।

The kachri is to be married and the kharbuza (melon) gets an invite. The mooli (radish) is the groom, and the baingan (brinjal) part of the entourage. The chirpota should be adorned and brought. The lauki (bottle gourd) is decked up, the tumra (round gourd) is avid to play and the kaddu (pumpkin) is playing the drum.

The Prize Pick in Rajasthan's Garden of Nourishment

Sangri

Dry soil is devoid of the greenery that nurtures traditional vegetables. But it's said that nature is impartial. The best example of this is found in the drylands of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, which have neither fertile soils nor the bounty of Lord Indra, god of rainfall. But the denizens of these regions have access to nutrition and palate-pleasing dishes, for Nature has given them a rare gift in the form of sangri. In Rajasthan, it is eaten with relish throughout the year, and features prominently on the menu of restaurants serving Rajasthani cuisine.

पतळी सी पातळी, सुवा पंखी रंग।
दस देव छोड़ौ, गीवी जेठे रे संग।।
झीणी गोरी पाळती, उभी खेजड़ हेट।
ग्यारै देवर छोड़कै, बारवां संग जेठ।

Sangri grows on the Khejri tree, which fruits in high summer. Harvested when still raw, it is boiled and shade-dried. Scientific processing ensures that all the nutrients are preserved. After it has been cooked, sangri is known as khokha. The people of Rajasthan eat dry fruits in the form of khokha, ber (jujube) and khelri.

खोखा म्हांने चोखा लागौ, खेजड़लो ज्यूं खजूर।

निंबोळी–अंबोळी सिरखी, रस देवै भरपूर।।

Gwar phali (cluster bean) is a popular vegetable. The dried version is called 'ramphali'. It is generally fried, but like khelri and phophaliya, may be boiled and sauteed, and served as a vegetable.

म्हारा गिरधर गोपाल आओ भोग लगाओ जी
बाजरा री रोटी मेली ऊपर धारयो ग्वारफली रो साग जी
मैं गरीब जाट री बेटी भोगे में अमृत बरसाओ जी
जाड़ो रो मौसम लागे घणो सुहाणो
बाजरा री रोटी जामे घी घणो है डालो
ग्वार फली करो चटपटो साग म्हारी बींदणी ने है बणायो

Dal and subzi are mandatory features of the Indian thali (platter) without which neither taste nor health is remotely possible. The flavours of dal are not as diverse as those of vegetables. Tur or arhar dal (red gram or pigeon pea) has the same flavour in winter as it does at the height of summer or the monsoon. But the flavour of carrots, peas and cauliflower in summer isn't as pleasing as it is in winter.

Similarly, the bhindi (okra) is far more flavourful in summer than in winter. In other words, vegetables are intimiately linked to the season and climate. Local ecological factors that govern air, water and soil have a critical role in the taste and nutritional value of vegetables. For instance....

कृष्णेच्या काठी
ताजा भाजीपाला
चव येई अन्नाला

This means that vegetables grown on the banks of a river taste better.

The vegetables commonly used in Indian

kitchens are the potato, onion and tomato. If nothing else is available, these staples can be combined into a divine dish that satisfies the tongue and the spirit, and fills the stomach. Vegetables have their own ecosystem. In every corner of the country, the sale of vegetables involves rendering them attractive in unique ways. For instance.....

आलक बेचू पालक बेचू और बेचू तरकारी सा
भरा बहाजरा डंका मारू में मालण की जाई सा
तरकारी ले लो मालण आई से बीकानेर की
ले ले तककारी बेंगन आलु कान्दा टमाटर सेवरा
बनडा रा दादीस सेवरा ले लो....

The main vegetables apart, the universe of vegetables is vast. They may be dubbed bhaji or tarkari or something else in the local language, but the fundamental nature and purpose of vegetables doesn't change – they provide taste and nutrition and break the monotony of everyday fare. In kitchens across India, the enticing, flavourful journey of vegetables takes different paths….

Timla subzi

There's the fig, and then there's the wild fig, known as timla. Ripe timla is counted as a fruit, but raw timla lends itself to a remarkable subzi. Tempered with onion, garlic and jakhya (wild mustard), it makes an excellent dish. Timla is also boiled to make pickles.

Bedu (Himalayan fig) subzi:

One doesn't need to make the effort to cultivate this fruit; it grows spontaneously near homes or water bodies. It is usually available in late summer or early monsoon, but all through the year, radio waves waft memories of the fruit over the hills of Uttarakhand:

'बेडू पाको बारामास नरैणी काफल पाको चैत, मेरी छैला'

The robust taste of rugra (mushroom)

An unsurpassed example of the harmony of vegetables and weather is the rugra or wild button mushroom. You will find this zesty vegetable in Jharkhand, where it grows under the benign influence of the gambolling clouds during the rains. The mushroom is available for a very short span of time, and neither scientists nor farmers have any formula or means of cultivating it. Purely nature's bounty, this edible mushroom is known by a variety of names, like phutkal, putto or 'veg' mutton. It is said that the louder the thunder of the clouds, the more the rugra proliferates. The shelf life of 'veg' mutton – as vegetarians refer to it – is limited, and the process of preparing it is quite complex. So much so that only cultural wisdom can help cook it. And if properly prepared, its unique bouquet floods the senses.

Saag: A garden of taste and nutrition

In Jharkhand, no discourse on vegetables is complete without saag (greens). The state is home to a tribal society, living in harmony with nature. The people bear witness to the miracles of nature, which are a part of their daily fare. The intimate link between nature and cuisine is exemplified by the question that attends the birth of a child. They do not ask, 'boy or girl?' The question is whether the newborn is fit for the plough, or for making saag. This clearly implies that a boy will man the plough and the girl will gather saag.

Even the oldest of women is found gathering and preparing saag here. The importance of saag lies in its superlative nutritional profile; full of nutrients and immunity-boosters, it is not just food, but therapy. And its taste is matchless. For instance...

Beng saag: it is prepared raw or in dried form. The leaves are believed to protect against numerous diseases, and are of special benefit to the polio-afflicted.

Chakod saag: The petals of the flower are plucked and dried. It is said to useful in combating skin diseases.

Sanai saag is made from the flowers of the plant, while the bark is used for making ropes.

Katai saag – this is made from leaves found among prickly plants, and is good for digestion.

Sunsuniya saag – This, too, is found among prickly plants in the forest, and helps in managing insomnia. Given its efficacy in facilitating sound sleep, it should be used with caution.

Koinar saag – Made in summer from the tender leaves of the Koinar trees, it should be eaten with care, because it is said to have a heating effect on the stomach. To counteract this effect, it is often mixed with phutkul saag.

Tunpa saag – This is made from the flowers of the Koinar tree. The taste is a bit acrid, but it is excellent for the stomach.

Saag is consumed not just in Jharkhand, but across the country, and with great relish. The mutter (pea) and chana (chickpea) saag is very popular. In western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, the chana saag is eaten with rice-flour rotis - a favourite meal in winters. Sarson ka saag (mustard greens) has become a global brand and is eaten with makki ki roti (maize flour flatbread) - a combination that is now famous across the world. It can be described as Punjab's signature dish.

Green Jingles

Kundru Karela

हाय रे कुंदरु करेला,
मोर छैला
अलबेला मोर तीर आजा
मोर तीर आजा राजा
खवाहूं बीरो पान।
हाय रे पड़की परेवना मोर
कोईली मैना मोर तीर आजा
मोर तीर आजा रानी
खवाहऊं बीरो पान।
कोहरा के लोवा नारे म सरगे
तोर बीना हिरदे म भुर्री बरगे।
मोर तीर आजा
कोचई कांदा मही म राधे
नहीं बतामन कोन कइसे बांधे?
मोर तीर आजा
अमारी भाजी रे अमसुरहा लागे,
आते तै डरेऊठी करम फुटहा जागे।
मोर तीर आजा
खाये रे खीरा चाने पंदोली,
मयारूंक सुन लेतेंद मया के बोली।
मोर तीर आजा

Tambri Bhaaji (Konkani)

श्री मंगल मंगल, श्री मंगल
भाजी रोयिली मयत्या मळार
भाजी रोयिली मयत्या मळार
भाजी शिंपिली चवरानी
भाजी किल्लेली घासाघशी
भाजी खुंटीली नाखटानी
भाजी शिनिली आदोळेवरी
भाजी भरली भगूण्यात
भाजी ठेविली चुलीवरी
भाजी धवळली दवलेनी
भाजी शिजोनी मेण जाली
भाजी वाढिली वाटुल्यानी .....
तांबड़ी ग बाई भाजी
पेरिली ग मयत्या मळार
सखया रऊ चला मौजा
तांबड़ी ग बाई भाजी
शिजवूया भागूण्यात
धाडूया गे ब्रह्मया भेटेक
सखया मारू चला मौजा....

Karonda (Bundelkhand)

बहार मोरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार
बहार मोरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार
हमारे करौंदा के बड़े बड़े गुण हैं
सर्दी औ खासी बुखार
बहार मौरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार
बहार मोरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार
हरे करौंदा कहाँ कहाँ बिकत है
रीवा सतना औ यूपी बिहार
बहार मोरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार
बहार मोरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार
हमारे करौंदा का बनत है
चटनी मुरब्बा अचार
बहार मोरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार
बहार मोरे राजा आयी करौंदा बहार

Oh, Vegetable Vendor!

गोंदली ला रखे जी मां डार के
अवो मची अम्मा वो, अवो पेड़ हम्मा वो
बइठे मरारिन बजार में
पररा में केरा संतरा धरके, बइठे रइथस कोर कोर में
एक बेर लेवैया हा दु बेर आथे, हँसत रइथे तोर संग में
खटमेचिया टुरा हा मेछा ला एठियाके
खटमेचिया टुरा हा मेछा ला एठियाके, पईसा देथे आँखी
मार के
गोई बजार में
एक पईसा के भाजी ला, दू पईसा बेचे गोई
गोंदली ला रखे जी मां डार के
अवो मची अम्मा वो, अवो पेड़ हम्मा वो
बइठे मरारिन बजार में
गोड मा हे मेंहदी, झमके मुंदरी, खोपा के मोगरा महके
बंगला के पान खाये, मुंहे रचाये, छंड़त है लुगरा तोर
मुड़ के
हरियर भाटा ला आघु मा रख दे, कड़हा भाटा ला पानी
छिच दे
गोई बजार में
एक पईसा के भाजी ला, दू पईसा बेचे गोई
गोंदली ला रखे जी मां डार के
अवो मची अम्मा वो, अवो पेड़ हम्मा वो
बइठे मरारिन बजार में

या भाजी तो प्रेम से मन स्वामी जी ने परसी
स्वामी जी को परसी मन छोरा छोरी ने खायी
भाई को फड़को लियो खायी घणी जी–2
खाई घणी जी हँस बोल्या धणी जी–2
अच्छी बनी गौरी थारी अमाड़ी की भाजी–2

Ash Gourd

तुमा कहै मोर चिक्कन पानी
रांध ले रतिहा खा ले बिहानी
रखिया कहै गड़बड़हा पाने
साधे नोहरे में आथौं कामें
मुनगा कहै मोर छोटे–छोटे पाने
आए छेवारी आथौं कामें
तरोई कहै मोर दस ठन कोरे
आए पितर में करथौं सोरे।

Sabzi Bazar, Chhattisgarh

सासु ने काइ काइ रांद्यो जवांयला।
आवस्या नो भोजन रांद्यो जवांयला।
खाइ ते सलो–वलो करे जवांयला।
गुल ने घिंव ते नारब्यो जवांयला।
खासे तिं घणि मुझा आवसे जवांयला।

The song calls out to sons-in-law, asking what the mother-in-law has made. The answer is that she has made sevian (vemicelli), and when it is eaten it goes all over the place. It has lots of ghee and gur and will enchant the palate.

