

Traditional Practices Followed in Malwani Cuisine: A Note

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Abstract: *Preserving the traditional food and the traditional ways of preparing food is very important in any culture and so is in Malwani cuisine culture. Preparation, sharing, and dispensing of food are important and when we prepare food in the Malwani kitchens, there are meanings behind it and we instill this meaning in every known and unknown person who comes in contact at the dining table. Traditional food is very important for any region and imparting traditional food knowledge from generation to generation helps in increasing the shelf life of the food culture and is a significant way of sustaining the Malwani food culture. This study qualitatively explores how the transfer of traditional food knowledge takes place among the Malwani people and how it is handed over to the younger generation. Further, the study also investigates whether the younger generation practices the knowledge conferred upon them by the older generations the knowledge imitated is all about the ingredients, preparation method of cooking, equipment, cooking skills, ways of food preservation, and specialty foods cooked during festivals. The study has concluded that the transfer of cultural food identity is through communication observation and practical hands-on in the kitchen. Commercialization of food ingredients, convenience foods ready-to-eat food, nuclear families, working time, and lifestyle are a few reasons one finds the younger generation to practice the Malwani cooking skills on a daily basis. This disrupts the continuity of practicing the traditional food preparations and further down the line passing of the Malwani traditional food knowledge to the next generation. The Malwani people are preserving and carrying ahead the traditional Malwani food culture and creating more awareness to bring authenticity from the kitchens of Malwan to kitchens all around the world. The data for this study is collected through interviews. The sample size of 26 mother-daughter duo were interviewed in the local languages Marathi and Malwani and the data was later translated to English. The data was collected in the time frame of two months. The methodology used was qualitative analysis. Cluster sampling was adopted. The mother-daughter pair's native to the Malwan region were the target population for the study. Both the alternate hypotheses for the study were proved according to the data collected i.e. knowledge of traditional Malwani food is transferred from mother to daughter, and there is a significant relationship with the preparation of traditional Malwani food and the younger generations*

Keywords: Malwani Cuisine, Traditional practices, Traditional methods.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cuisine is a unique style of cooking food with different traditions and practices related to different regions and geographical locations. With a variation and uniqueness from region to region. Every region, community, and locality has its unique cuisine and is known by its specific name (Indian food is known as Indian cuisine, Italian food is known as Italian cuisine).

Preserving, and forwarding the food culture of a particular region or community is the main motive of any food culture to keep it alive for years to come. And so is it for the people of the Malwan region. The cuisine of Sindhudurg district is popularly known as Malwani cuisine.

The cooking style or food related to a specific region becomes its cuisine culture or culinary culture. The cuisine culture of any region is a reflection of its geographical, historical, and climatic conditions. The cuisine culture of every region is named after its community, tribe, or the region it is related to.

The district occupies an area of 5,207 km². The name Sindhudurg literally means 'sea fort', the district is named after the Sindhudurg fort built by Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj near Malwan. Sindhudurg district is the southern part of the Konkan coast which is historically famous for its long coastline and safe harbors. Sindhudurg district was earlier a part of Ratnagiri district. For administrative convenience and industrial and agricultural development, Ratnagiri district was divided into Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg with effect from 1 May 1981. The most spoken local language is Malwani or Konkani. As for the literacy rate, most of the people speak Marathi or Hindi as well.

Climate: Sindhudurg district is the southern part of the Konkan coast which is historically famous for its long coastline and safe harbors. Sindhudurg district was earlier a part of Ratnagiri district. For administrative convenience and industrial and agricultural development, Ratnagiri district was divided into Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg with effect from 1 May 1981.

Agricultural and Raw Material Resources: Major Crops of the district are Rice, Coconut, Kokum, Mango, and Cashew. Crop area Irrigated is 21,416 ha. Non-Irrigated is 1, 04,390 ha. And Forest is 38,643 ha. 74% of the total land holding in the district, is held by small and marginal farmers. Rice is the staple food of the region. Different types of rice are cultivated and consumed in this region.

