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Cookbook Chronicles: Documenting Cooking in Hindu Households

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Cookbook Chronicles: Documenting cooking in Hindu households[1]

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Abstract

This paper explores the socio-cultural and historical significance of cookbooks as windows into the culinary, domestic, and societal practices of their time. Positioned at the crossroads of social and cultural history, it examines Hindi cookbooks from the early 20th century and situates their culinary directives within the broader context of India's ancient Hindu gastronomic traditions. Section I provides a historical survey of Indian cooking, drawing from ancient texts and medieval manuscripts to unravel the symbolic meanings of food in Hinduism, particularly within the Ayurvedic framework. It incorporates interdisciplinary perspectives to reveal how food intersects with material, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. Section II delves into select medieval manuscripts preserved in the libraries of the princely states, offering insights into early culinary science before the Islamic conquest. Section III analyses early 20th-century printed Hindi cookbooks, highlighting how they framed cooking within discourses of tradition, religiosity, colonialism, and nationalism. These texts articulated visions of selfhood, family, and nationhood through culinary practices. Ultimately, the paper underscores cookbooks as both historical and normative texts that not only document food practices but also shape cultural identity and values, offering a taste of the terroir and the times in which they were created.

Key words: Food, history, vegetarianism, non-vegetarianism, cookbook, kitchen, dietetics, ayurveda.

[1] This paper is a revised version of the public lecture delivered at PMML, New Delhi on 23 November 2022.

Cookbooks are social texts that encapsulate within their recipes important pointers towards the origins and development of the ingredients, kitchen equipment, techniques of cookery, the presentation of food and prevailing dining etiquettes. As texts that are culturally and temporally contextual, they serve as an effective lens for understanding the significance attached to these activities in the societies that produce them. Cookbooks are like windows, capable of allowing a glimpse both at the inside and the outside; they inform about the significance of the food to the cook as well as to those who consume it and how cooking is done and what the final product means. As R.S. Khare noted, food is both nutrition and culture and never merely one.[2] Situated at the intersections of social and cultural history, this paper will look at some important Hindi cookbooks published in the first half of the nineteenth century to reflect how their authors understood domesticity, society and culture in north India. It will also aim to contextualise their culinary injunctions through a long overview of the prescriptions and proscriptions in the ancient Hindu canon.

Section I will briefly survey the history of cooking in India, by looking at food references in ancient texts and medieval cookbooks that have survived to home in on meanings of food in Hindu gastronomy. It will engage interdisciplinary insights from the work of pioneering historians and anthropologists of Hindu food studies, like P.K. Gode, Om Prakash, K.T. Achaya, R.S. Khare, Arjun Appadurai and Patrick Olivelle. Whereas Gode, Prakash and Achaya were pioneers in archiving the historical Sanskrit archive on food, Khare, Appadurai and Olivelle have provided sociological and anthropological insights, placing these historical food references in context. Their work demonstrates that food simultaneously references multiple symbolic systems to convey a combination of material, moral, social, and spiritual messages. One of the major referents for Hindu cooking has been the classical tradition of Ayurveda, and this section will provide an outline of food in the Ayurvedic system.

Section II will explore extant Indian cookbooks 12-19th century, looking at manuscripts unearthed in various libraries and private collections of the princely states, especially through the efforts of linguists and scholars like Gode. Mostly in Sanskrit, these manuscripts are the earliest written documentation of the culinary world prior to the Islamic conquest of India.

[2] R.S. Khare, 'Food as Nutrition and Culture: Notes Towards an Anthropological Methodology', *Social Science Information*, Vol. 19, Issue 3, June 1980, pp. 519–542.

Here, we get a glimpse both into the world of eating, and the science of cuisine in early medieval India.

Section III will analyse a representative selection of Hindi cookbooks published in the early decades of the twentieth century, taking the story forward from manuscript to print, paying special attention to how they re-embedded cooking in a discourse of text, tradition and religiosity. These cookbooks located the formation of the self, family, community and nation in culinary terms, especially as they were being written at the intersection of colonialism and nationalism, of tradition and modernity.

Across the ages, the culinary philosophies embedded in cookbooks often read like manifestos: they are not only about what people eat, they are also about what people should be eating. They are not simply documenting the food culture around them. They are also cultural visions of the community, religion and the nation's culinary profile. Overall, they do significantly more than just guide the cooking of a recipe. Cookbooks are simultaneously historical texts which record, environmental practices and food availability, as well as important everyday texts that communicate contemporary societal norms and reflect the socio-cultural milieu in which they were created. In the pages of these cookbooks, we find both taste and terroir.

I. Ancient Gastronomic References

Contemporary research in food archaeology has recreated what ancient people ate, employing various methods such as starch grain analysis, lipid residue analysis, dental calculus analysis, studying microfossils, phytoliths, pollen and starch. Complimenting the focus on crop production and agricultural variability, this has demonstrated that apart from meat, the people of the Indus Valley Civilisation grew and ate a variety of cereals and pulses. Archaeological evidence shows the cultivation of pea (*matar*), chickpea (*chana*), pigeon pea (*tur/arhar*), horse gram (*chana dal*) and green gram (*moong*). "To judge from the quantity of bones left behind, animal foods were consumed in abundance: beef, buffalo, mutton, turtles, tortoises, gharials, and river and sea fish".[3] Further, starch grain analysis and lipid residues on various surfaces such as pottery, dental calculus and animal remains have revealed the first direct archaeological evidence of cooked ginger and turmeric, indicating that the Harappans were eating food flavoured with these spices by the second half of the third millennium BC.[4] Besides, u-shaped

[3] K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, Oxford University Press, 1994.
[4] Arunima Kashyap and Steve Weber, 'Harappan Plant Use Revealed by Starch Grains from Farmana, India.' *Antiquity* 84(326): Project Gallery. http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/kashyap326. Karen Bescherer Metheny and Mary C. Beaudry (ed), *Archaeology of Food: An Encyclopedia*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Akshyeta

stoves (*chulha*), large storage jars and flat metal and clay girdles (resembling *tava)* have been found in several Harappan sites, suggesting that the boiling of rice and barley and the preparation of the baked chapati may have been known.[5]

These archaeological inquiries on food complement the central historical and social position of food in ancient Indian texts. The Vedic civilisation was pastoral, with sacrificial rituals that abounded with analogies of milk and honey. The *panchamrita* (or its Sanskrit version *amrita*) is conceived as the "elixir of immortality," the most precious gift obtained from the gods' churning of the primaeval ocean.[6] A prayer from the *Yajurveda*, composed at around 800 BC, links prosperity with availability of food:

> May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, milk, sap, ghee, honey, eating and drinking at the common table, ploughing, rains conquest, victory, wealth, riches. May for me prosper, through thorough sacrifice, low-grade food, freedom from hunger, rice, rarely, sesame, kidney beans, vetches, wheat, lentils, millets, panicum grains and wild rice; May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, trees, plants, that grow in ploughed land and that which grow in unploughed lands.[7]

The Rigveda mentions only barley (*yava*), and not rice and wheat. From the Yajurveda onwards, rice, wheat barley and pulses are common, from the Sutra period (800-350 BC, there is a reference to thin and thick barley gruels (*yavasu*), as well as pearl barley boiled in milk (*yavaka)*. Rice becomes the major staple and was eaten boiled in water (odana) or milk, or with curds, honey or meat (*mansaudana*).[8] Vegetables like the lotus stem, cucumber, bitter and bottle guard are mentioned in the Rigveda. Fruits like *khajur*, *ber* and *bel* are mentioned in the Yajurveda, and the mango (*aam*) appears in Shatpatha Brahmana dating around 1000 BC. Buddhist and Jain literature mentions coconuts, bananas, jackfruits, grapes and several spices. Texts like Arthasastra from around 300 BC mention *rajdana* and grapes.[9] Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* dated between the 6th to 4th centuries BC provides evidence for reconstructing an important chapter on the history of food and drinks in ancient India. Food is called *anna*, and the eater of food, *annada*. The word *bhakta* in the *Ashtadhyayi* is interpreted in two different ways, the first one of food and the second one as boiled rice. In epic literatures like the Ramayana and the

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Suryanarayan, Miriam Cubas, Oliver E. Craig, Carl P. Heron, Vasant S. Shinde, Ravindra N. Singh, Tamsin C. O'Connell, Cameron A. Petrie, 'Lipid residues in pottery from the Indus Civilisation in northwest India,' *Journal of Archaeological Science*, Volume 125, 2021,https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2020.105291.

[5] K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food*: *A Historical Companion*, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 15–20.

[6] Manuel Morene, 'Pancamirtam: God's Washings as Food,' *The Eternal Food – Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*, R.S. Khare (ed), Suny Press, 1992, pp. 147–178.

[7] K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food*, p. 27.

[8] Om Prakash, *Food and Drink in Ancient India*, Munshilal Manoharlal, Delhi, 1981, pp. 7–57.

[9] K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food*, pp. 27–40.