India's festive spirit is unparalleled. Celebrated with public fervour, song and dance and colourful rituals, the festivals of India are a beguiling aspect of her many-splendoured culture. In this context, it is said, 'seven days and as many festivals'. The same festival is observed in different regions in distinctive ways. But every part of India has in common the tradition of collective festivities, in which food plays an important role – to the point that it seems as if festivals are a pretext for feasts! Every festival is distinguished by the favourite foods of the region where it's held. In fact, the hallmark of Indian festivals is an array of foods that combine taste with nutrition.

Seven days, *Nine Festivals*

Several festivals mark important events in the agricultural calendar: sowing the field, harvesting the crop and the change of seasons. The latter calls for observing a fast and paying obeisance to the Mother Goddess. Summer festivals are marked by a variety of cooling drinks, winter festivals by warming foods. This rich tradition nourishes the body and the spirit.

Festivals have played an important role in refining India's diverse food culture. Consider Makar Sankrati, associated with the harvest season early in the year and celebrated in Uttar Pradesh with a special khichhdi. Its counterpart in Punjab, observed a day earlier, is Lohri. In Bihar and Jharkhand, the festive food on this auspicious day comprises dahi-chuda and tilkut (curds and flattened rice, with a sweet of sesame and jaggery). In Assam, the festival is known as Bihu and the dish of the day is til pitha/narikel pitha (sesame or coconut dumplings). In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the skies are painted with a mosaic of varicoloured kites. People rush outdoors to fly their kites, soaking up the sun and getting a hefty dose of Vitamin D in the process. This is absorbed courtesy churma-baati (baked wheat balls with powdered sweetened cereal) and moong dal pakodas (green gram dumplings) which provide the requisite fat. In south India, the day is celebrated in the form of Pongal and the signature dish is kheer prepared in an earthen vessel.

In Mathura, Janmashtami (the advent of Lord Krishna) is observed with prayers in temples and offerings of certain foods to the deity. In Brij, the scene of Lord Krishna's youth and childhood, milk-based sweets are prepared, whereas Maharashtra celebrates the day as Gopad Kaala with a pot of curds. Likewise, Holi (the festival of colours), is observed in region-specific ways and with distinctive foods.

The festival of Diwali, once a major event only in north India, is now observed with enthusiasm even in Tamil Nadu in the south. Similarly, Ganesh Chaturthi has made its way from the west to Punjab in the north. Karwa Chauth, primarily observed in the north, has diffused eastwards to Bengal. Chhath Puja, earlier a preserve of Bihar, is now observed in the National Capital Region, with communities creating the mandatory 'sacred' ponds or commandeering swimming pools for the purpose. The traditional prasad of 'thekua' is prepared and distributed. Prasad, of course, is an essential feature of all festivals, as are the folk songs with which women welcome the deity.

मेवा लाई, मिठाई लाई, फल ले आऊंगी।
आओ जी मेरी हरि जी आओ तुम्हें खिलाऊंगी।
शर्बत लाई, लस्सी लाई, जल भर लाऊंगी।
आओ जी मेरे हरि जी आओ, तुम्हें खिलाऊंगी।

Festivals beguile the mind and at the same time, act as a social glue. Communities work together to create ponds for Chhath puja or make khichhdi on Makar Sankranti and khoya on Diwali. When the entire household is involved in the preparation of gujiyas on Holi - which tend to vanish into thin air no sooner than they are ready! – the joy of the festival increases manyfold. Every festival has its own menu; sweet, sharp or salty. Offering consecrated foods to the gods satisfies the soul, and eating them brings joy to the spirit. The younger generation participates in the celebrations with enthusiasm, but are rather more concerned with the festival platter than its historical or cultural significance. Needless to say, for them the taste of the festive cuisine matters far more than its nutritional profile!

Makar Sankranti

First a bath, then the repast

The fragrance of khichhdi, the crunch of sesame and the sweetness of jaggery are intimately associated with Makar Sankranti. The festival is known by different names in each region: Sankranti, Uttareni, Uttarayan, Pongal and Magha Bihu. Food and nutrition are an important aspect of the celebrations. Khhichdi made from rice and dal can be found in every street in Uttar Pradesh. It is collectively prepared and shared. The day begins with a bath to cleanse the body, followed by donations to cleanse the spirit and food to nourish both.

आ गई संकरात मकर की, बुड़की है दिनभर की
कोऊ लेत कूडा देव जाके, कोऊ जटाशंकर की
भीमकुंड कछु चले ओरछा, कोऊ लेत पुसकर की
कोऊ लेत त्रिवेणी जू में, कोऊ पौड़ी हर की

A dip in the nearest water body in the wintery chill of January renders the subsequent repast of a steaming dish of khhichdi twice as delicious. Warming foods like sesame, cane jaggery, peanuts and black gram form the ingredients and comfort the body. A Bhojpuri folk song captures the moment:

तिल चटके, जाड़े सटके
तिल चटके, त्यौहार बढ़के

The khhichdi is accompanied by curds and pickle, thereby imparting a healthy dose of Vitamin C and protein on the pretext of Makar Sankranti. Piping hot khhichdi is served from large vessels placed at temples, streets and crossroads. The khhichdi made at home is fortified with vegetables of various kinds, and laddoos or gajak made with sesame and gur add a touch of sweetness to the evening.

In Uttarakhand, the festival is called Uttareni or Ghughutiya, and is marked by a preparation of wheat or semolina mixed with jaggery and water. Known as ghughut, it is shaped like a hand-held drum (damru), a mound or letters of the Hindi alphabet. Children observe the festival

with a curious game. They thread chunks of ghughut into a necklace and call out to crows:

काले कौवा काले घुघुति माला खाले

ले कौवा भात में कै दे सुनक पात

In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the bright, sunny days preceding the festival (known as Uttarayana or Sankranti), are rendered colourful by a host of bobbing, gliding kites. Kite-flying ensures that folks not only get a dose of Vitamin D but plenty of exercise. In Gujarat, duels between kites are punctuated by cries of "Bo kaata! (hacked)", and the duellists are invigorated by robust snacks made from sesame and peanuts. In Rajasthan, ghewar, feni and sesame ladoos add sweetness to the celebrations. The festival is associated with a ritual specific to married women. They must have a bath, donate a 'suhaag' kit (markers of their marital status) and seek the blessings of their mothers-in-law. They also get together to chant folk songs recalling the parental home:

केला रे हरा रंग तेरा, सासू हमारी पीसना पिसाती

माता री याद तेरी आती, जेठाणी हमारी पाणी भराती

Lohri

Mustard greens and Cornmeal

Merriment, song and dance, and delicious food mark the festival of Lohri. In a state known for gaiety, it is celebrated with fun and frolic on the day before Makar Sankranti. The signature cuisine bears the stamp of Punjab, comprising sarson ka saag (mustard greens) and makki ki roti (cornmeal flatbread). The celebrations transcend the borders of the state, with the traditional gidda and bhangra (Punjabi folk dances) performed around bornfires in various parts of the country. Lending sweetness and a healthy dose of nutrients are sesame- and jaggery-based sweets such as gajak and revdi. The bornfire, the vigorous dances and the warming effect of the sweets guard the body against the chill of the winter. Lohri is a theme in many Punjabi folk songs. As they swing around the fire, energized by the revdi, the dancers call out....

ओए, होए, होए, बारह बरसी खडन गया सी, खडके लेआंदा रेवडी....

In households with a bridal couple or a newborn, Lohri takes on a special significance. All the foods prepared for the festival have a warming effect. The taste of the saag and roti is enhanced by jaggery and buttermilk, which are served alongside. The robust fare not only builds immunity but provides essential nutrients. Preparations for the festival begun several days ahead, with the shaping of the cow dung cakes which will be used as fuel. Folk songs are sung a fortnight earlier....

कौली विच घिओ

जीवे मुंडा दा पियो

कोठे हेठ गां

जीवे मुंडे दी मां

In households where a boy has been born ahead of Lohri, a particular folk song is heard...

वीरा तेरी जड़ लग्ग जे

वे मैं नित वरमे(पीपल) जल पावा

In addition to the dry, sesame-based sweets, a delicious kheer is prepared with sugarcane juice and rice. It is said that this kheer is made in winter and eaten in spring. Prepared on the last night of winter, it is consumed on the following day, which is regarded as the first day of spring. The goddess Sendal Mata is worshipped on this day and offered sweets (gulgula) made of wheatflour, jaggery and ghee. The prasad is distributed exclusively among children.

A Prasad of 56 Consecrated Foods

The mention of Lord Krishna conjures the dusky form of the child Krishna and immediately recalls the taste of 'chhappan bhog' (the 56 consecrated foods), which is offered to the deity on Janmashtami. Devotees observe a day-long fast and wait patiently until midnight, when the advent of the Lord will be announced and they can sit down to a meal.

The traditional 56 foods include dry fruits like almonds, cashewnuts and pistachios and a smorgasbord of sweets, as well as dry and cooked foods. Devotees get together to prepare the offering, often spending the whole day on the task. In Mathura and Brindavan, prior to the 'bhog', the idol of the Lord is bathed in panchamrit or the nectar made of five ingredients. Thereafter, He is first offered milk and gram flour preparations, followed by salty foods and finally, sweets and mewa. Only after the advent of the child Krishna and offerings to Lord Krishna is the prasad distributed among the devotees.