Fruits available: Best, export quality Mangoes are produced in the district. Fruits like Mangoes, Jackfruit, Chikoo (Sapodilla), and Pineapple, etc. are easily available during the season. Karvanda (Bengal currants), Jambhul (Indian plum), Charoli (Cuddapah almond), are also seasonally available and enjoyed a lot in the region.

Apart from this tropical fruit's variety of cucumbers, and squashes are easily available during the season and happily consumed all over the region with a variety of different seasonal fruits and squash dishes.

Vegetables available: Leafy vegetables, squashes, and gourds are cultivated and consumed all over the region apart from fresh vegetables even pulses and different fruits and flowers like jackfruit and banana flower are consumed as vegetables in the region. Locally cultivated Vegetables are also sold in the markets during weekly bazaars.

Seafood: As the region is blessed with rich marine resources the seafood is consumed in abundance and is the specialty of the region. Unlike other regions in Maharashtra Malwan is famous for fresh as well as dried fish. Many fresh fishes like Bangda (Mackerel) Mushi (Sharks), Bombil (Bombay ducks), Paplet (Pomfret), Vaagli (Stingray), etc. are highly consumed. As well as dry fishes like Golma, Bombil, Paplet, Kardi, etc. are also consumed in huge amounts. Local beverages in Sindhudurg district include Taddi (toddy) and Madi (madi).

Types of equipment and Vessels used: There are different and unique equipment, utensils, and vessels used in the Malwani cuisine culture. Many Malwani people all over still prefer to make their own masala for daily use with raw materials. For ages, the chul or chulha (clay stove plastered with cow dung) has been used in the kitchens of Malwan. Every household has a Vhaain (a small hole on the ground in the kitchen plastered from the inside) used to grind a small quantity of thick paste using a stone or wood. Round saucepans are used to prepare curries, rice, etc. Kadhai is used to deep fry. Tava is used for making bhakaris. Modak patra is used to make Modaks, aluvadi, etc. Bhida (thick bottom pans) is a special pan used for making Ghavane or Amboli. Ukhal is used to make powdered masalas. Pata and Varvanta are used to grind fine paste or wet Masalas. Sokatan (Malwani wooden chopping board) is used to cut chicken or fish pieces. Koyta is used to peel coconut and break its shell. Adaalat or Vili is a sharp piece of equipment used to grate coconuts or chop vegetables, onions, cut fruits, etc. instead of a knife. Doules, hath, and jhaara are different spoons used for serving and cooking food.

Cuisine Culture of Malwan Region

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The Tradition and Practices

Over the years, preference for flavors in food has evolved and customs have faded. The old ways of cooking (a pinch of this, a dash of that, or a fistful of whatever) are quietly forgotten. Practicing the traditional food knowledge has come to a standstill. No study has been carried out to know the traditional Malwani foods and the ways of sustaining them same. To fill up this gap by adding more information, the researcher has narrowed down this topic.

Malwani cuisine is one of the best cuisine cultures made with less oil and spices but is very tasty and delicately prepared. This region is blessed with abundant natural resources throughout the year. Rich marine resources are

available as the district is located on the coastline. An ample quantity of rain provides a variety of raw materials. And a variety of tropical fruits are available which are a major part of the Malwani cuisine culture. Malwani food is incomplete without watap (freshly ground coconut, onion, chilies, spices, etc.) paste. The authentic ways of preparing Malwani food make it tastier and richer. The passing of food knowledge from generation to generation is one of the ancient and preferable methods of keeping the food culture alive and increasing the shelf life of the cuisine culture. Other ways to keep the culture alive is through authentic restaurants, food festivals, and various occasions.

In every Malwani household, the day starts with Ukdyta tandlachi pej (thin rice porridge). Seasonally it comes along with fhansachi (jackfruit) bhaji. Vade saguti (komdi vade) is the specialty of many occasions. The amazing style of cooking fish (curries as well as fried fish) is the most preferred Malwani food item. And also, one of the best styles of cooking fish keeping it tender, crisp, and juicy. Even dry fish is a huge part of Malwani fish preparations locally known as Golma (dried prawns) is also a specialty of Malwan.