Mahabharata, there is a veritable list of forest fruits and vegetables like *suran* (yam) sweet potato (*pindaluka*), long *bottle* gourd (*Kalasaka*, *lauki*), bamboo leaves etc. In terms of cooking techniques, the Rigveda mentions frying in ghee (*ghrtavantam*). The Atharvaveda has mentioned 40 ways of frying, with sesame oil, and especially using mustard oil. Dharmasutras (600─300 BCE) mention using ghee for frying. The Arthasastra also refers to the processes "of pounding, fraying, reducing to flour, frying or drying of different grains, though Sushrutawarns against fried foods in his treatise.[10]

Meat is mentioned as early as the Rigveda, and the sacrificial fire is termed the eater of horses, oxen, buffaloes, sheep and goats, as understandable for a pastoral society.[11] The meat was usually roasted on spits, or boiled in pots; rice and meat together were relished in Upanishads. Many words used for fishermen in Yajurveda indicate the use of fish in the diet. Consumption of consecrated meat marked rituals like annaprashan, marriage and shradha.[12] Food offered to the god (*naivédya*) changes into godly leftovers, to be consumed as consecrated or transvalued food (*prasad*) by the believers.

Composed around the 1st century CE, the *Manusmriti*, or *Manav Dharmashastra*s, stands as a foundational text in shaping Hindu dietary laws and attitudes toward food. It reflects ancient perspectives on ritual purity, social conduct, and ethical eating, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding dietary choices in the context of religious and societal obligations. This pivotal work not only influences how food is viewed in terms of purity and moral consequence but also underscores the intersection of law, spirituality, and social norms in ancient India. The great law-giver Manu argued that in this world, life inherently consumes life; it is simply the way of nature, and the act of slaughter cannot be entirely avoided. However, refraining from slaughter is considered the more virtuous path. This perspective leads to the debate between vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism.

Manu's discourse exhibits two distinct perspectives: one legal and the other moral, which together explain the seemingly contradictory stances in his treatment of meat consumption. In Chapter 5, verses 4–26, of the *Manav Dharmashastra*, Manu addresses the pragmatic, traditional legal framework, taking meat-eating as a given and laying out specific rules for permitted and prohibited animals. This reflects the ritualistic and societal norms of the time.

[10] P.K. Gode, 'Studies in History of Indian Dietetics —Some References to the Use of Fried Grains in Indian Diet between B. C. 500 and A. D. 1900,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 29, No. ¼, 1948, pp. 43–63.
[11] K.T. Achaya, *Indian.Food*, pp. 53-57.
[12] Om Prakash, *Food and Drink*, pp. 56-57..

However, this practical approach is followed by a moral critique of meat consumption in verses 27–55, emphasizing its karmic consequences and the ethical superiority of abstinence. Here, Manu introduces a reflective, moral voice aligned with the emerging ideals of vegetarianism. The concluding verse of this section (5.56) reconciles these perspectives by acknowledging that meat-eating, drinking, and sexual activity are natural behaviours; however, it elevates abstinence as a path to spiritual rewards.[13] This duality underscores Manu's effort to provide guidance for varying levels of moral and spiritual aspiration: one accommodating traditional practices and another promoting a higher ethical ideal.

Manu also points to the presence of meat during rituals of ancestral offerings like *shradha*. In chapter 3, verses 267–72, we find meat is presumed as an accepted part of these rites. It is evident that the ethics of vegetarianism and non-injury was gaining ground during this time, which accounts for the strong condemnation of killing and eating meat outside very restrictive parameters established by the needs of the Vedic sacrifice.[14]

The composition of the epics occurred contemporaneously with the creation of the Manusmriti, suggesting that both sets of texts emerged from the same historical and cultural milieu. Cooks and favoured foods are frequently mentioned in the epics, notably in the side tales and digressions in the Mahabharata. Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers, is renowned for his immense appetite and culinary skill. During their incognito exile, Bhima disguised himself as a cook at King Virata's court and impressed the king with his cooking.[15] Similarly, the Nishad King Nala, who loses his kingdom in a game of dice and is separated from his wife, survives by becoming the charioteer and cook for the king of Ayodhya. He is reunited with his wife Damayanti when she recognizes him by the taste and flavour of his cooking.[16] King Nala is credited with the authorship of the *Pakdarpanam* (Mirror of Cooking) which is continuously referred to as the master text in Indian culinary tradition.

I. (i) Ayurvedic Dietetics

Indian pharmacology and Ayurvedic dietetics are intimately related. Ayurveda, derived from the Sanskrit words *ayus* (longevity) and *veda* (knowledge), are often interpreted as the 'science

[13] Patrick Olivelle, Suman Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 31–32, 278–280 and 558–568.
[14] Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law,* p. 279.
[15] Alf Hiltebeitel, 'Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadi'. *History of Religions, 20(1/2),* 1980, pp.147–174. doi:10.1086/462866.
[16] Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, 'Nala: The Life of a Story,' *Damayanti and Nala: The Many Lives of a Story*, Susan Wadley (ed), Chronicle Books, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 1–37.

of longevity' or the 'science of life.' It encompasses a comprehensive empirical healing system. The Ayurvedic medical tradition boasts a history of over 2000 years, with roots in earlier periods of Indian medicine and texts dating back to the Atharva-Veda around 1000 BC. In the Atharva-Veda, Ayurveda is considered an *upaveda*, a secondary Veda, placing medical practice at the heart of Vedic thought.[17] Kenneth Zysk has suggested that the foundational elements of Ayurvedic theory and practice originated from the heterodox religious traditions of ancient Indian wandering ascetics and were only later integrated into the Vedic canon.[18] Systematic medical theory began to be articulated in early Buddhist texts, where the concept that disease arises from an imbalance of humoral substances was first explicitly stated, a notion that would become central to Indian medical theory.

The classical era of Ayurveda begins with the medical treatise *Charakasamhita*, dating to around the first century CE, though it most probably had earlier origins. *Charakasamhita* divided medicine into eight branches (*ashtanga*), a division still broadly followed today. The *Susrutasamhita*, completed in the third century CE, is notable for its detailed information on surgical operations. In the early seventh century, Vagbhatta composed the *Astanga Hridaya Samhita*, synthesizing the knowledge of Charaka and Susruta into a cohesive system.[19]

The codification of Ayurveda in the Sanskritic canon as *upaveda* allowed it to transcend Brahmanic orthodoxy. The parallel development of Ayurveda as a *practice* has been equally significant. Ayurveda's Indian pharmacology is based on five essential concepts: *rasa* (taste), *vipaka* (post-digestive taste), *guna* (attributes), *virya* (potency), and *prabhava* (specific action).[20] This allowed Ayurveda to straddle both the priestly and the common worlds. It was at once the domain of ritualists as that of practitioners. Although practitioners' work with the human and animal body excluded them from proper Brahmanic status, the practical value of their knowledge led to its codification in Sanskrit. This elevated their cultural status, even if it wasn't reflected in the formal social hierarchy. This duality forms the basis for distinguishing between Ayurvedacharyas, trained in canonical literature, and vaids, who dispensed dietary advice and domestic medicine.

I. (ii) Hindu Gastro-semantics

[17] Rachel Berger, *Ayurveda made Modern*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
[18] Kenneth Zysk, *Asceticism and healing in Ancient India*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
[19] Dagmar Benner, 'Healing and Medicine in Ayurveda and South Asia' *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Lindsay Jones (ed.), 2nd Ed., MacMillan, New York, 2005, pp. 3852–3858.
[20] B.V. Subbarayappa, 'The Roots of Ancient Medicine: An Historical Outline,' *Journal of Biosciences*, Vol. 26, No. 2, June 2001, pp. 135–144.

In ancient Hinduism, food integrated ecological, economic, nutritional, and cosmological aspects. The sacred texts asserted that "food comes from God and life comes from food," highlighting the unbroken continuity linking God, the five primordial elements, plants, food, and all life. Thus, God, food, and life form a Hindu cosmological triangle.[21] Classical Hindu thought considers food to have both observable (gross) and invisible (subtle) properties so that when it crosses the bodily boundary and gets absorbed, its effects are both nutritional and social. To describe this intricate web of meanings, Khare coined the term "gastro-semantics," referring to the symbolism and communication in the cultural language of food, and how it connects the worldly with the other-worldly.[22] Thus, food becomes a subject of moral reflection and regulation, rather than just sustenance. While its handling involves practical, even monetary, transactions, its deeper significance lies in its "morally just (*dharmasangata*) availability to all creatures, and within the entire creation."[23] Judged through this prism, the dharma-based ideas of justice, food becomes a moral and legal "text," where different interpretations of dharma, rights, obligations, personal dilemmas, and practical priorities interact and sometimes conflict. This makes food a focal point for exploring ethical and legal challenges in both personal and collective life. Indeed both inclusion in a community as well as exclusion from it can be referenced through food in Hindu culinary cosmology.

In the Vedas, anna (food) is often depicted as the life-sustaining essence of the universe, essential for physical survival and strength, synonymous with life itself[24]. The Rigveda's *Annastuti* praises food for providing strength, sustaining life, and enabling courage. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa describes food as a reciprocal flow and a sacred medium between the earthly realm and the beyond through sacrifices. Life and death rituals, from *annaprashan* to *shraddha*, are performed through food and feast. Numerous Vedic verses associate food strongly with wealth and power. Deities are frequently invoked as bestowers of food, emphasizing the importance of hospitality, encapsulated in the saying "the guest is god" (*atithi devo bhava*). By the later Vedic period, in response to Jain and Buddhist critiques of sacrificial violence, the Upaniṣads emphasized non-violence (*ahimsa*), shifting towards a metaphorical

[21] Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upanishads*, Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, New York and Evanston, 1963. pp. 266–267.
[22] R.S. Khare, 'Food with the Saints: An Aspect of Hindu Gastro-semantics,' *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992.
[23] R.S. Khare, *The Eternal Food*, p. 17.
[24] Brian K. Smith, 'Eaters, Food, and Social Hierarchy in Ancient India: A Dietary Guide to a Revolution of Values,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 58, no. 2 (1990), pp. 177–205.

understanding of food in religious practice. Ritually consecrated food, or prasad, is the leftovers of these divine meals providing humans with a point of contact with the divine.