An offering of milk and curds is made in every household in Brij, where a popular folk song marks the occasion:

एक लख धेनु नंद बाबा के
नित घर माखन होय
दधि माखन तू रोज चुरावै
हंसी हमारी होय

In the same vein, a Bundeli folk song speaks of curds:

आ जाऊंगी बड़े भोर दहीरा लेके आ जाऊंगी बड़े भोर
ना मानो चुनरी घर राखे, लिखे पपीरा मोर

Another folk song urges the child Krishna to stop stealing butter:

चोरी माखन की दै छोड़ि
कन्हैया मैं समझाऊँ तोय

Coriander-infused 'Panjiri': A Wealth of Nutrition

On Janmastami, a delightful and healthy sweet is prepared from choice ingredients: coriander powder, ghee, foxnuts, shredded coconut, almonds, cashewnuts, poppy seeds and raw sugar. The panjiri, when offered to Lord Krishna, is believed to protect against disorders of the three humours - vata, pitta and kapha - at night.

In Maharashtra, Janmastami is observed by breaking a pot of curds bound to a high pole. Devotees form a human pyramid to reach the pot and attempt to break it. The curds are then distributed as prasad. All

across India, butter and curds are part of the Janmastami prasad (given Lord Krishna's predilection for milk and its products). It is offered to the Lord and then distributed among devotees.

Pongal

Pongal is south India's biggest festival, lasting for four days, during which farmers, cattle, women and children are immersed in the celebrations. While preparing delectable prasads for themselves, people ensure that cattle are also well-looked after; they are given a special massage and fortifying feeds. In Tamil, the term Pongal means 'to boil'. Gur and rice are boiled together and offered to the Sun god - the reason being that the festival is associated with farmers and farming and therefore the Sun, whose radiance brings forth a good crop, must be propitiated. The four-day festival is celebrated in January, after the harvest. It marks the Sun's transition to the north, as it moves into Capricorn. In Tamil Nadu, the boiled rice-and-gur kheer is made in an earthen vessel, offered to the Sun and then distributed as prasad. In the evening, children are given payasam (a concoction of rice and milk or buttermilk) and told to look towards the moon while drinking it. Kheer and payasam are boiled to the point where they do not spill over the mouth of the vessel.

Devotees calls out to the moon, saying:

नीला नीला ओडी वा

The four days of Pongal have a nutritional significance. Different kinds of food are prepared, so as to impart protein and season-specific nutrients. Gur, milk and rice are the primary ingredients, accompanied by chutney, various kinds of sambhar (red gram curry) and other

nutritious foods.

The first day of Pongal is called Bhogi Pongal and is dedicated to Lord Indra. A flame is lit, and devotees sing folk songs. New rice is boiled in milk to make kheer. On the second day, Perum or Thai Pongal, the prayer ritual involves placing newly-purchased vessels filled with new rice, gur and green gram dal on a banana leaf, with sugarcane and ginger. A special dish is made from all of these and offered to the Sun god. This prasad is known as Pongal. Another dish, known as sakkarai pongal, is prepared from sugarcane in an earthen vessel. On this day, propitious designs are drawn on the floor of the house with chalk or rice powder. The third day, Mattu Pongal, is marked by the worship of animals associated with agriculture. This involves massaging them with oil and garlanding them.

On the final day of the festival, Kannum Pongal, leftovers are placed in the courtyard on washed turmeric leaves, along with betel vine leaves, betelnut and sugarcane. The family gets together on this day. The foods prepared during these four days include Puran Pongal, cabbage vada, sakkarai pongal, ven pongal and Chidambaran baingan (aubergine).

Sambhar made with green gram dal is served with coconut and green chutneys. All of these consecrated foods contain the essential nutrients required during the season.

The polla festival: nutrition for cattle

India has a festival that involves giving nutritious feed to cattle. The Polla festival, also known as Bail Polla, Motha Polla and Tanha Polla, is observed in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Karnataka on a new moon night. Along with the animals, humans also partake of special, nutritious fare.

In Maharashtra, Polla is a two-day festival during which bullocks are worshipped. Children make wooden or clay horses and go from house to house, where they are given gifts or money. It is believed that on this day, the young Lord Krishna defeated the demon Pollasur, who had been sent by his wicked uncle, Kansa. So, it is regarded as children's day. On new moon, cows and bullocks are untethered and massaged with turmeric paste and mustard oil.

In the evening, a spike of sorghum is placed on a tray and taken to the field. The farmer whispers in the bullock's ear, inviting him to a meal on

the following day. A paste of turmeric and butter is lathered on the bullock's shoulders. The next morning, the bullocks are bathed and decorated. The tether and the bells around the necks of all the cattle are changed. One member of the household observes a fast, and no work is undertaken. The bullocks are worshipped, and are fed Polli naivedh (a rice-and dal preparation) and gudwani (a gur-based sweet). In Chhattisgarh, the Koitur adivasi community prepares a feast which includes a variety of sweet and salty foods served in earthen utensils. In Vidarbha, Polla is marked by an evening meal packed with fibre and protein: rice, okra, dal, and millet (sorghum and bajra) rotis. A sweet known as puranpoli and sanjachipoli, a semolina

pudding, are also served. Pakoras, curry and cucumber add nutritious elements to the menu.

आला आला शेतक*या
पोयाचा रे सन मोठा
हातीं घेईसन वाट्या
आतां शेंदूराले घोटा
आतां बांधा रे तोरनं
सजवा रे घरदार
करा आंघोयी बैलाच्या
लावा शिंगाले शेंदुर
लावा शेंदूर शिंगाले
शेंव्या घुंगराच्या लावा

गयामधीं बांधा जीला
घंट्या घुंगरू मिरवा
बांधा कवड्याचा गेठा
आंगाव*हे झूल छान
माथां रेसमाचे गोंडे
चारी पायांत पैंजन
उठा उठा बह्यनाई,
चुल्हे पेटवा पेटवा
आज बैलाले नीवद
पुरनाच्या पोया ठेवा
वढे नागर वखर
नहीं कष्टाले गनती
पीक शेतक*या हातीं
याच्या जीवावर शेतीं
उभे कामाचे ढिगारे

बैल कामदार बंदा
याले कहीनाथे झूल
दानचा*याचाज मिंधा
चुल्हा पेटवा पेटवा
उठा उठा आयाबाया
आज बैलाले खुराक
रांधा पुरनाच्या पोया
खाऊं द्या रे पोटभरी
होऊं द्यारे मगदूल
बशीसनी यायभरी
आज करूं या बागूल
आतां ऐक मनांतलं
माझं येळीचं सांगन
आज पोयाच्या सनाले
माझं येवढं मांगन

कसे बैल कुदाळता
आदाबादीची आवड
वझं शिंगाले बांधतां
बाशिंगाचं डोईजड
नका हेंडालूं बैलाले
माझं ऐका रे जरासं
व्हते आपली हाऊस
आन बैलाले तरास
आज पुंज रे बैलाले
फेडा उपकाराचं देनं
बैला, खरा तुझा सन
शेतक*या तुझं रीन !
– बहिणाबाई चौधरी

Immunity Boosting Prasad, on Chhath

The four-day Chhath festival is held in October-November, around the onset of winter. Those who observe a fast eschew water for 36 hours. However, the prasad distributed during the festival is an immunity booster in itself, and provides nutrients that fortify the body for the impending winter. A regional festival of Bihar until recently, it is now observed in many parts of the country. Shortly after Diwali, one can witness Chhath rituals being conducted on the banks of rivers, ponds and other water bodies.

Thekua is the most important prasad made during Chhath, and preparations begin well in advance. The wheat grains must be washed, dried and ground by the women of the household, who sing as they work, urging the goddess to bestow merit on their sons and husbands:

कलसुवा चढइबो छठिय मइया छठी मइया के सुहाग

लोग्या रउरी बाहारो धन सम्पत्ति हमरा के दी

अमरुधवे चढइबो छठिय मइया छठी मैया के सुहाग

खोरिया रउरी बाहारो पुतवा भीखि दी

Thekua is made from gur, wholewheat flour and ghee on the first day of the festival, and provides nutrients that protect the body against colds, coughs and other seasonal ailments.

The worship of Chhath Mata or the Mother Goddess involves offerings of fruit such as bananas, coconuts and lemons, and various cooked foods. Great stress is placed on hygiene; for example, fruits that might have been pecked by birds cannot form part of the prasad. Bananas are an excellent source of potassium and lemons of Vitamin C, both of which shore up the immune system.

The rising and setting sun are venerated during the festival. A Bhojpuri song refers to the ritual:

ओरे गोडे खरऊबा ए आदितमल तिलका लिलार
आरे हाथावा में सोवरन सारो ए आदितमल अरघ दिआउ
ए आमा के कोरा सूते ले आदितमल मोरे हो गइल बिहान
आरे हालो हाली उग ए आदितमल अरघ दिआउय

On the first day of the festival, devotees cleanse themselves and partake of a vegetarian meal, usually pumpkin, a split chickpea dal and rice. On the second day, they observe a fast through the day and eat only in the evening. A kheer of gur, milk and rice is served as prasad, and is an essential feature of the festival. After consuming it, devotees commence a 36-hour nirjal (waterless) fast. Yam or suthni is another food associated with the festival. A storehouse of fibre and protein, it is believed to strengthen the digestive system and benefits patients of asthma. New rice is also offered to the deity, in the form of kasar laddoos which are made with coarsely ground rice, fennel, ghee and jaggery. Sugarcane also figures in the prayer rituals; it is offered to the Sun god.

'Ganpati Bappa Morya'

The festival of Ganesh Chaturthi is one of the most popular in the country. Lord Ganesh, beloved by all, is propitiated with prayers and special foods. It lasts for ten days and features a variety of foods intended to delight the deity. While the laddoo features in most depictions of Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed God is known to enjoy a variety of prasads. Devotees offer up a range of delightful comestibles and themselves partake of the nutritious prasad.

Modak: Lord Ganesh is known to prefer this sweet above all others, and it finds mention in the scriptures. On the first day of Ganesh Chaturthi, modak is offered to the Lord. Traditionally, it is made of rice flour or wheatflour and gur, but the variety is mind-boggling: it may be steamed or fried, made with chocolate or dry fruits.

LADDOO

A pile of laddoos frequently features in depictions of Lord Ganesh. The motichoor laddoo is most often offered to the deity. Devotees make these laddoos with their own hands, from ghee, gram flour and sugar. They are said to impart energy.

SATORI

This sweet roti is native to Maharashtra, and is prepared from khoya and mawa (reduced milk), ghee, besan (gram flour) and milk. It is said to be a dish fit for royalty.

COCONUT RICE

White rice soaked in coconut water or cooked with shredded coconut is believed to be one of the Lord's favourite dishes. It is highly nutritious.

SHRIKHAND, OR HUNG CURD

In many parts of the country, the deity is propitiated with shrikhand, a sweet pudding made from hung curd and embellished with raisins and dry fruit to improve its nutritional quotient.

BANANA SHEERA

Lord Ganesh's favourite fruit is the banana, so offerings on Ganesh Chaturthi include a sheera prepared from mashed bananas, semolina and

sugar. It has a texture similar to that of halwa and melts in the mouth.

