VIEWS | OPINION

Traditional Food Board - A Necessity for India

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Our body is made to digest and assimilate things which are available locally for you on regular basis. Import of any edible things may not be suitable for your body and may invite some trouble which may not be reflected in a short duration but may require generations to learn their ill effects. Therefore, we can see different food products at different locations all over the globe. Such special food products made by using locally available edible material has its own value for particular locality or even it may have therapeutic or medicinal benefits also. All such products are made by using wisdom and knowledge which is traditionally transferred from one generation to next hence these food products are known as traditional foods.

Traditional food refers to foods consumed over the longterm duration of civilisation that have been passed through generations. Traditional foods and dishes may have a historic precedent in a national dish, regional cuisine or local cuisine. Traditional foods and beverages may be produced as homemade, by restaurants and small manufacturers, and by large food processing plant facilities. Indian cuisine encompasses a wide variety of regional cuisines native to India. Given the range of diversity in soil type, climate, culture, ethnic group and occupations, these cuisines vary significantly from each other and use locally available spices, herbs, vegetables and fruits.

Historical incidents such as foreign invasions, trade relations and colonialism have also played a role in introducing certain foods to the country. For instance, the potato, a staple of the Indian diet, was brought to India by the Portuguese, who also introduced chillies and breadfruit. Indian cuisine has also shaped the history of international relations; the spice trade between India and Europe is often cited by historians as the primary catalyst for Europe’s Age of Discovery. Spices were bought from India and traded around Europe and Asia.

History of Indian traditional food

Indian cuisine reflects a more than 5,000 year history of various groups and cultures interacting with the subcontinent, leading to diversity of flavours and regional cuisines found in modern-day India. We get lots of references in old scholarly books about food and its impact. Arya Chanakya also has devoted an entire chapter in his famous book ‘Arthashashtra’ on food and its impact on the body. In Mahabharata, the reference of food science has been mentioned in Virat Parva, when Bhima adopted the profession of a cook while disguising himself along with his brothers in the Virata Kingdom. Bhima served as Virat’s cook and one chapter dedicated on food science is believed to have been authored by Bhima. He has described various recipes and their impact on the human body. A food classification system that categorised any item as saatvic, raajsic or taamsic was developed in Yoga tradition.

Staple foods of Indian cuisine include cereals such as pearl millet (bājra), rice, whole wheat flour (atta), and a variety of legumes/pulses, such as masoor (most often red lentils), toor (pigeon peas), urad (black gram), and moong (mung beans). Legumes/pulses may be used whole, de-husked e.g. dhuli moong or dhuli urad or split. Split pulses, or dal, are used extensively. Some pulses, such as channa or chole (chickpeas), rajma (kidney beans), and lobiya (black-eyed peas) are very common, especially in the northern regions. Channa and moong are also processed into flour (besan).
The most important and frequently used spices and flavourings in Indian cuisine are whole or powdered chilli pepper (mirchi), black mustard seed (sarso), cardamom (elaichi), cumin (jeera), turmeric (haldi), asafoetida (hing), ginger (adrak), coriander (dhania), and garlic (lasoon). One popular spice mix is garam masala, a powder that typically includes five or more dried spices, especially cardamom, cinnamon (dalchini), and clove. Each culinary region has a distinctive garam masala blend - individual chefs may also have their own. Goda masala is a comparable, though sweet, spice mix popular in Maharashtra. Some leaves commonly used for flavouring include bay leaves (tejpat), coriander leaves, fenugreek leaves, and mint leaves. The use of curry leaves and roots for flavouring is typical of Gujarati and South Indian cuisine. Sweet dishes are often seasoned with cardamom, saffron, nutmeg and rose petal essences.

A large variety of recipes have been developed using various mixes of different spices, food

grains and other ingredients in different proportions over the thousands of years. Interestingly, they were not only tasty food items. That they were for sure, but most of the food items were developed also keeping the health aspect in mind and some of the foods were directly used as home made medicine for some specific diseases as they had therapeutic value. The previous generations knew very well the medicinal value of some of the spices or other ingredients and as such made it a point to use that ingredient in some food recipe to add medicinal value in it. This all made Indian cuisine rich in wide variety and taste and also helpful for health.