Food issues play a central role in both the legal literature of the Dharmasastras and the everyday lives of people. These include rules about what can be consumed, how it should be prepared, when and in what quantities it should be eaten, from whom one can accept food, and with whom one can share meals. The Bhagavad Gita illustrates the interdependence of all beings regarding food. It explains that humans and sacrifice were created together, with humans sustaining the gods through sacrifice, and the gods providing rain that produces food. "From food do beings derive, food derives from rain, and rain derives from sacrifice."[25] The interdependence of all beings is expressed in this socio-cosmic food transaction. The cosmos represents a giant food cycle.[26] Thus, food is understood both materially as a nutrient for remaining alive, and culturally as a principle of cosmological creation. These two aspects of food — bodily nutrition and cultural construct — are inextricably intertwined.[27] In orthodox Hindu contexts, commensal regulations are intricate, covering food preparation, serving, and consumption. These rules define dining groups, designate providers and recipients of food, and specify permissible and forbidden foods. These regulations are context-sensitive and further nuanced by factors like marital ties, familial hierarchy, caste, gender, and professional standing.[28]

It is to be noted that this ancient Indian cosmological understanding of food has always interacted with historical, sectarian, and regional differences in food habits and symbolism. Sanskritist Patrick Olivelle notes that it is difficult to identify a singular, consistent food ideology universally classified as 'Hindu' due to variations across periods, regions, and sects.[29] The relationship between food and religion is a dynamic, lived activity shaped by tradition and adaptation. Brian K. Smith also argues that the Vedic classification of reality into 'eaters and food' reflects a practical observation of a competitive world with power imbalances, rather than a metaphysical concept. Smith observes that changes in food metaphors, such as an increased emphasis on purity rather than power, and the rise of vegetarianism during the late

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[25] अन्नाद्भवन्तिभूतानिपर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः। यज्ञाद्भवतिपर्जन्योयज्ञःकर्मसमुद्भवः॥ Bhagwat Gita, Chapter 3, verse 14. https://www.gitasupersite.iitk.ac.in/srimad?htrskd=1&httyn=1&htshg=1&scsh=1&choos=&&language=dv&field_chapter_value=3&field_nsutra_value=14.

[26] Patrick Olivelle, *Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions*, Anthem Press, 2011, pp. 71–89.

[27] Patrick Olivelle, 'Food in India,' *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 3, September 1995, pp. 367–380.

[28] R.S. Khare ed. *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*. Albany, New York, State University of New York, 1992, pp. 27–52.

[29] Patrick Olivelle, *Food in India*, op cit.

Vedic period around 500 BC coincided with the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism, and marked the rising significance of asceticism in the societal landscape.[30]

Anthropological and sociological studies of the Hindu meal took on conceptual rigour with the works of Arjun Appadurai and R.S. Khare. If Khare coined the term 'gastro-semantics,' Appadurai concentrated on 'gastro-politics' to focus on the social interactions involving food in three distinct realms: the sacred spaces like temples where it is offered through acts of worship, in large public gatherings like weddings that emphasize the obligations of hosting and communal dining, and lastly within households, where food serves as both a social and domestic currency, establishing symbolic hierarchies that assign roles based on gender, age, and kinship. The concept of commensality, which includes the 'rituals of nation-making,' is integral to these observations.[31] R.S. Khare grounded his philosophical understanding of food in its domestic dimension.[32] In his formulation, the ethical foundation of the Indian meal lay within the customary practices of domestic eating and nourishment. The domestic hearth faces numerous challenges, including fluctuations in income, family size, interpersonal dynamics, personal health, and moral choices. Despite these, it strives to uphold the ideal of providing feasible and acceptable meals for the household daily. It is within the domestic hearth that new ideas of taste, sufficiency, satisfaction, and survival must be negotiated. We will encounter this domestication of the culinary in the third section.

II. Early Medieval Compilations: The Food of the Royalty

Indian Cookbooks, 12- 19th Century

Since the study of ancient Indian food has been mostly textual, it has been limited to discussions on dietary restrictions, prohibitions, purification rituals, and its role as medicine. Anthropologists have noted that there was more investment in what could be eaten, and what should not be (*bhakshya-abhakshya*) and with commensality (with whom to eat and not) rather than in cooking and recipes.

However references to Ayurvedic preparations in the *Sastra* literature have been widely prevalent, and we find the mention of ancient treatises like *Nalpaak, Bheempaak, Seetapak, Krishnapaak* as well as relatively modern ones like *Bhojpak, Veerapak, Paksudhkar*,

[30] Brian K Smith, 'Eaters, Food and Social Hierarchy in Ancient India: A dietary guide to a revolution in values', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 58, no. 2, 1990, pp. 177–205.
[31] Arjun Appadurai, 'Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia,' *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 8, No.3, 1981, p. 507.
[32] R.S. Khare, *Hindu Hearth and Home*, IIAS 1976; *Culture and Reality: Essays on the Hindu system of Managing Foods*, IIAS, 1976.

Ruchibandhu, *Ratnmala Pakshekhar* and *Paktaranga* in various texts from 1900 onwards. Most of these have been lost, or at least they have not been traced yet. These manuscripts were assiduously searched for by the antiquarians, linguists and cultural historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Among the most prolific of these scholars was Prof P.K. Gode, the first curator of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, who contributed articles on the origins of unique Indian food items like almond, *tambul*, tobacco, gram, *jalebi* and figs. Outside India, G. Jan Meulenbeld embarked on a gargantuan enterprise to document Indian materia medica, and listed more than 32 Sanskrit cooking books (*pākaśāstra*).[33] These works detail the Hindu gastronomic world before the influence of Persian and British cooking. They also allow us to situate food in a historical archive that has only been scantily explored. A set of texts from medieval India provide opportunity to pick up the trail of cuisine and food in the Indian subcontinent.

Manuscript sources on food from the first millennium are difficult to find in India, as elsewhere. Less than a dozen recipe compendiums commissioned by the kings, princes and feudal elites are extant today. These survived precisely because they originated in the courts of kings and elites.

In the early medieval period, South India's regional kingdoms like the Cholas, the Chalukyas, Rastrakutas and the Hoysalas thrived as hubs of cultural and political development, with both kings and temples playing pivotal roles in shaping regional identities. These ambitious rulers, seeking to consolidate power and rally their vassal chiefs, aligned with the rising Bhakti movement devoted to Shiva. They promoted Sanskrit literary traditions and initiated large-scale temple construction, establishing some of the earliest surviving temples in the subcontinent. By the mid-eighth century, their strategic efforts elevated them to the centre of a vast network of vassal rulers, trade hubs, and pilgrimage sites, dominating the Deccan plateau and India’s western coast. Literature flourished under generous royal patronage, reflecting the deep connection between political authority and cultural expression.

An ancient clan, the Cholas rose to prominence in the 9th century, under Vijayalaya Chola who ruled in the locality of Uraiyur in the Tiruchirapalli region of Tamil Nadu in the mid- 9th century. The period of their rise and consolidation was primarily in the 11th century, with the illustrious kings such as Rajaraja I and Rajendra I. The Chalukya kings of Kalyana (974–1190)

[33] G. Jan Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, Volume II A, Text, Groningen, Egbert Forsten, 2000, pp. 416–17.

emerged as the principal rivals of the Cholas for control of the Deccan plateau. Also known as the Kalyani Chalukyas, they ruled from Kalyani, and the western Deccan until the middle of the 12th century. These dynasties were imperial in their ambition, subjugating Indian kingdoms along with aggressive naval expeditions into Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and China. Prosperity gained through this commercial activity paid for cultural efflorescence.

The Tamil Bhakti movement, flourishing between the 6th and 9th centuries CE, firmly established the worship of Brahmanical deities like Shiva and Vishnu. These traditions, celebrated in Sanskrit Purāṇas were localised by Tamil Bhakti saints who used the Tamil language for expression and identified regional cult sites as sacred to these deities.[34] During the Chola period, temples dedicated to these Purāṇic deities were constructed, expanded, and renovated, seeking legitimacy from the Bhakti tradition. The Chola era saw the rise of monumental "cathedral" temple architecture, such as the Shiva temples at Tanjavur and Gangaikonda cholapuram. The Chalukyas too symbolically entrusted sovereignty over royal territory to a patron deity, typically a form of Shiva or Vishnu, with the king portrayed as the deity's devoted servant. To honour this divine authority, the king supported Brahmin priests to perform rituals and ceremonies on behalf of the deity and financed the construction of grand temples that enshrined the deity's image, reflecting the cosmic and spiritual legitimacy of his rule.