PURANPOLI

The classic Maharashtrian sweet dish is essentially a paratha – fried flatbread – made from wholewheat flour. It is stuffed with a sweet paste of dal mixed with cardamom and nutmeg. The word 'puran' means stuffed, while 'poli' refers to a paratha.

RAWA PONGAL

Semolina and green gram dal are ground and mixed with ghee and dry fruits, giving the dish a halwa-like texture. In many regions, it is offered to the deity on the seventh day of the festival.

PAYASAM

Payasam, popular in south India, is made from rice or vemicelli cooked with milk and sugar or gur. Cardamom powder, ghee and dry fruits are added. It is offered on Lambodar, an auspicious day observed by devotees of Lord Ganesh.

BHAGORIYA PARVA

Bhagoriya is a festival observed with great fervour by the adivasi community (particularly the Bhil tribe) seven days before Holi. At this grand fair, marriages within the adivasi community are fixed. For seven nights, there is song, dance and feasting. There is a high demand for gur jalebi, bhajiya (a kind of pakora or fried vegetable dumpling) and taree (a beverage extracted from the sap of the palm tree). The traditional adivasi fare is organic, as the communities eschew the use of pesticides, and has a matchless taste and flavour that urban dwellers cannot even imagine. Dal-paniya is a popular dish. The paniya is a kind of bread made from maize flour wrapped in the leaves of the Palash tree and baked. The forests inhabited by the Bhil community are the home of the famous Karaknath breed of chickens, the king among poultry. It is known for its taste and flavour and immense health benefits. The chicken is cooked in an earthen vessel over a woodfire, and is eaten with a roti made of maize flour, accompanied by a mahua beverage.

Paan

The Delightful Digestive

The mention of Paan, that wonderful digestive redolent with taste, fragrance and texture, calls to mind several popular Bollywood ditties in which it is celebrated. The word also evokes a picture of the by-lanes of Benares, India's oldest city, known for the excellence of its paan. In election season, the paan-ki-dukaan (paan shop) becomes a wrestling arena, where the merits of rival parties and candidates are furiously debated. For the rest of the year, it is a lively hub where friends get together after dinner to exchange news and gossip. The panwari or paan vendor witnesses all the debates and gossip. Engaged in the intricacies of preparing the paan, such as spreading Catechu paste on the paan leaf, he makes a pithy comment. This gives the subject a

new direction, or leads to a fresh spate of arguments. One paan follows another in quick succession as the combatants square off. During the day, the panwari serves as a friendly neighbourhood Google map, but as the dusk follows the afternoon and the crowds thicken, one fears that one might misread his directions.

राजा हमके बनारस घूमाद
चल के गोदौलिया के पनवा खियाद
चला चौका पे चम-चम चीखादी
ठंठायी पियादी और पनवा खियादी
ए राजा हमके बनारस घूमाद॥

While singing a paean in praise of paan, one may recall that uncouth persons have a tendency to

decorate walls and streets with paan spittle. These boorish individuals have no fear of warnings or fines, and are entirely ignorant of the etiquette of paan. Such behaviour and the criticism it attracts have led many people to eye paan-chewers askance. Where once the ruddy touch of paan on the lips was regarded as an embellishment, lovers of paan now turn their heads aside to hide the evidence of paan-chewing.

Some regions are known for a cultural association with paan, for example in Mithila...

पग पग पोखर माछ मखान

सरस बोल मुस्की मुख पान

Those unfamiliar with Indian traditions may believe that paan has nothing to do with nutrition. The fact is that paan is a mine of nutrition. Some with vested interests dubbed paan as a vice or an

addiction. While cigarettes and alcohol attract only warning notices, and the hukkah or water pipe is widely prevalent, a touch of paan on the lips brands one as a rustic. Perhaps only villagers can understand the significance of paan. Truth to tell, the negative sentiments vis-a-vis this digestive and palate cleanser are an outcome of ignorance. Paan chewers have no idea of its impact on health. Those who fear being dubbed rustics chew paan in secret. And the white-collar brigade that does not, hasn't yet discovered its virtues on the internet.

त्रयोदशगुणी विडा (तांबूल)

एला लवंग कर्पूर कस्तुरी केसरादिभिः

जातीफलदलैः पूगैः लागल्यूषण नागरः

चूर्णैः खदिरसारश्च युक्ता कर्पूरवीटिका

Paan afficianados should know that Lord Ram and Lord Krishna are said to have enjoyed paan in Satyuga (the age of truth), while in Kalyuga (the dark age) King Krishnadevraya ruled the Vijaynagar empire with paan in his mouth, and did so with such brilliance that his fame spread across the world.

श्री गोवर्धन महाराज, महाराज

तेरे माथे मुकुट बिराज रह्यौ

तौपे पान चढ़े, तौपे फूल चढ़े, तो पै पान

और चढ़े दूध की धार, हाँ धार.

In hymns to Lord Ram, we note that his mother Sumitra celebrated his birth by distributing paan. Understandably, on every street corner in Ayodhya and Benares one finds panwaris who can give Google Guru a run for its money. In every household in Benares, one finds a receptacle with all the ingredients of paan. In the course of convivial conversation, neither host nor guest notices as the paan leaf, betelnut, catechu and lime are reflexively brought together to form triangular pockets of paan,

which are popped into the mouth. Thus, paan is integral to everyday life in the spiritual capital of India.

कौन के बँट रहे बूरे–बताशे ----2,
कौन के बँट रहे पान,
सो दिन–दिन नीके सो दिन–दिन नीके लगें ॥
केकई के बँट रहे बूरे–बताशे ----2,
कौशल्या के बँट रहे, सुमित्रा के बँट रहे पान
सो दिन–दिन नीके सो सब दिन नीके लगें ॥

Paan is one of 56 consecrated foods offered to Lord Krishna. In the Shrinath Temple at Nathdwara, the kitchen has a special section devoted to paan and called the paanghar (home of paan). It is just as sacrosanct as the rest of the temple kitchen. If Lord Krishna cannot sleep without having a paan in the evening, how can his devotees? The entire region of Brij loves paan.

बृन्दाबन की सुघर ग्वालिनी,
सिर मटकी मुख पान, मोरे लाल।टेक।।
बीच में मिल गये कुँवर कन्हैया,
माँगैं दही को दान, मोरे लाल।

In the north-eastern states of Manipur and Meghalaya, wherever Lord Krishna's footprint has fallen, paan has become an important part of the local culture. If paan is one of the 56 sacred foods offered to the Lord in Dwarika on the western coast, it also features among the 108 foods that form the bhog at the GovindDev temple in Imphal in the extreme north-east. From Uddupi in south India, the influence of paan has spread to other parts of the state, and to Kerala. In Maharashtra, a supari shredder is found in every home. Prayers to Lord Ganesh during the Vinayak puja, are incomplete without paan and supari.

एक सौ पान सुपारी ड्योढ सै
म्हारो फलसड़ो कुण खुड़काइयो।
छोटो सो बिंदायक डगमग डोलै
च्यार लाडू खावा नै

Communities across India have folk songs that celebrate offerings of paan not just to Ram, Krishna and Ganesh, but to local gods and goddesses, thereby rendering paan an integral part of their lifestyle. After food is offered to the gods and consecrated, it is distributed as prasad and consumed with reverence. This is an essential element of the nutritional culture of India.

अंबे की छाया बखानी ।।
नीम तले डोले भवानी ।।
सोने की थारा में ज्योना परोसी,
खावै नगर पटरानी ।।1 ।।
झन–झन झारी गंगाजल पानी,
पियें नगर पटरानी।। 2 ।।
पान पचास के बीड़ीया लगाई,
चाबै नगर पटरानी।। 3 ।।
फूल गुलाब के गजरे गुंदाई,
पहने नगर पटरानी ।। 4 ।।
चुन बिन कलियाँ में सेज बिछाई,
लेटे नगर पटरानी ।। 5 ।।
विडा घ्या हो अंबाबाई आम्हा अनाथाचे आई
लीनभक्त इच्छितातो शेषप्रसाद देई
वासना त्या ठेवी पूजीयले पूजा फळ
भावार्थ कापूर लावियेला प्रेमळ
शांती नागली, पान आणले थाळी
अहंकार जाळूनिया चुना लाविला भाळी
दया, शांती विडा लवंगी आणि वेलदोडे निर्मळ
बोध आत्मसुखाचा हेची आणावा निर्मळ
विडा करी सुरंगी मातोरी अंबाबाई

Paan consumed first thing in the morning renders each breath fragrant. In Vatsyayana's Kamashastra (3rd century BCE), it is said that after cleaning ones teeth in the morning, one must have paan. The great ancient Indian surgeon Sushrutu held that paan

aids breathing; it is fragrant, sweetens the voice and prevents diseases of the teeth, tongue and gums. It should be consumed after meals, because it is a highly efficacious digestive.

In all of south east Asia, from Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Meghalaya in India to Vietnam, we hear a folk tale centred around paan. It tells of a triangular relationship between an individual, his friend and the latter's wife, or an individual and his brother and sister-in-law. The couple give up their lives for each other and the individual, unable to live without them, follows suit. God intervenes and brings them together in the form of paan, supari and katha (catechu): the composite paan.

In underworld-speak, giving a 'supari' for someone means a sentence of death. The term has had a powerful effect on Bollywood films, with the result that the negative connotations of supari have gained currency. Tobacco has given paan an addictive

nature. Thus, both supari and paan have been traduced, whereas in Maharashtra, they are a must in the most cultured families. In some sections, however, the fact that supari is imperative in the worship of Lord Ganesh receives attention only during the festivals. Indeed, supari is offered to the entire pantheon of deities.

श्री महाकाली, महालक्ष्मी, महासरस्वती ।
नवदुर्गा देवताभ्यो नमः तांबुलं समर्पयामि ।।

Without supari, paan is incomplete. The culture and art of making paan teaches moderation in all aspects of life. The precise quantum of ingredients like katha and chuna (lime) that are required is learnt only through practice. And this practice is informed by folk knowledge, culture,

rites and rituals, not gleaned from books. Regional diversity plays a big role in the culture of paan. The composition of paan changes as one moves from the south to the north.

खुमरी के आल–पाल, खाले बेटा बीरो पान
में चलावंव गोंटी, तोर दाई पोवय रोटी
मैं मारंव मुटका, तोर ददा करे कुटका
आमा लगे अमली, बगईचा लागे झोर।
उतरत बेंदरा, खोधरा ला टोर
राहेर के तीन पान, देखे जाही दिन मान
तुआ के तूत के, झपट भूर के
खुडूवा के डू डू डू...