Current challenge

Unfortunately this rich heritage is slowly fading out without any records of it due to growing popularity of Western food culture. Due to urbanisation, rising city populations, hectic and busy lifestyle, fancy in taste and easy availability many people, especially younger citizens, are shifting their liking towards Western food. There was no harm in having such a type of food occasionally as a variation from the routine taste of the regular food. But, its regularity of consumption has started increasing and since about a decade, Western food had started becoming a part of eating outside the house. Now slowly it has entered our kitchens and thus Chinese noodles, Italian pasta, Spanish pizza, etc. have now become regular cooking items in many homes.

The problem doesn’t stop here. Due to the preference of Westernised food, slowly and steadily it has started replacing our own traditional food from the kitchen. The main problems are the lengthy processing time of traditional food, the presumption, particularly among youngsters, that Western food is tastier than traditional food, though traditional food is always healthier than Western food in most respects, and fashion to eat Western food. People have started forgetting the health aspect of traditional Indian food. Another important issue is that there is no authentic traditional food document which can be referred to for recipes.

India’s rich cultural diversity has reflected in many art forms and also in its food tradition. It has

developed a great heritage of ethnic foods or traditional food across all states. There is a great need to preserve this diversity in food.

What is the solution?

Unity in diversity is an Indian culture. All the traditional food reveals the culture of different places in the country. If one looks at the each of the state it would be seen that every state has some specialty in usage of ingredients, variety of foods and tastes and also health aspect. It has created a rich heritage which was needed to be protected for next generations as they do not have not much understanding of its value yet. Such knowledge is always transferred from one generation to next.
The major concern is that we do not have a record for this unparallel knowledge therefore may not be transferred to future generations and even may not be available for them in near future if not recorded.

To overcome this problem and in the interest of Indian heritage, it was necessary to establish a Central Traditional Food Board (CTFB). CTFB can have braches in each state called as State Traditional Food Board (STFB). These STFB would be located in food technological institutes in each state and they will be engaged in research of traditional foods. This can be called project ‘Parampara’.

STFB can undertake various research objectives like standardisation of local food recipes, documentation of traditional food recipes, nutritional research on traditional foods, health and medicinal aspect of local traditional foods, commercialisation of traditional food, etc. CTFB will co-ordinate with all states and make a centralised database of all research and finally will prepare the combined data on traditional food recipes for India. This would prove to be a single point authentic database.

CTFB should also make funds available for PhD programmes across all states and many young

researchers can carry out research in this space. Once the Central Food Board takes shape, within 2 to 3 years of its establishment CTFB can publish its first document, ‘Indian Traditional Food Recipe Directory’ which will be one of its kind and will represent an authentic guide to Indian Traditional food in all respect. Association of Food Scientists and Technologists India, Nutritional Society of India, IDA and similar associations can be permanent knowledge partners of the CTFB.

Thus from all above data and discussion we can conclude that in a country with a population of 130 million and with 28 states, we need to preserve our tradition of food recipes which is our heritage.

There are unique recipes in each state which are a part and parcel of their respective culture. The time has come to protect and preserve our own traditional foods and also carry out research on all such wonderful recipes so that the traditional knowledge can be preserved.

There is an urgent need to form the Central Traditional Food Board with the objective to protect and preserve traditional food, otherwise the next generation will never have an authentic reference for traditional food recipes and the knowledge of the Indian heritage of more than 5,000 years will be at risk.

Indian Traditional Food Heritages

Sr No	State	Traditional food
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Seafood ,Raw fish& Fruits
2	Andhra Pradesh	Seafood, vegetables, pulses, rice, yogurt, dosa, vad and idli
3	Arunachal Pradesh	Rice, fish, meat and leafy vegetables, boiled rice ca wrapped in leaves, thukpa, Apong or rice beer