Few other Malwani dishes are:

Pithi bhaat (pithi is prepared by grinding roasted kulith), Dhondas (made with rice jaggery), Shirvale (rice flour noodles served with sweet coconut milk), Khaprollya (Malwani bread served with coconut milk), Kel fhulachi (banana flower) bhaji, Ghavane (lacy rice flour dosa), Amboli or poli (thick rice flour dosa), Solkadhi (appetizing drink), Olya kajuchi usal (raw cashew-nut curry), Malwani khaja (sweet gram flour sticks dipped in jaggery and ginger syrup), Kadak bundiche laadu, Shevache laadu, etc, Ambyacha rayta (boiled mango curry), Amba poli (mango sweetmeat), Phanas poli (jackfruit sweetmeat), Kaapa/narlachi wadi (coconut sweetmeat), Kharwas, Kelyachi bhaji, Kalya watanyachi usal

Festivals and celebrations in Malwani: Festivals in Sindhudurg are celebrated with great enthusiasm. Ganesh Chaturthi is the most glorious festival for the people of Sindhudurg. Apart from Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussara, Shimga (holi), Mirag (a day celebrated to mark the arrival of the rainy season), etc are also celebrated widely.

Festival and occasion Specialties include:

Tandlachi kheer during Undarpi (second day of Ganesh Chaturthi), Puranpoli during Holi/Shimga, Ukdiche modak during Ganesh Chaturthi, Patolya during Ganesh Chaturthi, Komdi vade on Pachpartavan (the day after the wedding)

Due to modernization and shifting of the locals from one region to another region the traditional Malwani food is left behind. The Chakarmanis (people from the konkan region shifted from one region to another region in search of work and to settle down) come back home to enjoy the delicacies prepared at home due to its richness and authenticity. Many recipes are customized or cut cropped according to convenience, many are forgotten, and many are not prepared making them the lost Malwani food preparations.

This research attempts to save this amazing food culture from the region of Sindhudurg and make people aware of the lost Malwani recipe straight from the kitchens of Sindhudurg.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Traditional Malwani food culture:

(Nair, 2017) Malwani food is an independent combination of Maharashtrian food, Goan food, and food from the western part of Karnataka. From the coast of Malwan comes the amazing cuisine made with fish, fowl, and vegetables but seafood and chicken take a place of pride in Malwani cuisine. What makes it unique is Malwani masala and the abundant use of coconut. It is different from other cuisines because of its liberal use of coconut and the combination of chilies, coriander seeds, kokum, and spices. The food is generally pan-fried, deep-fried, or curry which is simmered. Malwani masala is a combination of 15 to 16 dry spices. There is an equivalent proportion of veg and nonveg dishes. The seafood curries are hot and fiery, but it's irresistible enough to have you wanting yet another mouthful. Mackerel, crabs, and prawns are perennial favorites, fried or cooked with coconut masala paste. Chicken curry, ghavane, amboli, vade, Solkadhi are equally popular dishes. dhondas is the perfect answer to the sweet tooth cravings baked preparation made with cucumber, jaggery, rice, and semolina. Not everyone can come up with a sweet cake made with a combination of rice and cucumber. Khaprolia and raspoli are two sweet variations served with sweet coconut milk.

Traditional food knowledge:

(KWIK, 2012) Traditional food knowledge (TFK) refers to a cultural tradition of sharing food, recipes, and cooking skills and techniques and passing down that collective wisdom through generations. The value of this knowledge is hidden in a global food system offering an abundance of commercial convenience foods. Some young people may learn

at home, others from community members. Citizens of any age may learn about other traditions and food habits in venues where they can exchange knowledge such as within a community garden or kitchen. Knowledge of traditional foods is important for sustaining their development and utilization.

Food knowledge transmission is the process by which a knowledge or skill of cooking that has become a family tradition is passed down or shared among family members and friends. To ensure the continuity of the food tradition, family members especially mothers should take the initiative to attract the young generation to get involved in cooking activities. The significance of food knowledge referring especially to the traditional food dishes as cultural identity can be seen when each culture, ethnic group, or region has specific food traditions and practices.