The importance of paan and supari is evident in rituals, such as the

practice of sending invitations along with supari wrapped in red string. Wedding rituals also involve paan. In Telegu weddings, for example, the bride and groom place a paste of jaggery and cumin held in both hands on a paan leaf. Only then does the ritual of tying the mangalsutra (a symbol of married status) around the bride's neck commence. In Bengal, when the bride's brother leads her to her groom, she hides her face with paan leaves. Only after purifying rituals does she remove them, allowing the groom to see her face. In Rajasthan, when serving food to the groom's entourage, the first course is placed on paan leaves, a rituals known as niyona. Only then does the rest of the meal follow. A Bagheli wedding song featuring paan:

पान का पठयों दुलहे दुलेरूआ कहना रह्याउ वेलमाय
की बेलम्या तुम राजा दरवरिया की बेलम्या ससुरार
ना हम बेलमेन राजा दरवरिया ना बेलमेन ससुरार
हम तो बेलमेन आजा बगैचा कोइली गहागह लेय

हम तो बेलमेन पिता के बगैचा जहां कोइली गहागह लेय

हम तो बेलमेन काका के बगैचा जहां कोइली गहागय लेय

हाथ कै हिरौधी मैं तोही देहों फंसिया कोइली पकरि लै आव

In Mithila, women observe a festival called Madhushravani, in which the goddess Bishari Mata, clad in paan, is worshipped:

पुरैनिक पत्ता, झिलमिल लत्ता, ताहि चढ़े बैसाली बिशारी माता

हाथ सुपारी खोइचा पान बिशारी करती शुभ कल्याण

In Chhattisgarh, even children sing songs about paan:

ये लईका का के

गिल्ली डंडा धराय के

ये गिल्ली डंडा का के

पईसा जीताय के

ये पईसा का के

पान लेवाय के

ये पान का के

मुहूं रचाय के

येमुहूं का के

दुनिया दिखाय के

In Meghalaya, paan is referred to as 'kwai' with great reverence. The Garo tribe call it 'guay', and honour it equally. It is found tucked into women's cummerbands and in the pockets of the men, who readily offer it to others as a form of greeting. At one time, distance was measured in terms of the number of times 'kwai' was chewed to cover it.

Buddhist fables also feature paan and describe its virtues. There is ample evidence that Buddhist monks consumed paan. In the court of King Krishnadevaraya, where a ministry of fragrances existed, paan featured prominently on the royal menu. In every house, a paan vine was planted at the base of a flowering tree, adding its perfume to the air along with the blossoms. Cardamom, cloves, camphor and other fragrant spices were used in experimenting with different kinds of paan.

Among forest dwellers,romantic songs are incomplete without paan. During the Bhagoriya festival in Jhabua, paan vendors have a field day because their wares are so much in demand.

Paan features in the list of 16 traditional embellishments. It reddens the lips, and it was said that the deeper the red of a man's lips, the deeper his love for his wife.

नानमुन टेपरी म बोयेन जीरा धाने

खड़े रइहा भोजली

खवाबा बीरा पाने।।

Another one says,

आठे के चाउर नवमी बोवा इन

दसमी के भोजली, जराइ कर होईन,

एकादसी के भोजली दूदी पान होईन।

Laavni, the famous folk dance of Maharashtra attracts a vast audience, but the assemblies are incomplete without paan. For Laavni afficionados, receiving paan from the hands of the dancers is a matter of great honour. As long the mouth savours paan juice,

the dance should continue. As the juice permeates the mouth, the gathering becomes more and more lively.

लावणी गीत

कळीदार कपूरी पान, कोवळं छान, केशरी चुना

रंगला काथ केवडा, वर्खाचा विडा, घ्या हो मनरमणा

बारीक सुपारी निमचिकनी घालुन

जायपत्री वेलची लवंग वरी दाबुन

बांधले तसे या कुडीत पंचप्राण

घ्या रंगत करि मर्दुनी चतुर्दशगुणी सख्या सजणा

In Bihar, numerous folk songs celebrate paan.

पांच पान के बिरवा, तौ दुहरी सोपारी लागी,

हो मोरी सासू लिहे मुड़वरिया के ठाढ़ि उलटि नाहीं चितवैं।

A woman requests her husband to bring her paan, with cloves in it.

हमरे लिए बिरवा, वह में लौंग खोंसे आना,

In some songs, we find the following lines -

लवैंगा इलायची कै बीरा जोरायों।

A woman missing her husband says that she would prefer to have dry tobacco with him than paan scented with cardamom and cloves without him.

लौंग इलायची हमैं ना भावै, सूखी सुरुतियाँ गुजर करवै।

Today, paan is still widely used in rites and rituals, or within families who have a tradition of consuming paan, and some urban centres. On the roadside in Odisha, one can still buy three paans for the sum of ten rupees, in contrast to high-end panwaris in Jodhpur, who charge Rs 700 for a single paan. This is known as shahi (royal) paan because it contains gold. Paan still has many ardent adherents.

खड़ी करमा

झूरा–झूरी पान मांगे जाये कैसे सोसी पड़े

पाने मंगावत सीता गारी खवाये

अंगना मा बैठकी मन मा विचार कैसे सोसी पड़े

कौन तोरे लानय कारे पान सरैपान

कौन तोरे लाने बीड़ा पान, कैसे सोसी पड़ ।

Setting the Table

Preparation & Presentation

Food is a basic necessity, and the medium for preparing and serving it are vessels: cookware and tableware. Utensils are as old as human civilization; indeed, archaeological excavations invariably turn up hoards of pottery in various forms, and these remnants serve as a hallmark of particular cultures. It can safely be said that the manufacture of utensils has evolved alongside human civilization.

As cultures became increasingly sophisticated, so did the quality and range of utensils, but the very first kind to take shape was earthenware. In Indian tradition, earthen or terracotta vessels are held to encapsulate the quintessence of human life:

सांवरा, एक माटी का बरतन चार, चारूं की करणी न्यारी–न्यारी
सांवरा, पैले में दूध तपाय, दूजै में जसोदा दही रै जमावती
सांवरा, अगलै सूं माखन खावे कन्हैया, चौथी फूटे मसाण,
सांवरा, मत दे कुंभारी नै दोष करमां री रेखा न्यारी–न्यारी

Over time, the manufacture of vessels passed through successive stages. The humble clay utensil gave way to an array of vessels in metals, alloys and other materials, which brought with them numerous ailments and impairments. As a result, we are now going back to earthen vessels. The potter's wheel has turned full circle.

Nutrition specialists are now according importance to earthenware. While it's true that in today's fast-paced existence, the use of terracotta utensils poses problems but then, health is the greatest asset that any human being can possess. The human body is a temple, and it is the responsibility of each individual to care for it to the best of their ability.

Nutritious food is the first step in tending the body-temple, and the nature of foodstuffs is determined in large measure by the vessels in which they are cooked. It is said that food makes the man. Our nature, personality, thoughts and behaviour are determined by the kind of food we consume.

Good health, courtesy Mother Nature's blessings

Scientists and nutrition experts concur that food prepared in earthen vessels is not only tastier but is replete with nutrients, and those who consume it are healthier and less prone to disease. That is why India has a marked preference for terracotta utensils. This is particularly true of rural India, which explains why its denizens have better immunity.

The advantage of cooking food in earthen vessels is that micronutrients are not destroyed in the process. On the other hand, food prepared in pressure cookers and other modern high-tech gadgets tends to lose nutritive value. Earthen vessels are far more conducive to nutritious, tasty and easily digestible fare. Cooking food in baked clay ensures the

availability of essential nutrients like iron, calcium, magnesium and sulfur, which protect us from cancer and other incurable maladies. Thus, earthen cookware produces fare that is both delicious and healthful.

A miracle of better health

Earthenware is the safest option for cooking, given that it is made of purely organic material. One can prepare food in these utensils without worrying about the harmful effects of aluminium, cadmium, lead and other disease-causing metals or chemicals, as earthenware is entirely free of potential toxins.

The advantages of cooking in earthenware are manifest. Less oil and water is required, and most vegetables are cooked in their own juices. The porosity of clay and oven-style slow cooking ensure that nutritive elements are preserved. The uniform conduction of heat is optimal for cooking, and once the vessel has been heated, a low flame is adequate. When the food is 50 to 60 per cent

cooked, one can cover the vessel and leave it, because the trapped heat completes the process. As a result, less energy – and therefore less fuel – is required for cooking.

Imbued with taste and fragrance

Cooking in earthenware adds to taste and fragrance, apart from enhancing nutrition and minimising use of energy and water. That's why leading food industry brands now offer choice products prepared in earthenware, for which consumers are willing to pay high prices.

In keeping with this trend, dishes prepared and presented in clay pots (handi) are now extremely popular. Combining the aroma of food with the subtle fragrance of baked earth, they appeal to the senses and permeate the consciousness. The cognoscenti can easily tell the difference between yoghurt fermented in an earthen pot to that made in any other material. The soothing scent of baked clay somehow suffuses all the foodstuffs it holds. Buttermilk served in a baked clay tumbler (kulhad) has a entrancing flavour all its own, and in the little tea-stalls scattered across the countryside, customers enjoy the distinctive taste of kulhad-wali-chai (tea in clay pots). Water left standing a clay jar not only extinguishes thirst, but satisfies the spirit. Milk brought to a slow boil in an earthen vessel and served in a kulhad, is a delightful blend of taste and nutrition.

In the context of milk, some may recall a certain trend, which involved placing a pot of milk in a deep and wide earthen dish over a medium flame. As the milk gently simmered,

its colour gradually deepened from white to pink. Those who have tasted the rose-hued milk or the buttermilk, yoghurt or ghee made from it, say it is unforgettable. Milk is of course integral to the traditional Indian lifestyle. The saying that rivers of milk once flowed through the sub-continent has a solid basis in fact. Folk tradition celebrates that tradition in song:

दूध रो कटोरो

मे तो माता ने मे मद लाई भरतार कटोरो पीलो दूध को
तू तो ठण्डो कर लाई घरनारा कटोरो लेजा दूध को
मे तो छन्नो करलाई भरतरा कटोरो पीलो दूध को
तू तो फीकां लाई घरनार कटोंरों लेजा दूध कों
में तो मिश्री घोंलर लाई भरतरा कटोंरों पीलों दूध कों
तू तो लूण घोंलीयों य घर री नार कटोंरों लेजा दूध कों
में तो केशर घोल लाई मरतरा कटोरो पीलो दूध को

Tableware

One of the first questions a doctor puts to a patient is regarding dietary habits, an indication of the close relationship between food and health. Surprising though it sounds, it's not just what we eat, but how and in what it's served that matters in the context of health. Ayurveda is clear that the nature of the serving dish, that is, the material of which it is made, has a direct impact on our well-being. Knowledge of the various materials of which vessels are made, as well as their chemistry and behaviour, is essential.

Gold, a symbol of wealth and health

Gold is among the most precious of elements, and is a symbol of wealth. It also possesses unmatched qualities. Ayurveda holds that it has a heating effect on the body. Food served in gold vessels imparts strength to the internal and external organs. The gold particles act as a protective layer, and also serve to

Gold vessels are celebrated in a mellifluous, charming song....