As part of their propaganda projects, the Chalukya kings lavished patronage on a new 'Puranic' form of Hinduism that focused on pilgrimages and on ritual worship at temples built by kings.[35] The Chalukya emperors adapted North Indian Sanskritic political ideas to the Deccan, sparking a wave of Sanskrit literary production in southern India. The Hoysalas patronised Jainism, and are identified with the golden age of Jainism in the region. Notably, temples were often named after kings, symbolizing an ideological link between the ruler and the deity, as seen in Rajarajesvaram (Brihadeswarar Temple) built by Rajaraja I. This also facilitated the assimilation of local gods into Brahmanical traditions, integrating them through Sanskritised Tamil and Telegu liturgies, rituals, and patronage to Brahmanas, strengthening the connection between regional and pan-Indian religious practices. As the region's cities and courts grew wealthier, their aesthetic religious, and poetic ideas enriched the intellectual culture of Sanskrit and its cultural ideal, contributing to a vast body of texts on subjects ranging from grammar to architecture to political theory. It also played significant role in shaping South Indian food and

[34] R. Mahalakshmi, *The Making of the Goddess: Korravai-Durga in the Tamil Traditions,* Delhi, Penguin, 2011.
[35] Anirudh Kanisetti, *Lords of the Deccan: Southern India from the Chalukyas to the Cholas*, Juggernaut, 2022.

culture, leaving a profound legacy in cuisine, art, and traditions, visible in some extant representative culinary manuscripts.

A concise summary of some of these culinary works is presented below.

II. (i) Lokopakara: Chavundaraya II 11th Century

A century before the advent of cookbook authorship in medieval Europe, the *Lokopakara*, translating to 'For the Benefit of the People,' emerged as a pioneering text. Composed in 1025 AD in the Kannada language by Chavundaraya II,[36] it stands as a testament to the intellectual milieu fostered by King Jayasimha II (1015–1042 AD), who patronized a multitude of scholars and poets.[37] Drawing upon earlier Sanskrit treatises such as Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita*, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Brihat Jataka*, the *Lokopakara* offers a window into the culinary practices prevalent in Karnataka during the eleventh century. Indeed it has been called the "a vade mecum of everyday life for commoners and describes topics such as astrology, portents, vastu (architecture), water-divining, vrikshavuneda (the science of plant life), perfumery, cookery, veterinary medicine, etc."[38]

The first printed edition of *Lokopakaram* was translated by Pandit H. Shesh Iyengar, retired lecturer of Kannada at the Madras University in 1950. This exercise was undertaken by the Government of Madras in 1948, in a project to acquire and publish various manuscripts in Indian Languages on subjects like philosophy, science and medicine. The manuscripts were sourced from the Saraswati Serfoji Mahal Library in Tanjore, and were mostly single extant copies of the texts. The *Lokopakara* manuscript was in Halagannada (old Kannada) dialect and bore the number D. No. 2147, comprising 407 pages of 20 lines each.[39] The main text consisted of twelve chapters covering various topics relevant to the common man. It is clear that though the content was not entirely original, it was based on earlier Sanskrit texts. Most likely, Chavundaraya II compiled this practical knowledge and translated it into old Kannada, the

[36] Chavundaraya II, the author of *Lokopakara*, is distinguished from Chavundaraya I, an earlier figure who served as a minister, Commander-in-Chief, and writer in the Ganga court. Chavundaraya I is renowned for commissioning the iconic *Gommateshwara* statue at Shravanabelagola around 980 CE. Our Chavundaraya II was a Kannada Jain poet, living about AD 1025 Cf. K.T. Achaya, 1994: 118, 120 and 250); Cf. Y L Nene, *Glimpses of the Agricultural Heritage of India*, Asian Agri-History Foundation, 2007.

[37] Jayasimha II, also known as Jayasimha Jagadekamalla, was one of the significant kings of the early Western Chalukyan period who reigned from 1015 to 1042 CE. The Chalukyas under Jayasimha II had ongoing conflicts with the Cholas, who were expanding under Rajendra Chola I during this period. These battles were part of the larger Chalukya-Chola rivalry for supremacy over South India.

[38] Y.L. Nene, *Glimpses of the Agricultural Heritage of India*, Asian Agri-History Foundation, 2007, P. 141.

[39] H. Sesha Iyengar, *Lokopkaram: Critically edited with Introduction*, Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, 1950.

spoken language of the time, making it accessible to people who did not understand Sanskrit. The title itself, *Lokopakara*, meaning 'for the benefit of the people' reflects this intent.

Notably, a comprehensive chapter, No. 8 comprising 57 verses, within the *Lokopakara* is dedicated to *Supasastra*, the art or science of cooking. The text elucidates ingredients and cooking techniques, though precise measurements and cooking durations are notably absent. Reflecting the author's devout vegetarianism and adherence to Jainism, this section exclusively delves into vegetarian ingredients and dishes. While mentioning food items, Chavundaraya II refers to different types of rice, millets, cereals and other items. Two types of rice are mentioned –the *karaveakki* and the *tavareakki*, along with a superior variety of wheat called *jave godhi*, which was considered highly nutritious. There is some reference to the popular *Iddali*, though the ingredients listed for it are mung dal, cumin, coriander and pepper. Various spices like camphor, saffron, dates, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg etc are listed. A dish prepared with flowers of neem, also uses of methi, mustard, ginger and chillies. However, despite the author's religious convictions, the *Lokopakara* intriguingly includes references to root vegetables, onions, and garlic, which Jainism typically abstains from. Of particular fascination within the *Lokopakara* is its discourse on the benefits of incorporating various leaves, berries, and roots from medicinal plants and herbs into everyday culinary endeavours, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between gastronomy and herbalism in ancient Indian culture.[40]

Interestingly, many food names mentioned in the text, written a thousand years ago, are still in use in modern Kannada, such as *anna*, *huli*, *palya*, *oggarane*, *seekarne*, *unde*, *mandige*, and *sandige*. Though the recipes may have evolved slightly, the fundamental preparations remains quite the same. This work provides valuable insights into the experimentation with herbs, spices, and preservation techniques to create diverse food items.

II. (ii) Manasollasa by King Somesvara III (1129 A.D.), 12th Century

By the 12th century the Western Chalukya Empire included substantial portions of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. King Someswara III, son of Vikrmaditya IV, a prominent ruler of the Western Chalukya dynasty of Kalyani, reigned from 1126 to 1138 CE. He was feted as *sarvagyanbhupa* or *sarvagyanchakravartin* for his extensive knowledge. Among his enduring legacies is the *Manasollasa*, also known as the *Abhilaṣitartha Cintamaṇi*,

[40]A.V. Narsimha Murthy, 'Some Aspects of Agriculture as Described in the Lokopakara,' *History of Agriculture in India up to c.1200 AD*, Lallanji Gopal and V.C. Srivastava, (ed.) , Volume V, Part I of D.P. Chattopadhyaya, (ed.) *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization* Centre for Studies in Civilizations, Concept Publications, New Delhi 2008, pp. 506–509.

composed in 1131 CE, an extensive Sanskrit compendium elucidating the pleasures and responsibilities befitting a monarch. This compendium, often referred to as the 'Book of Delights,' is structured into five comprehensive sections, known as *vimsathis*, which are further segmented into approximately one hundred chapters. It consists of five books of twenty chapters each, intended for the benefit of all classes in the state. K.A. Nilkantha Sastri thinks the work was most likely a composition of one or more of his court-poets, considering its encyclopaedic scope.[41]

The printed volume in 1939 was prepared with the help of manuscripts housed at the Oriental Institute, Baroda, the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute at Pune, and the collection of the Bikaner Darbar.

As the preface of the first volume, completed in 1925, informs us, "Someswara was an orthodox Hindu king and the picture presented in his Manasollasa is of the glories, pomp and paraphernalia of a purely Indian court and royal household."[42]

The third section of the Manasollasa, termed *Upabhogasya Vimsathi*, intricately explores twenty varieties of *upabhogas*, or pleasures. Of notable interest is the section dedicated to *Annabhoga*, which not only outlines the intricate preparations of diverse recipes but also provides guidance on their presentation as fit for royal consumption. This segment offers a rich tapestry of culinary insights through 248 shlokas on the king's dietary, encompassing a diverse array of vegetables, meats, spices, flavourings, and techniques employed in gastronomic creation. The royal meal would start with dal, rice and ghee and end with milk and sugar.[43] The meticulous detailing extends to the spices employed, predominantly indigenous to India. These include staples such as black pepper, long pepper, mustard, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, coriander, asafoetida, fenugreek, camphor and saffron, each playing a vital role in enhancing the flavours of both meat and vegetable dishes. A multitude of dishes currently consumed in Karnataka and Tamil region are mentioned in this 11th century text. These include, vadai, mandakas (similar to modern balushahi), and veshtika(present-daybedmi), basically wheat flour stuffed with chana dal paste and spices.[44] *Dhosaka* (dosai) and *idrika* (idli) are mentioned, but prepared out of urad dal, unmixed with rice. Vada prepared out of the

[41] K.A. Nilkantha Sastri, *A History of South India: from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, India, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 338.
[42] Gajanan K. Srigondekar (ed), *Manasollasa*, Vol. 1 Central Library Baroda, 1925, p. viii.
[43] Shanta Ghokale, 'Annabhogain the Manasollasa,' *Social Life in Ancient India*, D.C. Sarkar (ed.), University of Calcutta, 1971, pp 98─101.
[44] K.T. Achaya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, India, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 90─92.

same dough is called *gharika. Angarapolika* is the word for chapati, baked on embers. The puri is identified with names like *sohola, patrika and purika.*[45]

Rice, a dietary cornerstone then as it remains today in the region, takes centre stage in Somesvara's discourse. He delineates eight distinct varieties, ranging from the enduring red rice named *Raktasali*, still cultivated notably in the southern and northeastern parts of India, to the *Kalingaka*,the aromatic fragrant rice and the regional specialty from Kalinga. Other rice varieties are named Mahasali, Mundasali, Sthulasali, Sukshmasali, Gandhasali and Sasastika. Among these are the large-grained variant, the robust 60-day rice—sown during the hot season and harvested within a swift two-month span—and a spectrum of other types varying in texture and size.