4	Assam	Fish, chickens, ducks, pigeons, snails, silkworms, insects, mutton, pork, venison and turtle, Homebre rice beer or rice wine
5	Bihar	Litti chokha, Meatsaalan, Dalpuri, Malpua Balushahi, Khaja, thekua
6	Chandigarh	Paratha, Makki with Sarson da saag, Dal makhani ,C Gappa
7	Chhattisgarh	Rice, liquor brewed from mahuwa flower
8	Delhi	Rajma-chawal, paranthas, kebabs, kachauri, chaat,I
9	Goa	Seafood and meat, Rice, bread and fish
10	Gujarat	Gujarati thali, keri no ras
11	Haryana	kadhi, pakora, besan masala roti, bajra aloo roti, churma, kheer, bathua raita, methi gajar, singri ki sabzi, and tamatar chutney. Lassi, sharbat, and nimbu pani
12	Himachal Pradesh	lentils, broth, rice, vegetables, and bread, sidu, patande, chukh, rajmah and til chutney
13	Jammu and Kashmir	Wazwan, Kashmiri Pandit cuisine
14	Karnataka	Bisi bele bath, Idli, Rava Idli, Mysore Masala Dosa, b bele bath, jolada rotti, badanekai yennegai, Holige, Kadubu, chapati, idli vada, ragi rotti, akki rotti, saar huli, kootu, vangibath, khara bath, kesari bhath, sajjige, chiroti, benne dose, ragi mudde, and uppittu
15	Kerala	Sadya, rice, idli, dosa, appam, idiyappam, puttu, an pathiri, Thalassery biryani, Coconut and sea fish

16	Lakshadweep	Coconut and sea fish, coconut water
17	Madhya Pradesh	Daal Bafla, Wheat and meat, rogan josh, korma, qeema, biryani, pilaf and kebabs, jalebi, ladoos
18	Maharashtra	Bajri, wheat, rice, jowar, vegetables, pulses, and fru form, puran poli, ukdiche modak, batata wada, mas bhat, pav bhaji and wada pav, Kanda poha and aloo poha , Shrikhand, sol kadhi, ‘poli’ or ‘bhakar’, along with ‘varan’ and ‘aamtee’ a panha, a drink made from raw mango
19	Manipur	Black rice, leafy vegetables, fish, Bamboo shoots ar eaten both fresh and fermented, ngari(fermented d fish), mutton. Fruits, kangsoi
20	Meghalaya	Spiced meat is common, from goats, pigs, fowl, duc chickens, and cows, *jadoh*, *ki kpu*, *tung-rymbai*, *mir songa*, *sakkin gata*, and *momo* dumplings Garos ferment rice beer
21	Mizoram	Rice, bai (boiling vegetables spinach, eggplant, bea and other leafy vegetables), *Sawhchiar*
22	Nagaland	Rice, meat, a chutney, a couple of stewed or steam vegetable dishes - flavored with ngari or akhuni. Desserts usually consist of fresh fruits
23	Odisha	Fish and other seafood, such as crab and shrimp, ar very popular, and chicken and mutton, Pakhala, Ani Kanika, Dalma, Khata (Tamato & Oou), Dali (differe types of pulses, Saga (spinach and other green leav and Alu-bharta (mashed potato) along with Pakhala popular dishes (lunch) in rural Odish

24	Puducherry	coconut curry, *tandoori* potato, *soya dosa*, *podanlangkai*, curried vegetables, stuffed cabbage, and baked beans.
25	Punjab	stuffed *paratha* and dairy products, pulsee and bea sprout curry , *makke di roti* and *sarson da saag, Tandoori* food
26	Rajasthan	daal-baati, tarfini, raabdi, Ghevar, bail-gatte, panchkoota, chaavadi, laapsi, kadhi and boondi. Typical snacks include bikaneri bhujia, mirchi bada, Pyaaj Kachori, and Dal Kachori.
27	Sikkim	Dhindo, Daal bhat, Gundruk, Momo, gya thuk, ningr phagshapa, and sel roti
28	Tamil Nadu	Rice, Saapadu, Dosa, idli and ponga, chutney and sambar and seafoods
29	Uttar Pradesh	dal, roti, sabzi, and rice. Pooris and kachoris, Chaat samosa, and pakora, kebabs, dum biryani, Sheer Qorma, Ghevar, Gulab jamun, Kheer, and Ras mala
30	West Bengal	fish, vegetables, pulses, and rice, luchi, Fresh sweetwater fish, Shondesh and Rasgulla

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