पराती सोने की

पराती सोने की, हय हय पराती सोने की

दइयो बनवाय, पराती सोने की।

मैं तो गई हाथरस मंडी, मैंने लाडू रखे हुए देखे,

मेरो वाई दिन से, हय वाई दिन से

जिया ललचाय, पराती सोने की।

पिया दिल्ली शहर को जइयो, अच्छो सो सोनो लइयो,

Silver adds lustre to the intellect

enhance eyesight. Vessels of gold embellished royal tables for this very reason, as warrior kings and princes needed both strength and sharp vision when on the battlefield. Gold tableware is naturally the prerogative of the select few, but ordinary people take delight in light-hearted raillery centred around it:

सोने की थाली में छप्पन व्यंजन

समधी जेमें जेवनार

सखि अवध पति महाराज समधी बनी आयो

सोने के थाली में जेमन परोसल

गाली दियो रसदार, समधी बनी आयो

The gold thali (tray) figures in banter between close relatives and friends:

आओ हो हरी हमरे गोकुला नगरिया मा।।

सोने की थाली मा ज्योना परोसेवं

जेवों हो गयी हमरे गोकुल नगरिया मा....आओ अन्नप्राशन

जेंवो जेंवो हे अवध कुमार, लला राजा दशरथ के।।

रतन जडित कंचन की थाली, रजत कटोरी चार....लला राजा

Gold armours the body, but silver sharpens the mind. Their nature is contrastive; gold is said to warm the body whereas silver is cooling. But they have in common the descriptor 'precious metals'. A child born to a wealthy family is said to have been 'born with a silver spoon'.

Silver is as beneficial as it is precious. Food served in silverware cools the body internally and enhances the intellect. It improves eyesight and eliminates disorders of the humours. In Indian tradition, silver vessels are intimately associated with tenderness and love...

बीरा ऐसी जूती ल्यादे रे....

पंजे प मोरणी च्यार रे

पितल की बाल्टी ल्यादे रे
बीरा ऐसी....
चाँदी का गिलास ल्यादे रे
तोरी पीवे भाणजी दूध रे
बीरा ऐसी
फागण में सरसम काटी रे
कातक में चुगी कपास रे

The folk song speaks of expressing love for a niece by giving her a silver tumbler from which to drink milk.

The many benefits of brass

Brass is commonly used, not just in the manufacture of utensils but in numerous rituals. Food cooked and served in brass vessels is proof against Helminthiasis (worms), and is effective against disorders related to kaf and vayu (humours). Nor is the nutritional value of the food reduced. That's why collective meals at public gatherings are usually prepared in brass cookware. In folk tradition, silver and brass vessels are popular and widely prevalent.

Bronze: the peerless alloy

Tradition has it that bronze dishes are the best when it comes to serving food. The metal has numerous benefits, be it stimulating the appetite, purifying the blood, mitigating bleeding disorders or enhancing the intellect. Discretion must be exercised in the use of bronze tableware, however. Sour foods must never be served on bronze dishes, as they react with the alloy and produce toxins that harm the body. Thanks to cultural exchange traditions, bronze is embedded in the folk psyche. To cite and example:

रतन कचोळै दूधो ठ्यारियो, मिसरी को जांवण
दिरावो प्यारा जेठजी,
छोटै भायाँ की बहू लाडली।
रतन कचोळै केसर घोळियो, मिसरी को जांवण
दिरावो प्यारा जेठजी,
छोटै भायाँ की बहू लाडली।
मैमदां घड़ावो भांवै राखड़ी, जिठाणीजी रा खैंच
दिरावो प्यारा जेठजी,
छोटै भायाँ की बहू लाडली।
बार बार थांनै के कैवां, घड़ी ये घड़ी थांनै के कैवां?
कहतां तो आव म्हांनै लाज प्यारा जेठजी,

Copper, the wellness metal

The importance of copper vessels can be guaged from the copper water bottles that grace desks in modern offices. That drinking water left standing in copper bottles has numerous health benefits is now globally accepted. It not only serves as blood purifier, but improves memory. Copper brings relief to those afflicted with fatty liver, and is said to counter a range of liver ailments. Food served in copper utensils is believed to be healthful, as the metal preserves nutrients. Ayurveda, however, strongly forbids the consumption of milk from copper utensils.

Iron steels the body

Every Indian kitchen has some articles of iron cookware, in particular the thick, round-bottomed, circular kadahi. Iron utensils are essential for maintaining adequate levels of iron compounds in the body. For those suffering from anaemia, they are a blessing. By virtue of its nature, iron is a synonym for strength. When a child is born, the household knows that it's time to let 'iron clash with iron'. In other words, the post-partum mother must be given a halwa of jaggery made in an iron vessel and stirred with an iron spatula. Both gur and iron are necessary to purify and restore the blood. Traditionally, the food prepared for the newborn's mother in an iron utensil is served to her in a bronze dish. This custom, prevalent all over north India, is known by different names.

Leafware: 'organic' plates and bowls

Long before there was metal tableware, food was served on fresh or dried leaves. Disposal 'leafware' was the norm before the advent of plastic and thermocol. The 'pattal'(dry or fresh leaf/bark) plates and bowls are made from more than 2,000 different varieties of plants, although some are more prevalent than others.

Trifecta: protecting the environment, generating employment and building health

Food served on pattals has numerous advantages. For one thing, many kinds of leaves are of medicinal importance and impart health benefits. For another, collecting raw materials for the leaf plates is a community exercise usually undertaken by forest-dwellers, for whom it is a valuable source of income. The most significant benefit from the environment point of view is that unlike plastics and thermocol, disposable'organic' flatware is bio-degradable and does not release toxins that are harmful to human health. So, from the economic, ecological and health perspectives, leafware is immensely useful and practical.

Banana leaf Pattal

The shape of the banana leaf renders it a readymade pattal. In Indian tradition, the banana leaf is the most widely used disposable plate. To this day, it is popular in south India, particularly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It is said that the true flavour of some south Indian dishes is evoked only when they are served on a banana leaf.

That's why most restaurants in south India serve meals on banana leaves. These broad, flat leaves are also used in religious rituals. According to ancient Indian texts, serving food on banana leaves is equivalent to serving it on silverware.

The banana leaf contains 60 per cent moisture and numerous phytonutrients, including anti-oxidants. It also has anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties. Polyphenols are also present, similar to those found in green tea, and they help the body fight off free radicals. In particular, the polyphenol oxidase is an enzyme that has proved effective against Parkinson's disease.

In terms of convenience, the banana leaf scores high, as it does not need much cleaning. It is waterproof and therefore suitable for serving liquid foods without fear of seepage.

Karanj pattal

The Karanj or Indian beech tree is known for its medicinal properties, so pattals made from its leaves help in combating various ailments, specially skin diseases and joint pain. Every part of the Karanj tree – roots, leaves, flowers and bark – has medicinal uses.

Sal Pattal

The leaves of the Sal or Shorea robusta are aptly described as a treasure trove of medicinal qualities, for they contain alkalides, flavonoids, phenol, saponins, tannin and anti-inflammatories, as well as digestives. The benefits of eating from pattals made of Sal leaves are manifest.

Peepul pattal

The leaves of the Peepul tree exude life-giving oxygen, and are replete with beneficial properties. High in Vitamin A and C, which boost immunity, they are also effective in easing constipation, improving digestion and strengthening the mind. Pattals made from Peepul are not just environment-friendly, but have medicinal value.

Taur pattal

The leaves of the Taur plant are rich in protein, ascorbic acid, Vitamins A and B complex and fibre, and assist in strengthening the lungs and respiratory tract. They also contain essental minerals like iron and magnesium and serve as blood purifiers. The presence of natural digestive enzymes renders them useful in fortifying the gastrointestinal system. Pattals made of Taur definitely contribute to good health. Integral to the traditional lifestyle of Himachal Pradesh, these pattals are used to serve food during the public feasts or 'dham', held to mark weddings, festivals and other social occasions.

Mahul Pattal

The evergreen leaves of this gigantic climber are rich in fibre, anti-oxidants and other nutrients, and aid digestion. By boosting immunity, they guard against infections and provide relief from pain and inflammation. It can safely be said that pattals made with Mahul leaves have a positive impact on health.

Palash Pattal

Pattals made from the leaves of the Palash tree, also known as Flame-of-the-forest, are said to be equivalent to dishes of gold. The leaves are believed to purify the blood and purge the body of toxins. The anti-oxidants present in the leaves combat free radicals, thereby

boosting immunity and soothing internal inflammation. They are particularly useful for patients of piles. Serving food on Palash leaves improves resistance to disease and overall fitness.

Supari Pattal

The leaves of the Supari or Beetul Nut palm are packed with vitamins and minerals, which fortify the entire body and combat gastrointestinal ailments. The tannic acid in the leaves is a tooth-whitening agent. Eating food served on Supari leaves has a general prophylactic effect.

Amaltas Pattal

The leaves of the Amaltas or Golden Shower tree contain natural enzymes that aid digestion. They are also said to be effective in preventing hair loss and strengthening hair, and have anti-inflammatory properties. Those suffering from palsy/paralysis may benefit from partaking meals from Amaltas pattals.

Cookware

Tauli

A brass and copper vessel with a rounded bottom and small mouth, it is used in hilly areas to prepare rice or semolina for four to five people, and is also figures in temple rituals.

Taul

Similar to the Tauli in appearance, but larger in circumference and with a wider mouth, this vessel is also round-bottomed and deep. Encased in a thick coat of copper, it has handles of copper or metal, known as 'munar'. As it is generally used in cooking for community gatherings, the handles have been added for convenience. Rice, lentils and semolina based dishes are prepared in the Taul, which can hold enough for several people.

Deg

A brass or aluminium vessel, it is round and deep with handles on opposite sides and is used in preparing community meals, usually rice, vegetables or halwa. Black gram or urad dal cooked in the deg is said to be exceptionally delicious.

Chashni or Tegi

A massive kadahi, it is sometime referred to as 'karah'. Usually made of iron, it is used for preparing halwa or frying puris for large numbers. It is so big that 40-50 puris can be fried at the same time.

A taste-full ending....

A discussion on food and nutrition is incomplete without a description of the great Indian wedding feast. These days, the wedding itself is a ceremonial affair. Much of the conversation and debate centres around the menu. So much so that the wedding itself is judged on the number of dishes offered to the guests. Take a look at the song on the back cover. In presenting the invitation to the wedding of Sita and Ram in a sublime way, it shows how folk culture can elevate the humdrum into the heavenly. Wedding songs are a particularly rich and variegated aspect of folk culture. The first part has mentioned a few of them in other contexts, but here, we present a smorgasbord of songs from the four corners of India. Listen, and enjoy...