Within the annals of Somesvara's culinary exploration, meat finds prominence, unbound by the vegetarian strictures that govern Brahminical dietary norms. As a Kshatriya ruler, the king was free to indulge in meat, particularly game, deemed fitting fare for royalty. Hence, the compendium boasts an array of recipes featuring game birds, deer, and wild boar, while notable omissions include chicken and beef. Encompassing nearly a hundred meticulously detailed dishes, many of which endure in contemporary culinary practice particularly in the southern and western regions of India, the compendium offers a glimpse into a gastronomic world both familiar and exotic. The dishes we know as mutton curry, cutlets and kebabs are named *Nadyavartta*, *Payula*, *Pinga* and *Kavchandi*. A favoured meat was that of pig, and *handabhaditraka* was a meat dish made from the spinal cord of a pig, cut and roasted in fire, and spiced with tamarind water and hingu (asafoetida). *Nadyavartta* was a dish prepared with tortoise meat. A recipe made of intestines of sheep was called *panchavarni*. Fish preparations are called *pinga* and *kharakhanda*. The text includes description of 35 kinds of marine and fresh water fishes, each with a distinct name, the feeds provided to a few fishes, the art of angling, and a brief description of cooking fish.[46] Among other meat offerings are dishes like blood-filled sausages, goat's head in sour gruel, grilled stomach membrane, and barbecued river rats, representing a diverse and intriguing culinary tapestry.[47]

II. (iii) Soopasastra By Mangarasa, 14th Century

[45] Ghokale, 'Annabhoga in the Manasollasa', op.cit.
[46] Nalini Sadhale and Y.L. Nene, 'On Fish in Manasollasa (c. 1131 AD)', *Asian Agri-History* Vol. 9, No. 3, 2005, pp. 177–199.
[47] G.K. Shrigondekar, *Manasollasa of Somesvara,* Vol. II, Baroda Oriental Institute, 1939. The section on Annabhoga appears on pp.115–136. See also Colleen Taylor Sen, *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India*, 2015, pp. 141–143.

Soopasastra of Mangarasa was written around 1509. *Soopasastra* is one of the earliest works exclusively on the subject of South Indian cookery. Mangarasa III, a feudatory of the Hoysala kings of Southern Deccan, was a follower of Jainism. Accordingly, *Soopashastra* is an exclusive text on vegetarianism. The text is arranged in six chapters, comprising 358 slokas or verses. This treatise was transcribed into prose by S.N. Krishna Jois in 1969 after consulting nine available manuscripts of the work.[48]

The six chapters of *Soopasastra* are devoted to bread and snacks, drinks, rice dishes and curries. The ingredients and cooking methods are described in great detail, and even the types of utensils and ovens needed are described. The first chapter describes the preparation of thirty-five breads, sweets and snacks. The second chapter describes the preparation of various soft drinks, salty, sour and sweet in taste. The third chapter is on nine types of *payasam* (puddings), eight types of cooked rice and twenty-four types of mixed rice dishes. The remaining three chapters are on dishes made with various vegetables. These include recipes for twenty dishes with eggplant, sixteen dishes with jackfruit and twenty-five dishes made with raw bananas (plantains) and banana flowers. The last chapter contains recipes using bamboo shoots and myrobalan.[49]

II. (iv) *Bhojankuthuhala*, by Raghunath Ganesha Navahasta, 17th Century

The *Bhojanakuthuhala*, meaning "Curiosity about Food," is a significant 17th-century Sanskrit culinary text by Sri Raghunath Suri, also known as Raghunatha Ganesha Navahasta, a Maratha scholar patronized by the royal court of Tanjavur.[50] The culinary chapters of the "Bhojanakuthuhala" were completed by 1682. The text covers the properties of various food materials, preparation methods, digestive effects, and purification processes, drawing from ancient treatises like the *Sidiruta*, *Bhavaprakasa*, *Manusmriti*, and *Vatsyayanasutra*. The *Bhojanakutuhala*'s first four chapters deal entirely with rice, wheat and grains, not only by exhaustively classifying their types but by going into detail about the quality of food produced in ploughed fields versus wild, uncultivated soil.

The *Bhojanakutuhala* is very well-known in the history of Indian medical literature, and among cultural historians of early modern India. P.K. Gode explained how this Sanskrit cookbook,

[48] G. Jan Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, Vol. II(b), Egbert Forsten, Groningen, 2000, p. 430.
[49] S. N. Krishna Jois, *Supa Sastra of Mangarasa* (1516AD), University of Mysore, Mysore, 1969, Appendix pp. 25–29.
[50] Anand Venkatkrishnan, 'Leaving Kashi: Sanskrit knowledge and cultures of consumption in eighteenth-century South India', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, Volume 57, Issue 4, September 2020, pp. 1–15.

written in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, provided the particular Marathi names for various dishes and delicacies, and how it spread throughout the subcontinent, as far as Kashmir, Bengal and Banaras.[51]

II. (v) *Pakdarpanam*, attributed to Raja Nal, compiled between the 12–17 Century

Pakdarpanam (the Mirror of Cooking), is one of the oldest extant treatises attributed to the legendary King Nal mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. The earliest mention of this treatise was by *Cakrapāṇidatta*, a scholar and author of commentaries on ayurvedic texts in the 11 century.[52] Jan Meulenbeld too dates it between the 12th to the 17th centuries, based on the absence of chilli and some plant names that are not found earlier than 1200 CE.[53]

The origin of the story of *Pakdarpanam* comes from the Mahabharata. The *Vanaparva* recounts how King Nal was exiled from his kingdom after losing a game of dice. Disguised as the dwarf Bahuka, he becomes the charioteer and cook of King Rituparna of Ayodhya. Food cooked by Nala plays a central role in reuniting him with his wife Damyanti, who recognises the taste of food cooked by her lost husband.[54] Nala's culinary repertoire was so well known that eventually, the word *Nalapaka* became a synonym for excellence in culinary arts in India.[55]

Divided into eleven chapters, *Pakdarpanam* is imaginatively composed as a dialogue between King Ṛituparṇa and Nala. The recipes are divided into sixteen chapters, based on different types of food preparation and food consumption. The preparations include both vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods. Recipes include dishes made of rice and its multiple combinations with milk, buttermilk, meat, fowl, dals, and flowers. Next, follow dal-preparations from lentils like *kulthi, arhar, bhat, urad* and *chana*, further categorised as those for ordinary consumption, and those fit for special occasions. While spices used in dal preparation are similar to those used today, viz. – turmeric, rock-salt and asafoetida, the seasonings also included camphor and various aromatic flowers. Different vegetable dishes were prepared using different parts of the

[51] P.K. Gode, 'A Topical Analysis of the Bhojànà Kutījhala: A Work on Dietetics, Composed By Raghunātha, between AD 1675 and 1700,*' Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, July–October 1941, Vol. 22, No. 3/4 pp. 254–263.

[52] In 1915, Pandit Vamanacharya Bhattacharya, professor at Government Sanskrit College, Benaras, published an edition of *Pakdarpanam* which was further edited by Dr Indradev Tripathi in 1983 and published as the *Oldest Ayurvedic Treatise of Home Science of Maharaja Nala, Madhuri Hindi Commentary*, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, 1983. See also the English Translation by Dr Madhulika, edited by Prof. Jayaram Yadav, Chowkambha Orientalia, Varanasi, 2013.

[53] Meulenbeld, G. Jan. *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, Volume II- A, p. 416–17.

[54] For a masterful reading of the story of Nala as one of the search for self, see David Shulman, 'On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala,' in David Shulman, *Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 132–158.

[55] Susan Wadley (ed) *Damyanti and Nala: The Many Lives of a Story*, Chronicle Books, New Delhi 2011.

plants. For example, both the fruit and stem of the banana tree are used for novel culinary preparations. We find references to familiar vegetables like brinjal, radish and jack fruit on one hand, and to unfamiliar ones like *Shilachilli* and *Mahachulli*, lost to us now.

In the chapter *Ṛitu Dharma Nirūpaṇam*, *Pakdarpanam* advises a season-based consumption of food, extending the concept from yearly seasons to parts of a single day. A day is divided into six parts, each corresponding to one of the six seasons. Ayurveda recognizes six tastes—sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, and astringent—each vital for physical well-being and combined in diverse ways to create rich flavours. Bringing the idea of season and taste together the text recommends consumption of pungent, sweet, and salty items in spring (*vasanta*), sweet, sour, and salty items in summer (*greeshma*); pungent and bitter items in monsoon (*varsha*); sweet and bitter items in autumn (*sharat*); sweet, pungent, bitter, and astringent items in early winter (*hemanta*) and bitter or sweet items in late winter (*shishira*). Following Ayurvedic principles, recipes are categorized based on the consistency and mode of intake. *Bhakṣya* refers to munchable foods, *bhojya* to those swallowable without much chewing, *choksya* to suckable items, *lehya* to lickable preparations, and *peya* to drinkable substances. Spices and herbs enhance both flavour and health benefits. The taste of a substance varies based on its origin, harvest time, storage, processing, and freshness. In Ayurvedic dietetics, taste reflects experience and the physical and energetic qualities we ingest. *Pakdarpanam*, following Ayurveda, views texture and taste as powerful therapeutic tools influencing not only how we experience food but also the overall flavour of our existence.