History, known and unknown dishes

(Bhonde, 2019) Malvani cuisine can be traced back to Malvan, a scenic town in the Sindhudurg district on the west coast of Maharashtra. Bound by the majestic Sahyadri mountains and the Arabian Sea, seafood and chicken are found in abundance in this region, and hence, in the *thali* too. Akshay Deshpande, sous chef at Conrad Pune, adds that seafood dominates this cuisine and is tailored to suit the fishing community. Mackerels, crabs, and prawns are perennial favorites, both as appetizers and mains. The *Bombil* fish or Bombay duck, a hallmark of the cuisine, is prepared by dipping the fish in rice flour and deep-frying. Another popular dish from the Konkan region is *tisrya masala* — a clam preparation with coconut, ginger-garlic paste, and the heat of red chilies. This is eaten with rice *bhakis* or *ghavne* — a netted white pancake made from rice flour. For vegetarians, a classic Malvani dish is *phanasachi bhaji*, which combines jackfruit *bhaji* with freshly ground spices. It is eaten as a side dish or as a stand-alone snack. “Mutton or chicken *sagoti* (Malvani curry), crab curry, *kaleji garam masala* (prepared by marinating liver in Malvani *masala*) are other popular dishes of the Malvani cuisine,” says Chef Nikhil Ganacharya, Executive Chef, of Via Bombay, a restaurant in Mumbai. For instance, Chef Kailash Suryawanshi, who helms the kitchen at Suryawanshi restaurant in Bengaluru, prepares fish curry using *kokum/aamsul* and coconut milk to add sweet and sour flavor to the dish. “The fish preferred in the curry is mackerel and is prepared by combining coriander, dry coconut, ginger-garlic paste, and onions. Malvani cuisine is heavily influenced by the use of coconut in various forms,” he says.

A few hundred kilometers away, Chef Somashekar Shetty from Tinge, a restaurant in Panjim, Goa, uses tamarind to impart a tangy flavor to the prawn curry. “Prawns are available in abundance in Goa, which is why it is in our Malvani *thali*. The prawns are marinated with salt and lemon, and the spices are prepared with tamarind, turmeric, garlic, red chili, and coriander leaves, and ginger in hot oil,” he explains. “The prawn curry combined with tamarind, coconut milk, and red chili makes the dish tangy and spicy,” he adds, rounding off the prawn’s *masala* with a slit chili on top. Another dish that features in his Malvani *thali* is Malvani chicken *sukha*, which has “coriander seeds, dry and fresh coconut, garam masala, red chili, ginger, and turmeric”.

Several sweet dishes define this cuisine — *malpua*, a sweet deep-fried delicacy prepared during Ramzan, *dhondas* or cucumber cake made by baking cucumber and jaggery, and *khaprotli*, a fluffy pancake dipped in yellow sweet juice.

Adoption of ancient food practices

(Mehta, 2017) Food habits have a major role in the rise and the fall of the civilization.

Ancient food practices play a vital role in constructing our health and benefit us in every possible way. The Indian style of eating with hands, not talking while eating, sitting on the floor to eat, early morning breakfast, early dinner, etc, is scientifically and historically proven to be beneficial for human health. It becomes easier to digest the food if all the practices are followed and are followed in the correct way. It has become a necessity for the younger generations to follow the footprints of our ancestors and bring the food practices back to routine life.

Malwani Cuisine: Everyone likes it Hot

(Sushila Narkar, 2014) 70-year-old Sushila Narkar is a bundle of energy as she bustles around in her small house in Mumbai. She is either busy pounding the bright red masala using the traditional mortar and pestle, haranguing with the fish-seller about the freshness of the fish, preparing the marinade for the spicy Bombil Fry, or exhorting her grandson to gulp down Sol Kadi to ease the digestion. It is all in a day’s work for her, and she claims that more than half her waking hours are spent in the kitchen, cleaning, cooking, pounding, grinding, and then repeating the same pattern the next day. What’s more, she won’t have it any other way, and she proudly proclaims that she has eaten all of five times in a