A Tamil wedding song

பருப்பும் அன்னமும் பாயாசமும்
பலவகை கரிகளும் வந்தருளி
வேணமட்டும் வித விதமாக
தேங்காய் பச்சடி கிச்சடி தயார்

பரங்கிக்காய் கூடுடன் பலபல கறிகள்
மாங்காய் ஊறுகாய் மனமிகு சாம்பார்
ரசமுடன் திவ்ய பக்ஷணங்களுடன்

Dal, rice and kheer Vegetables of many kinds Made in different ways Coconut chutney and khichhdi Just the way you like Pumpkin to accompany different veggies Mango pickle and sambar curry with rasam, to make a divine meal.

A taste-full ending....

The Himalayan vistas of Kashmir conjure images of snow-capped peaks, groves of Chinar and Deodar (cedar) trees, sparkling lakes, and last but not the least, wazwan, the signature cuisine of the region. While wazwan has now become routine fare, it was originally served only on special occasions, notably at wedding feasts. The popular perception that it is essentially non-vegetarian is incorrect; prior to the advent of Islam, vegetarian wazwan was popular among the pundits of Kashmir. It is a multi-course meal, with seven to 36 different dishes served up for delectation. The manner of cooking and serving the dishes makes wazwan so special that it evokes paens of praise at weddings.

तू हंगामा ज़मीनी या करामात आसमानी

की बर कथुर मेहरबानम शवद तू हर ज़माने

सलाम-ए- वाज़वाने वाज़वाने वाज़वाने

भराये दस्ती पाकस ज़ात ए खुद तश्नाउर आयद

ज़बाने ए हर बशर अध वारिया दोईखर आयद

सुकून ए रूह बक्षेयं मुश्कि अदफर धर हिजाबे

तभक माज़ा ज़ि तरुक तरुक मेथी धन फूल वल कबाबी

नुमाया तरम्मि ज़ीनत रिस्ट रोगनजोश वाह वाह

की गोग्जी पालके चटनी हमकूं नोश वाह वाह

अज़ीज़ ए खास ओ आमान

पुलावों मुर्गो चामनं

लक़ब दाउद प्याले इन्जा नुंदबाने नुंदबाने

सलाम-ए- वाज़वाने वाज़वाने वाज़वाने

चि जोए क्षीर रा फरहाद शामिल आबघोषस्य

खुदाया कंद ओ शक्कर शिरनयो नाबद वाज़े चाओचास

मिशालें सुर्ख मखमल आफरीन कुर्मा लज़ीजं

वाज़ोल त्यौंथ रस फ्यूरा फारमोदये हर दिल लज़ीजं

दिल ओ जानस तरहवथ आमद ए एखनि व गोश्ताब

ज़बानां आब पाषपान, चेसमह शीशधर जश्म बेताब

बदीं आदाब ए कॉलकाच

लिफाफा तूल पाकं गॉच

पारित अल्लहम्दुलिल्ला यक ज़बाने यक ज़बाने

सलाम-ए- वाज़वाने वाज़वाने वाज़वाने

A jyonar of Kannauj

The buffet meal is referred to as svaruchi, that is, a choice of dishes. One can serve oneself from the feast laid out on the table, in accordance with taste and appetite. But one can recall a time when the svaruchi meal was served by hand, with gentle insistence. Guests were seated in rows and food dished out from vessels of different kinds. In the backdrop, women sang of the various dishes being served, to the beating of drums. In this folk number from Kannauj, the singer entices guests with a description of the next course....

हरि जेंउत हैं जिउनार गामैं सजनी सारी।
कुण्डनपुर की सोभा आली हमते कही न जाय ।
छार-छार लछिमी जहं जलमी वरनै को कवि आय ।
यकित उपमा सारी।
चंदन की चौकी बिछवाई सोने से मढ़वाय ।
मनि मानिक पायन में लगि रहे नजर नाहिं ठहराय ।
जगमगाय रही सारी ।
मखमल के जहं बिछे गलीचा मसनद दये दबाय ।
पमन देव ठाढ़े करि डुलामै सीतल पमन चलाय।
खुसी तन बढै भारी ।
कंचन थार कटोरी कंचन कंचन गिलास मंगवाय।
कंचन धरी सुराही सब इतर दओ छिड़काय।
आवै खसवोय भारी।
पुरी अउर कचउरी खस्ता बिढ़ई दई सिंकाय
मालपुआ रसगुल्ला परसे पेड़ा परसे आय
इमरती हैं प्यारी।
खुरचन पेड़ा बालूसाही कलाकंद ढबदार
गुझियां बरफी लड्डू रबड़ी नानखताई त्यार
धरी आगे सारी।
मोतीचूर बेसनी लड्डू रबड़ी खोयादार
मठरी पापर कचरी परसी फली दई परसाय
मूली और जिमीकंद टिंडी परमल मेथी लाय
बनी है प्यारी सारी।
पालक बथुआ कुलफा कमरख सबै दए परसाय
कैत की चटनी करी चटपटी सुंदर सुघर बनाय
बनाय सवादिल सारी।
दालमोठ समोसा पिसता मिरचौनी निमकीन
दारि चना की बड़ी कुरकुरी खस्ता है बड़ी रसीली
टीकिया आलू की।
दही बड़ा और पकौड़ी मैं अदरख दई डरवाय।
सोंठ अउ रउते सब परसा के कह लौं देयैं गिनाय
सीखरन परसि दई।
मोहन थार गजर को हलुआ पेठा है रसदार
गजक बढ़िया प्यारी।

What do you know about Nutrition?

During wedding celebrations in the Angika region of Bihar, the bride's friends pose a number of riddles to the groom:

सुइया एन्हों सोझो
माथा पर बोझो। [ताड़-गाछ]
सुइया एन्हों सोझो
डाँड़ा पर बोझो। [मकई के पेड़]
तोर गदगद ऊपर फेन
तेकरो बेटा रतन सेन [भात]

Treasure trove of nutrients

S. No.	Nutrients	Work	Deficiency symptoms	Hyper or toxicity symptoms	Main Source
1	**Carbohydrates** Page Numbers – 04,09, 10, 13, 17, 23, 26, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 67, 71, 75, 77, 78, 80, 89 , 92, 96, 97, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 107, 113, 130, 136, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Provides energy • Converts protein into energy • Stores energy as glycogen in the liver and muscles	• Mild depletion results in the use of fat for energy purposes • Severe deficiency results in accumulation of ketone bodies	• Increase in dental caries • Obesity • Increase in heartburn • Loss of appetite • Increase in the level of triglycerides in the blood can lead to heart diseases	• Cereals: Rice, wheat, maize, barley, millet, jowar, ragi, samai, kodo, kutki • Vegetables: starchy beans, beans, peas, sweet potatoes, sweet potatoes, sago • Fruits and dry fruits • Sugar, jaggery , honey, maple syrup, corn syrup • Milk and milk products
2	**Protein** Page Numbers – 10, 13, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 96, 97,99 , 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 107, 113, 130, 136, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Physical development and maintenance • Synthesizes body cells, enzymes, hormones, body fluids • Structural component of muscle, bone, other tissues, hair, teeth • It is a secondary source of energy	• Weight loss, anemia, low immunity • Slow wound healing, low energy, stamina • Malnutrition in children, kwashiorkor	NA	• Milk and milk products, meat, fish, poultry • Pulses, pulses, beans, nuts and oilseeds
3	**Fat/Lipid** Page Numbers – 10, 13, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 96, 97,98, 100 , 101, 102, 103, 105, 107, 113, 130, 136, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Supplies heat energy • The layer of fat beneath the skin acts as an insulator • Provides support to vital organs as a shock absorber • Function of storing fat soluble vitamins A, D, E, K • Essential fatty acids maintain the functioning of cell membranes, controls cholesterol, helps in blood clotting	• Deficiency of essential fatty acids may result in reduced growth and fertility	• Obesity • Can slow down the digestion and absorption of food products	• Oils obtained from edible nuts and oilseeds like peanut, sesame, mustard, coconut, sunflower, safflower, cottonseed, soybean, corn, almond, walnut, cashew, pistachio, palm • Hydrogenated vegetable oil, margarine • Avocado, olive • Milk, meat Dairy products like chicken, eggs, lard, mayonnaise, fish, butter and ghee
4	**Vitamin A** Page Numbers – 07, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 51, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 99, 113, 136 , 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Health of vision and skin	• Dry, rough, scaly skin • Low resistance to microbial attack • Xerosis Dryness of the eyes • Night blindness	• Nausea, loss of appetite - anorexia • Fatigue, irritability, weight loss, skin lesions (lesions) • Joint and bone pain, enlargement of the spleen and liver • Hair loss	• Green and yellow vegetables, yellow fruits, ripe tomatoes • Meat such as liver, egg yolks • Butter, cream, whole milk, breast milk • Fish liver oil
5	**Vitamin D** Page Numbers – 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 89, 92, 99, 113, 136, 161, 163, 164 , 165, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Good bone health: Absorbs calcium and phosphorus	• Rickets in children – bowed legs, soft bones, bad teeth, low calcium and phosphorus in the blood, poor posture	• Fatigue, anorexia, weight loss, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, frequent urination, headache, kidney damage, hardening of soft tissues of the tubes of the heart, blood vessels, lungs, stomach, kidneys	• Milk, mother's milk, butter, egg yolk, liver, salt water fish, fish oil
6	**Vitamin E** Page Numbers – 00, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 89, 92, 99, 113, 136, 161 , 163, 164, 166, 197-225, 245-255	• Acts as an antioxidant and fights harmful free radicals in the body. • Combines with structural elements of cell membrane – phospholipids, cholesterol, triglycerides	• Muscle loss increases hemolysis of red blood cells	• Lipid levels in the blood may increase, hindering blood coagulation	• Vegetable oils, green leafy vegetables, margarine, egg yolk, milk fat, nuts, rice germ oil • Mother's milk
7	**Vitamin K** Page Numbers – 04, 07, 09, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 99, 113, 136, 161 , 163, 164, 166, 197-225, 245-255	• Helps produce blood clotting factors	• Delayed blood clotting	• Increases bilirubin levels, jaundice, mild hemolytic anemia in infants.	• Green leafy vegetables, cauliflower, cabbage, meat
8	**Vitamin C** (Ascorbic Acid) Page Numbers - 04, 07, 09, 13, 15, 17, 23, 26, 40, 43, 45, 54, 55, 58, 60, 67, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92 , 113, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Maintains and builds bones, cartilage, teeth, collagen, tissues, blood capillaries • It helps in the formation of hemoglobin and development of red blood cells by absorption of iron • It is needed for wound healing and bone fractures • Improves immunity to fight common cold and infections • Acts as a stress reliever • Promotes growth	• Joint stiffness, pain, mouth ulcers, delayed wound healing, improper development of bone and cartilage	NA	• Fresh fruits especially sour fruits like mosambi, orange, lemon, strawberry, canned fruit juice, tomato, green cabbage, chilli, amla, potato • Mother's milk
9	**Vitamin B1** (Thiamine) Page Numbers - 04, 07, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 67, 71, 72, 73, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 107, 113, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Regulates energy metabolism	• Anorexia, fatigue, constipation, depression, irritability, calf tenderness with loss of muscle coordination, abnormal carbohydrate metabolism	NA	• Whole grains, nuts and peanut butter, legumes, milk, dairy foods, brewer's yeast, wheat germ, meat, eggs, meat