The recipes of this text are modelled on a common pattern and written in a clear style. Each recipe is followed by the enumeration of its medicinal properties and the physiological reactions expected in consuming it. *Pakdarpanam* puts before us a master template that will be followed by most of the Hindi textbooks that form the basis of vegetarian cookery of the early 20th century. It thus provides a classical reference to the majority of Indian traditional dishes that form the basis of the daily Indian meal.

III. Select Hindi Cookbooks: Documenting Home Cooking

With the rise in the print culture from the late 19th century, cookery advice started appearing in women's magazines and vernacular cookbooks focusing more on everyday cooking as per the requirements of the new urban middle classes. However, the first cookbooks appeared in regional languages like Bangla, Marathi and Gujarati. *Pak Rajeshwar* (1831) and *Byanjan Ratnakar* (1858) are famed as the earliest printed Bengali cookbooks, followed by *Pak-*

Prabandha (1879), *Shaukeen Khadya Pak* (1889) and the most famous of all, Prajnasundari Devi's *Amish O Niramish Ahaar* (1900) at the turn of the century.[56] Similarly, we also find cookbooks documenting Gujarati/Parsi cuisine from the late 19th century, viz. *Pakshastra Vishe Granth*, (1857), the *Pakwan Pothi* (1878), the *Pakwan Sagar* in 1887,[57] and finally *Vividha Vaani* in 1894, which was the first Gujarati cookbook to be written by a woman. I am not very sure, but probably the first Tamil cookbook to be published was Kasiviswanath Mudaliar's *Pakasastram* in 1867. Similarly, the first Marathi cookbook that has been traced is Ramchandra Sakharam Gupte's *Soopashastra* (1875) and the first Marathi non-vegetarian cookbook Parvatibai's *Mamsa-Pakanishpatti* was published in 1883. These cookbooks in Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Marathi etc document community traditions caught in the flux of the first flush of modern urban living.

It is in this context that we locate the publication of Hindi cookbooks. The Hindi heartland was politically anchored in the princely state of Awadh, and Lucknow, its capital, was famed for its exotic, nawabi cuisine. In Hindi/Urdu, however, culinary advice in print was rare in the 19th century. The 1905 *Catalogue of the Library of India Office* lists only ten domestic advice manuals published in Hindi and Urdu listed for the period 1868 and 1895.[58] The Hindi public sphere and Hindi publishing blossomed from the early years of the twentieth century, aided by a robust print culture in not only premier cities like Banaras, Allahabad (now Prayagraj), Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, but also in smaller *qasbas*. Hindi books accounted for more than fifty per cent of the total publication in United Provinces, pointing toward the steady growth of the Hindi public sphere.[59] This is attested also by the growth of vernacular education among urban upper caste men and women in UP from the 1920s. Male literacy grew from 9 per cent to 15.6 per cent and female literacy from 0.39 to 2.39 during the fifty years between 1881 and 1931. Of this growth, a 34.4 per cent increase in literacy was registered between 1921 and 1931, with the total number of literate women increasing from 1,34,004 in 1921 to 2,18,299 in 1931.[60]

[56] Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle Class*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 63.
[57] *Pakshastra Vishe Granth* by Uttamram Purushottam, (1857), the *Pakwan Pothi* (1878), first Parsi cookbook by Burjorjee Nusserwanjee Heera, followed by the *Pakwan Sagar* in 1887,of Burjorjee Sorabjee Chikan Chhapnar.
[58] Judith Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Advice*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004, p.22.
[59] In 1926, the number of total publications that were registered was 2840 that rose to 3565 by 1931, showing a steady annual increase. Indeed, Hindi publishing accounted for 59.2% of the total published works of the province. See *Report on the Administration of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, 1926–27, 115–116, and *Report on the Administration of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, 1930–31, p. 66.
[60] D. Natarajan, *Census of India 1971:Extracts from the All India Census Reports on Literacy*, 1971, Census Centenary Monograph No. 9, P. 89.

This was a very small percentage of the total population, and this potential readership was concentrated in the towns and urban areas of the state. Further, these books and journals were both read and *heard*, substantially extending their audience beyond mere readership.

Hindi cookbooks analysed in the next section were low cost publications, typically printed on inexpensive paper and devoid of elaborate imagery, in stark contrast to the opulent recipe compendiums of the era or the visually appealing cookbooks prevalent today. Lacking the literary or cultural cachet afforded to more prestigious publications, these texts inhabit a world where print and oral traditions coexist, offering a glimpse into a bygone era. For social historians, these cookbooks serve as invaluable windows into the lives of individuals whose voices have often been marginalized or overlooked. Presented here is a modest selection of Hindi cookbooks published between 1900 and 1955, authored by both, male ideologues and women, including one by a sweatshop owner. While some of these Hindi cookbooks do include meat-based recipes, the majority are dedicated to vegetarian fare. United by their vegetarian focus they meticulously detail the *satvik* cooking traditions of the region. It is posited it was their investment in ancient tradition detailed in the sections above, and their unabashed vegetarianism tied to religion and tradition that allowed this '*satvik'* cuisine to coexist and prosper amidst the rich recipes of the Nawabi *dastarkhwan* and the British table.

III. (i) *Pak Raj arthat Mohanthal* (1903, 1908)

Authored by Karthik Prasad of Mathura, *Pakraj* was a recipe book published at the turn of the century in 1903, with a second edition in 1908. The front page of the cookbook has a dedication to Annapurna, the Goddess of food and nourishment and the presiding deity of the city of Kasi/Varanasi, in Sanskrit, "In the left-hand mother goddess Annapurna holds the ruby vessel brimming with honey, and a lotus in the right hand. She wears a bejewelled wristlet and holds riches to give away. A crimson-coloured garland adorns the heightened breasts of the three-eyed one. Let us adore/pray to this image of the full moon-faced mother Annapurna."[61]

In the introductory preface, the author Karthik Prasad aligns his treatise both with the ancient bhoopshashtras of Nala and Bheema, as well as the refinement of cooking in the medieval period, exemplified by numerous Persian treatises. He wrote the cookbook primarily due to his

[61] I thank Dr. Rakesh Pandey, CSDS for this translation.

concern over the waning appreciation for culinary arts, with traditional recipes fading from memory.[62]

Pakraj commenced by giving practical guidance, addressing the logistics of kitchen organization, encompassing considerations of space, stove quality, fuel selection, utensil types, and their respective attributes. Additionally, it outlined fundamental kitchen operations, including the preparation of ghee and various spice mixtures, before swiftly transitioning into its compilation of recipes. Food was categorized into sections spanning rice, lentils, breads, yoghurt preparations, snacks, vegetables, and sweets, albeit in an informal sequence. Measurements were sporadically provided for everyday dishes, with greater detail offered for more complex recipes. In instances where measurements were absent, it was assumed that readers were sufficiently familiar with culinary terminology, as seen in instructions to "add spices to taste."

Pakraj exclusively features vegetarian recipes, tailored for the commonplace Hindu households. However, the author exhibits no aversion to meat, assuring readers of its inclusion in subsequent editions and volumes. In this regard, the text mirrors the precedent set by treatises like *Pakshashtra* and *Supshastra*, both of which included meat-based recipes. Notably, while grounded in Indian culinary tradition, *Pakraj* incorporates numerous recipes of foreign origin, albeit perceived as “non-local”. Despite India’s diverse culinary landscape, only Bengal is acknowledged through a section on ‘Bengali sweets.’ Interestingly, the assortment of Bengali sweets is limited to a mere five, indicating the nascent introduction of Bengali sweets into mainstream culinary discourse.

Conversely, *Pakraj* includes a selection of British recipes, reflecting the culinary influence of colonial cookery. Among its pages, one encounters spice blends favoured by colonial kitchens, as well as recipes for assorted English biscuits, cookies, and syrups, juxtaposed with traditional Indian sherbets. Despite this intermingling of culinary traditions, *Pakraj* exudes cultural confidence, exhibiting minimal disdain towards Western recipes or culinary customs.

The text's primary aim is to provide a descriptive account of recipes prevalent or sought after at the onset of the 20th century, a goal it steadfastly adheres to without veering into critique or animosity towards Western influences.

III. (ii) *Grihani Kartavya Shastra ArogyashastraArthatPakshastra*(1913)

[62] Prasad, *Pakraj*.

In contrast to Pakraj, the recipe book that followed soon after exemplifies the fusion of Ayurvedic dietary principles with domestic guidance, a trend increasingly prevalent in the early twentieth century. While the majority of Ayurvedic treatises and *nighantus* were traditionally authored by male Ayurveda acharyas, this particular work represents a rare instance of an Ayurvedic cum cookery book written and published by a woman. This departure marks a significant shift, as access to Ayurvedic knowledge was typically restricted for women during this period.