restaurant in her lifetime. Ask her why, and she smiles, “Because Malvani cuisine is the best in the world. And once you’ve tasted it, no other food can ever entice you.” What is it about Malvani cuisine that amasses diehard fans with every bite? Is it the crunchiness of the fried fish? Or is it the fieriness of its masala? Renaissance Mumbai Convention Center Hotel recently organized a Maharashtrian food festival featuring Malvani food and we decided to head there to understand the lucre of this coastal cuisine. Malvan is a picturesque town situated in the valleys of Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra and Malvani cuisine derives its name from this town’s local food. Malvan has the majestic Sahyadri Mountains looking down upon it on one side and the tempestuous Arabian Sea lapping its shores on the other side. This is why seafood and chicken take pride of place in any Malvani meal, since both are available in abundance in this region. The interesting thing about Malvani cuisine is that it’s an amalgamation of several cooking styles. Some food writers trace its roots to the early 16th century when fisher folk settled along the coastal belts of what is now Maharashtra, Goa and parts of northern Karnataka, reveals Chef Sandeep Pande, Executive Chef of Renaissance Mumbai Convention Center Mumbai. Though the Maharashtrian variant of Malvani food is heavily inclined towards meat, certain factions within it, like the Konkanastha Brahmin preparations, are entirely vegetarian and comparatively bland in nature. Unsurprisingly, in its present avatar the cuisine imbibes the vinegary pungency of Goan food, the liberal use of freshly grated coconut from the Karwar belt as well as the sweet-and-sour combination of the Saraswat Goud community. There are subtle differences in Malvani food cooked along the entire western and southern belts of Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. For instance, kokum imparts tanginess in the Maharashtrian cuisine while the southern towns prefer using tamarind for the same effect. Chef Sandeep Pande, Executive Chef, Renaissance Convention Center, Mumbai, Malvani cuisine “It is the technique of grinding the masalas with fresh coconut or coconut milk that gives Malvani cuisine that edge and oomph” – Chef Sandeep Pande, Executive Chef of Renaissance Mumbai Convention Center Mumbai. Condiments like triphala, tamarind, kokum, red Konkan chillies, peppercorns, mace, cardamom and coriander lend a fiery punch to the masalas that are fundamental to the cooking style. “However, it is the technique of grinding these masalas with fresh coconut or coconut milk that gives this cuisine that edge and oomph,” adds Chef Sandeep, who along with his team visited many places in Maharashtra to understand more about the cuisine while planning the recently concluded Maharashtrian food festival at his hotel. Despite this varied lineage, Malvani fare has come into its own. What is ironic is that though every taste of dishes like the Chimbori Masala or crab masala might lead one to believe that the preparation is complex, it is actually quite simple in nature. Proteins like fish and chicken are often marinated in a simple marinade of salt, lime juice, garlic-garlic paste, red chili paste, and turmeric; later coated in a mixture of rice flour and semolina before being deep or shallow-fried. It is unfortunate that there are not many standalone restaurants outside of Maharashtrian and Goan towns that offer Malvani food. Could this be because not many know about this wonderfully simple yet gastronomically complex cuisine? We do hope this status quo changes, and soon, because as Sushila Narkar believes, once you taste Malvani food, you will keep coming back for more.

III. CONCLUSION

Food knowledge transmission is the process by which a knowledge or skill of cooking that has become a family tradition is passed down or shared among family members and friends. To ensure the continuity of the food tradition, family members especially mothers should take the initiative to attract the young generation to get involved in cooking activities. The significance of food knowledge referring especially to the traditional food dishes as cultural identity can be seen when each culture, ethnic group, or region has specific food traditions and practices. The transmission of traditional Malwani food is still happening. The speed of transmission has somewhat reduced as well the traditional dishes are losing their authenticity. Many Malwani people are still following the traditional food practices the ingredients or methods are replaced or missed out but they still try to maintain the authenticity of the food. The older generations are trying their best to incorporate the tradition into the minds of the younger generations. The ways of sustaining the traditional Malwani cuisine are followed by many. The process the ways have changed but the transfer of knowledge is still happening. Both the alternate hypotheses for the research are proved to be true according to the data collected and the objectives are accomplished.

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