11	**Vitamin B3** (Niacin) Page Numbers - 04, 07, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 67, 71, 73, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 107, 113, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• As coenzyme in energy metabolism and protein metabolism	• Skin swelling, fatigue, mouth ulcers, gastrointestinal disturbances, neurological disturbances, mental depression, weakness, anorexia	NA	• Meat, fish, poultry, whole and enriched grains, nuts, legumes, peanuts, brewer's yeast, liver
12	**Vitamin B5** (Pantothenic Acid) Page Numbers – 04, 07, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 54, 55, 58, 60, 67, 71, 72, 73, 75, 77, 80, 89 , 92, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 107, 113, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• It is involved in important enzymatic reactions when producing energy during carbohydrate and fat metabolism	NA	NA	• Yeast, meats such as liver, kidneys, egg yolks, skimmed milk powder, cheese, legumes, sweet potatoes, yellow corn
13	**Vitamin B6** (Pyridoxine) Page Numbers - 04, 07, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 67, 71, 72, 73, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 113, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Helps in protein metabolism as a coenzyme • Helps in producing energy from carbohydrates and fats	• Anemia, extreme irritability, convulsive seizures, weakness, vomiting, stomach pain may occur	NA	• Yeast, wheat, corn, meat, fish, poultry, milk, eggs, potatoes, sweet potatoes
14	**Vitamin B9** (Folic Acid) Page Numbers - 04, 07, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 72, 73, 75, 77, 80 , 89, 92, 113, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Necessary for interconversion of amino acids • An important part of hemoglobin and blood formation	• Megaloblastic anemia – decreased number of red blood cells, increased hemoglobin levels, glossitis, diarrhea, weight loss	NA	• Fresh green leafy vegetables, dry beans, pulses, fruits, milk, chicken, eggs, liver, kidney
15	**Vitamin B12** (Cyanocobalamin) Page Numbers - 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 40, 43, 45, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 72, 73, 75, 77, 89, 92, 113, 136, 139, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Important coenzyme in the synthesis of important proteins • It is necessary for the formation of red blood cells • Folic acid also activates coenzymes	• Pernicious anemia – large nucleated red blood cells	NA	• Meat like – liver, kidney, white meat, milk, eggs, cheese
16	**Calcium** Page Numbers - 04, 07, 09, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92 , 99, 113, 130, 136, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Important for healthy bones and teeth • It is an important component of blood clotting	• Growth retardation, poor formation of teeth and bones, rickets, slow blood clotting time, tetany	• Excess causes congestion in soft tissues and frequent urination	• Milk, cheese, dark green leafy vegetables like colocasia, betel leaf with calcium hydroxide, ragi, gram dal, moth, rajma, sesame
17	**Phosphorus** Page Numbers - 04, 07, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92 , 99, 113, 130, 136, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Important for healthy bones and teeth • Important minerals Genetic materials DNA and RNA are found in every cell • Regulates metabolic processes in the absorption of glucose • Necessary for continuous storage and controlled flow of energy	• Growth retardation, poor formation of teeth and bones, rickets, weakness, anorexia, pain in bones	NA	• Milk and milk products like cheese, egg yolk, meat, poultry, fish, whole grains, legumes, nuts
18	**Sodium** Page Numbers – 04, 07, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 113 , 136, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• An electrolyte, which maintains the balance of water inside and outside the cells • Maintains alkalinity in gastric secretions • It helps in the exchange of nutrients across the cell membrane • Helps in muscle contraction • Maintains nerve impulses	• Nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, muscle cramps, stomach cramps	• Serious problems like high blood pressure, heart and kidney failure	• Salt, meat, fish, chicken, eggs, milk, pickles, papad, chutney, processed foods
19	**Potassium** Page Numbers - 04, 07, 09, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89 , 92, 113, 136, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Controls fluid balance, acid-base balance • Controls heart rate • Controls nerve impulse conduction • Helps in muscle contraction	• Muscle weakness, loss of memory, abnormal heartbeat	• Hyperkalemia results in severe dehydration, kidney failure, heart attack, changes in scalp, face, tongue, muscle weakness, poor respiration, ECG	• Whole grains, beans, vegetables, oranges, bananas, plums, meat, chicken
20	**Iron** Page Numbers – 04, 09, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 113, 136, 161 , 163, 164, 166, 197-225, 245-255	• Necessary for the formation of hemoglobin in red blood cells • Energy is necessary for metabolism	• Symptoms of anemia like weakness, dizziness, weight loss, pallor	• The excessive consumption causes symptoms of liver cirrhosis.	• Whole and enriched grains, dark green leafy vegetables, potatoes, legumes, dried fruits, meat, egg yolks
21	**Sulphur** Page Numbers – 13, 15, 17, 26, 40, 43, 45, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 89, 92, 113, 136, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225 , 245-255	• Helps in the growth of hair, nails and body tissues	• unknown	NA	• Protein rich foods like beans, pulses, milk, cheese, meat, fish, chicken, eggs
22	**Magnesium** Page Numbers – 04, 09, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 99 , 113, 130, 136, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Important in bone formation • Necessary for healthy muscles and nerves • Necessary to make proteins	• Abnormal heart function, mental, emotional and muscle disorders	NA	• Nuts, milk, grains, fresh green leafy vegetables, sulfur-rich beans containing amino acids, meat, seafood

23	Copper Page Numbers – 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 89, 92, 99, 113, 136, 161, 163 , 164, 166, 197-225, 245-255	• Necessary for the formation of hemoglobin and melanin • It is a component of enzymes	• Anemia due to iron deficiency	• Overdosage causes toxicity, hepatitis, lenticular degeneration, renal failure, neurological disorders	• Beans, nuts, raisins, cocoa, liver, kidney, brain
24	Zinc Page Numbers – 04, 10, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 89, 92, 113, 138 , 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• It is a component of insulin and enzymes • Helps in wound healing • Necessary to make proteins and genetic material • Taste has a function in perceptioo • Normal fetal development • Sperm production, normal growth and sexual maturity • Immune system health	• Anemia, dwarfism, hypogonadism	• Decreased growth, bleeding in bone joints, anemia, bone reabsorption, loss of appetite, death in severe cases	• Seafood, oysters, liver, meat, eggs, milk
25	Selenium Page Numbers – 04, 13, 15, 17, 26, 40, 43, 45, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 89, 92, 113, 136, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197 - 225, 245-255	• Important component of biochemical complexes in cells and tissues, important for maintaining the overall health of the body • Selenium has various physiological functions controlled by DNA. It is deoxyribonucleic acid, a fundamental genetic element involved in the formation of cells, tissues and organs in the human body.	• Disrupts thyroid function • Mental abilities and immunity may decline • Sudden hair fall, seizures and feeling tired, muscle weakness • It can slow down energy metabolism • Infertility in men and women • Skin infections, excessive hair fall, tooth damage, brittle, brittle nails • In severe cases, toxic doses can lead to heart attack, kidney failure or even death	• There is a very low probability This may cause metallic taste in the mouth and bad breath • Nervous system failure • Skin infection	• Whole grains like brown rice, oats, barley; Nuts like almonds, Brazil nuts, pistachios; Legumes like beans, chickpeas and kidney beans; Milk, cheese, curd; Mushrooms, Garlic; Seafood like tuna, snail; eggs, chicken, meat
26	Dietary fiber Page Numbers – 04, 13, 15, 23, 26, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 54, 55, 58, 60, 71, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 113, 136, 138, 140, 141, 144, 161, 163, 164, 166, 197- 225, 245-255	• Normalizes bowel movements • Reduces cholesterol level in blood • Controls blood sugar levels	• Constipation • Irritable bowel disease • Diverticulitis • Heart disease • Cancer	• Bloating, gas, constipation	• Whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, beans, nuts and seeds

Heartfelt Gratitude

Aggregating and understanding traditions of nutrition across the length and breadth of India was a task beyond the scope of a small team. So, the Deendayal Research Institute's team traversed the country to speak with all manner of experts and knowledgeable people. Our definition of expertise was very broad, and not limited to degrees or other professional qualifications. Meetings with those we knew led to other meetings, often with people unknown and unnamed/unrecognized. Several offered a treasure trove of knowledge, gleaned from their forefathers. Nuggets of wisdom gathered from here and there, written or spoken, seen or heard, and sometimes sung. Often, it was not a lone individual, but a whole community that shared a wealth of information. The DRI team has endeavoured to serve up a buffet of hoarded knowledge on this Atlas-shaped platter. To those who have enabled us to make this platter taste-rich and substantive, we offer our heartfelt gratitude. We attempted to take note of the names and coordinates of many of them, without preference or regard for seniority/prominence. It is possible that some people have been left out, and we beg their pardon with folded hands.

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- The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)
- Prabhat Prakashan
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- Shrinath Ji Temple, Nathdwara
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दीनदयाल शोध संस्थान

Invitation to a wedding feast

Deendayal Research Institute

The Deendayal Research Insitute was established in 1968 with the aim of translating the principles of Pundit Deendayal Upadhayay's Integral Humanism on the ground. Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee was its founding chairman, and Shri Nanaji Deshmukh the general secretary. Both were national treasures. In time, both were honoured with the 'Bharat Ratna'. Atalji went on to become a successful Prime Minister, and Nanaji's unwavering dedication to social development earned him the title 'Rashtrarishi'. Thousands of DRI workers, following in the footsteps of great leaders, are committed to the inception of a society that, powered by the Four Pursuits of Human Life and traditional knowledge systems, will restore India to pre-eminence and glory. This Atlas of Food Culture, a compendium of traditional knowledge, is informed by that goal.

'In most parts of Bharat, the invitation takes the form of a folk song that gives a vivid description of the repast served at the wedding of Sita to Ram'.

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जतन ते हरे २ जतन से परसौ जी ।।
पत्तल परसी सकोरा परसौ दौना सीकनदार
साग रायते न्यारे न्यारे , पानी तो परसो सँभार
जनत ते हरे -२ जतन से परसौ जी
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पापड़.कचरी दाल मौठ और चटनी सौंठ अचारर
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पंचमेवा पंचमेल मिठाईई
गरम - गरम गाजर का हलवा , रवड़ी लच्छेदा
जतन ते हरे -२ जतन से परसो जी ।।

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Ministry of Women and Child Development
Government of India

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