Published in 1913, *Grihani Kartavya Shastra ArogyashastraArthatPakshastra* represents the pioneering effort of Yashoda Devi, a practitioner of indigenous medicine residing in Allahabad during the early twentieth century. In her long career, Yashoda Devi penned around fifty books and guides that combined traditional healing with modern notions of healthcare. Trained by her father and husband, Yashoda Devi began active practice at the young age of 16, with establishing the *Stri Aushadhalaya* (dispensary for women) at Allahabad around 1908. As noted by Charu Gupta[63] and Rachel Berger, Yashoda Devi's early career saw her writing articles and fiction that addressed the moral challenges of contemporary life, reflecting prevalent societal concerns. Evolving in her literary pursuits, she moved on to write numerous cookbooks and health guides, thereby participating in the burgeoning scientific writing movement in vernacular languages while advocating for holistic well-being. She was one of the earliest women to write medical books, population control pamphlets and sexual health guides in Hindi. Yashoda Devi was able to capitalize on the novelty of Hindi-language scientific writing and the boom in publishing and turned her writings into a successful venture that fitted both agendas.[64] On the one hand, her insistence on *shuddh* (pure) Hindi and its scientific focus helped her to lay claim to medical writing in the Sanskritic 'tradition'. On the other hand, the centrality of her arguments of the domestic sphere and the 'appropriate' role of women made her extremely accessible to middle-class female consumers of popular printed materials.

Yashoda Devi's *Pakshastra* contains only vegetarian domestic recipes. She gives the *taseer* of all ingredients before elaborating on the cooking technique. This is followed by dietetic advice about whether a food should be consumed or not in case of sundry illnesses. Due to her simple

[63] Charu Gupta, 'Procreation and Pleasure: Writings of a Woman Ayurvedic Practitioner in Colonial North India.' *Studies in History*, 21, no. 1 (2005): 17–44.
[64] Rachel Berger, *Ayurveda made Modern*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p 97.

writing style and everyday language her books appealed to middle-class Hindu women, and she was successful in making Ayurveda resonate in new ways in the early twentieth century.

III. (iii) *Pak Chandrika*, Maniram Sharma, 1926

Pak Chandrika, written by Pandit Maniram Sharma, was published from Allahabad in 1926. *Pak Chandrika* (I edition 1926, IV edition 1934) was one of the largest compendiums of recipes from central UP. The author of advice literature and cookbooks, Sharma's concerns regarding food, cooking, and Hindu domesticity infused his earlier books like *Pak Vidya* (1922) and *Adarsh Parivar* (1925).[65] The posthumous release of *Pak Chandrika* marked the culmination of his culinary legacy. *Pak Chandrika* boasted of an expansive repertoire of recipes, spanning an impressive six hundred pages. Its contents, spread across 39 pages, meticulously detailed a staggering 836 recipes. It comes as no surprise that *Pak Chandrika* was hailed as a comprehensive guide covering every facet of cooking, making it a fitting wedding gift for daughters and sisters.[66]

Pak Chandrika mirrors *Pakdarpanam's* categorisation of recipes and Sanskritized idiom, in a nostalgic attempt to hark back to a time before Islamic and Persian influences on Indian cooking. However, this sense of nostalgia is selective; while *Pakdarpanam* displayed little aversion to meat, *Pak Chandrika* notably excludes any mention of meat in its culinary repertoire. Furthermore, *Pak Chandrika* demonstrates a notable openness towards incorporating "foreign" vegetables such as potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, and carrots, albeit with an Indianized twist. This willingness to embrace foreign ingredients suggests that its nostalgic recreation is a product of the prejudices prevalent in twentieth-century society, rather than a strict adherence to historical culinary norms. Among all cookbooks I have come across, *Pak Chandrika* epitomises the high mark of Hindu domesticity, anchored in the rituals of the kitchen. Its advice to women ties them in the chains of tradition and designates any culinary innovation as an attack on the ritual and kitchen. Women were to serve the family, the community and the nation, and guard against any influence on either of these. Any deviation from the prescribed norms of conduct was construed as an affront to tradition and a betrayal of their inherent responsibilities. Works such as *Pak Chandrika* served not only to regulate

[65] *Do Shabd* (Sehgal's Preface), Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*. See also Rachel Berger, 'Between Digestion and Desire', *Modern Asian Studies*, 2013, 9.
[66] Advertisement in *Chand*, 1931.

culinary practices but also to exert broader social control, perpetuating patriarchal ideologies and solidifying gender roles.[67]

III. (iv) *Saras Bhojan Kaise Banaye*, Shrimati Vrindeshwari Bhargava, 1955

Saras Bhojan Kaise Banaye stands out as a unique domestic recipe book crafted by a mother for her daughter. Authored by Vrindeshwari Devi Bhargava from Lucknow in 1955, this compendium offered 501 easy methods for preparing distinct recipes commonly enjoyed in Hindu households of Uttar Pradesh daily. Amidst her battle with tuberculosis, Bhargava penned this cookbook as a testament to her love and legacy for her youngest daughter, Rama. The simple language and practical advice contained within the book was to be a guide for Rama and other young brides, acquainting them with the nuances of home cooking—both flavourful and traditional.

"Saras Bhojan" imparts invaluable household wisdom to young women and girls that resonates with the guidance offered in British and European advice literature. There's a gentle reminder that food should not only taste good but also be visually appealing, with a particular emphasis on the art of serving. It states, "In a thali, food should be served in just the right amount—not too little, which may suggest inadequacy, nor too much, which may imply laziness or disrespect towards the diner. If the kitchen is short on dishes and unexpected guests arrive, it's the mark of a skilled housewife to embellish the thali with pickles, preserves, and papads. *Saras Bhojan* is written in the everyday tone of a mother instructing a daughter, as is evident from this sample:

> Gram-flour Dumpling Curry
>
> Add water to the gram flour and mix it evenly. Don't make it too thin. Churn it well and put a little salt in it. Put ghee in the *kadhai* and put it on the fire. When the ghee is hot, put small dumplings in it, use a ladle to fry them around and then soak them in water. Mix one and a half quarts of curd in for 250 grams of the gram-flour dumplings. Add water and make a slurry. Add salt, turmeric, red chilli [powder] to this. After making dumplings, add ghee to the pan and prepare a tempering of asafoetida and cloves, then put this mixed curd slurry in it. Squeeze and leave the dumplings in it too. After five boils, take it off and add garam masala.[68]

[67] Saumya Gupta, 'Culinary Codes for an Emergent Nation: Prescriptions from Pak Chandrika, 1926,' *Global Food History*, 9(2), (2022), pp. 175–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2022.2118461.
[68] Vrindeshvari Bhargava, *Saras Bhojan Kaise Banaye: 501 prakar ke swadisht bhojan banana ke saral upaye*, Upper India Publishing House Limited, Literature Palace, Lucknow, 1955.

It would be difficult to find the recipes detailed in Vrindeshwari Bhargava's cookbook in any restaurant. There is a lightness of touch in this largely vegetarian cuisine that is difficult to reproduce in commercial cooking, though the internet with its myriad home cooking blogs and vlogs is proving to be a new home for this cuisine.

III. (v) *Pak Prakash Athwa Mithai,* Mata Prasad Gupt, 1929

Pak Prakash Athwa Mithai is a cookbook specializing in sweets, written by Mataprasad Gupt, the owner of a sweet shop in Pratapgarh, Ayodhya. Mataprasad Gupt was a practitioner who decided to record recipes that had made his shop famous. Two of his recipe collections were published in 1929. *Pak Prakash Athwa Mithai*, was billed as a cookbook "fruitful for our sisters and merchants," while *Gud Pak Vigyana*, a more commercial compendium, was dedicated to "every kind of sweets." This book detailed the complete processes from the sowing of the cane, identifying a good cane-press, and cleaning the juice, which will result in superior quality jaggery. Mata Prasad learnt the trade in Kanpur, Agra and Allahabad and returned to Pratapgarh in 1907 to open his sweet shop. According to him, it was the reluctance of the artisans to share trade secrets that strengthened his resolve to write the cookbook.

In this book, the techniques employed by the *halwais* are given in meticulous detail, with a lot of emphasis given towards mastering the basic recipe of sweet-making—how to make various types of *chashni*, (sugar syrup), different kinds of sugar balls, sugar toys, ways to process the *maida*, *khoya*, et al. There are detailed instructions, with images of the instruments of trade, the sieves, the moulds etc. used in a sweet shop. Furthermore, *halwai* establishments were not mere sweet shops. They were also the place where food could be had without breaking strict caste injunctions practised at home. So besides selling sweets, these shops also did a thriving business in *pacca*/*nikhra* or fried foods like *pooris*, *alu dams*, the chats, small snacks and savouries that were as much desired as the sweets. Strict rules of *satvik* vegetarianism were observed by the shop, and no egg, onion, garlic or even tomatoes were used in the preparation of the hundreds of dishes compiled in *Pak Prakash*. In the caste pecking order, the *halwais* might have a low standing, but their connection to ritual offerings made it imperative that codes of purity and pollution were followed with overt exactitude.

Many recipes in *Pak Prakash* appear enigmatic today, difficult to reproduce except by the people in the trade. Indeed, some of them – like spinach *laddus*, or potato *gulab jamuns* have quietly dropped out of our mithai repertoire, and without much remembrance either. Still, these recipes, like the home cooking of *Saras Bhojan*, or the ayurvedic recipes of *Pak Shastra* are

the archive of a *satvik* culinary tradition that increasingly exists only within the pages of these cookbooks.

IV. Culinary Social: Prescribing Social Traditions

All the above cookbooks published in the first decade of the 20th century lament the loss of the science of cooking in India: Their authors link their treatises to ancient and medieval cookery treatises. However, as these treatises were in Sanskrit or Persian they were inaccessible to ordinary people. The result, according to cookbook authors was that, by the early 1900s even *halwais* were unable to cook more than 20-30 types of ordinary dishes, and *grihanis* (housewives) knew even fewer. Authors like Kartik Prasad, Maniram Sharma and others wrote their cookery treatises to revive traditional cooking and guide women in correct domestic roles. Common themes across these works include:

i. Ayurvedic Dietary Tradition and Humoral Domesticity

ii. Advice to Women: Home Cooking Gastronomic Desh-seva

iii. Caste Rules and Commensal Distance

iv. Local Tastes and Graded Vegetarianism

IV. (i) Ayurvedic Dietary Tradition and Humoral Domesticity

The philosopher A.K. Ramanujam had explained the manner in which in Ayurveda the six tastes (*rasas*) are related to the *gunas*, to the six seasons which affect the balance of humors in the body.[69] All the Hindi cookbooks were largely based on Ayurvedic dietetics, drawing from ancient Nighantu texts which describe the properties and uses of Indian medicinal materials. The integration of cooking with Ayurvedic principles was clear, with emphasis on the bio-moral aspects of cuisine, dietary habits, and daily routines. This approach was common in works by Ayurvedic practitioners such as Yashoda Devi, and even in family cookbooks like *Saras Bhojan*. Sections on dals, vegetables, and spices would first explain their humoral properties and effects before suggesting balancing spices. Ayurvedic principles and Hindu gastronomic theories about food, cooking, and eating were presented as universally understood guidelines. Healthy consumption, based on Ayurvedic cooking, was framed as a cultural duty and moral obligation, aligning personal well-being with societal good. Food and medicine were

[69] A.K. Ramanujan, 'Food for Thought: Toward an Anthology of Hindu Food Images', *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*, R.S. Khare (ed), State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 221–250.

seen as intertwined, with food classified as part of the Ayurvedic regimen (*pathya*) and pharmacopoeia.

It should be stressed that knowledge about the use of food as medicine has been a part of the subcontinental tradition. However, the gap between classical Ayurveda and the practices of local vaids remained significant. In the daily life of Indian cities and villages, both Western medical knowledge and Indian classical tradition seemed distant—one due to its foreignness, the other because of barriers related to language, caste, and knowledge gatekeeping. Both needed to be made more accessible and adaptable to the local context. This is where cookbooks played a crucial role. The antiquity of the Ayurvedic tradition in Sanskrit literature provided cultural and medical authority for cookbook authors, who used Vedic authority to support their instructions. In doing so, they integrated Ayurvedic bio-moral norms into everyday cooking.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, while the publication figures of Sanskrit texts like the *Charaka* and *Susrutasamhitas* remained steady, Hindi guides on *chikitsa* (illness), *arogya* (health), and Ayurveda substantially outnumbered them. Hindi texts like *Aahar Vigyan* (1931), *Aahar Hi Aushadh Hai* (1939), *Bhojan Hi Amrit Hai* (1946), and *Adarsh Aahar* (1951) were written for a fairly literate readership unfamiliar with Sanskrit, but interested in Ayurvedic pharmacopeia. To establish their authority, these guides often retained the structure of the original Sanskrit texts, including printing a Sanskrit sloka followed by a Hindi translation and explanation. This approach rooted their claims in the learned tradition of Sanskrit while making the content accessible through the vernacular. Cooking treatises like *Pakraj*, *Grihani Kartavya Shastra*, and *Pak Chandrika* employed similar strategies, integrating Ayurvedic principles into recipes and making this knowledge accessible across caste and class. Rachel Berger and Projit Bihari Mukharji have explored how Ayurveda modernised in the 20th century, engaging with science while preserving its traditional core.[70] Through Hindi cookbooks and advice manuals classical Ayurvedic knowledge became household common sense: even without deep understanding of the shastras, the principles of Ayurvedic food were embedded in the everyday life of the people.

IV. (ii) Domesticity and Home Cooking: A form of *Desh-sewa*

Cookbooks are not typically seen as sites for exploring nation-building in Indian history. However, the home could not remain untouched by social reformism and political nationalism. In the early 20th century, even women's journals focused on domesticity strongly advocating

[70] Rachel Berger, *Ayurveda made Modern*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Projit B. Mukharji, *Doctoring Traditions: Ayurveda, Small Technologies, and Braided Sciences*, United Kingdom, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

women's education and public participation.[71] Despite this push for women's education and activism, there was a pervasive fear that educated, politically active women might neglect their domestic roles. The nationalist press often emphasized the need for a balance between home and public life, placing the responsibility of maintaining this balance largely on women's shoulders.

As urban families modernized, the new woman—educated to be a companion to the western-educated man—was expected to maintain a traditional home and serve traditional fare. Tanika Sarkar notes that from the late 19th century, women were seen as custodians of scripture and Hindu customs, symbolizing both past freedom and emergent nationhood.[72] Cooking was framed not only as a feminine duty but also as crucial for preserving national culture.[73] Domestic and national happiness was linked to the quality of food prepared by women. Thus, Yashoda Devi *in Grahini Kartavya Shastra* urged women to understand the properties of grains, fruits, and vegetables, and to incorporate Ayurvedic principles into daily meals. Yashoda Devi in *Saras Bhojan* argued that if wholesome food were available at home, men would avoid spending money and risking their health on street food. Hindi cookbooks also introduced a novel interpretation of *desh-sewa*, equating cooking wholesome, appetizing food for the men and sons of the nation as a domestic version of service to the nation. They argued that the Indian nation's 'weakness' stemmed from abandoning the bio-moral cooking advised by the sastras. Cookbooks like *Pak Chandrika* asserted that the current frailty of Indian men—and by extension, of the nation—was due to poorly prepared food.

An attendant concern was the growing participation of women in the Gandhian movement. Women participated in the freedom struggle in large numbers, especially from the 1920s onwards. As women would go on *dharnas*, pickets, protests etc., household duties and cooking would necessarily be affected. This generated patriarchal anxiety and constant mockery of the westernised ways of the new woman, who allegedly did not value cooking. Cookbook authors cautioned that justified ridicule would greet the educated woman who serves a reading rather than a recipe to a hungry husband![74] A poem titled "Swaraj for Women," advised women that diligence in household duties was their best contribution to the nationalist cause:

> Womenkind, it's time to be alert,

[71] Francesca Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, 243–308.
[72] Sarkar, *Words to Win*, p. 29.
[73] Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 41–42; Shukla, *Vrihad Pak Vigyan*, pp. 31–32.
[74] Devi, *Saras Bhojan*.

Try to be economical,

Do not spend your time in laziness,

Call swaraj to the household yourself

When you have time, spin the charkha,

Make the cloth yourself at the home,

Grind the grain in the house,

Make the bread yourself on the fire,

It is because of your determination and power,

That your men have got the strength now. [75]

This culinary approach to *desh-sewa* aligned with the ideal of fostering muscular masculinity for a strong nation. Here, well-cooked meals were seen as vital for both domestic happiness and national regeneration.

IV.(iii) Caste Rules and Commensal Distance

Arguably, the domestication of caste rules goes back to the strictures on food as seen in the ancient Hindu canons. The high-caste Hindu navigates the daily challenges in maintaining ritual purity as they are exposed to various sources of pollution through activities such as eating, excretion, and social interactions. This increasing susceptibility led to complex rituals like cooking food meticulously and away from others, chanting mantras, and performing purification rites in case of deemed ritual lapses.[76]

As P. Olivelle explains, the concept of ideal Hindu food lay at the intersection of several classificatory principles, where food is assessed as either 'fit to eat' (*bhojya*) or 'not fit to eat' (*abhojya*) based on the ritual status of the person consuming it.[77] While *abhaksya* refers to forbidden items of food, *abhojya* refers to food served at a meal that is normally permissible, but becomes unfit for consumption due to specific circumstances. This typically occurs when food is touched or served. This food touched by someone considered impure, from whom food

[75] *Swaraj for Women*, PP Hin.B.3121 (British Library), 1922, cited in Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert, 'The Domestic Sphere as a Political Site: A Study of Women in the Indian Nationalist Movement,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1997, pp. 493–504.
[76] Dina Simoes Guha, 'Food in the Vedic Tradition', *India International Centre Quarterly*, June 1985, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 141–152.
[77] Patrick Olivelle, '*Abhakṣya* and *Abhojya*: An Exploration in Dietary Language,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 122, No. 2, April–June, 2002, pp. 345–354.

cannot be accepted according to social or ritual norms. This evaluation varies depending on individual circumstances, such that a food deemed appropriate for one person may not be suitable for others, and could even be considered "forbidden" (*abhakṣya*). Indeed the lawgiver Manu's rules on *abhojya* give a list of people he calls *abhojyannah*, people whose food should not be eaten.[78]

As expected, these cookbooks, written by and for upper-caste Hindu households, treat the kitchen as a sacred space. There is no room for non-kosher food items or questionable individuals. Servants and domestic help are barely mentioned, except to caution the *grihani* (housewife) against them. Caste is a constant presence in these kitchens, evident from the strict rules regarding purity and pollution, especially during feasts and festivities when food is served to those outside the immediate family or caste circle. McKim Marriott's phrase, "the circulation of food is the lifeblood of caste rank," aptly describes the approach in these cookbooks.[79]

On the surface the advice on maintaining a clean kitchen, wearing washed clothes, and properly scouring utensils seemed like standard sanitary guidance found in cookbooks worldwide. It demonstrates the process through which modern codes of hygiene, order, and discipline were translated into civilizational practices for the middle-class urban kitchen. However, these cookbooks localized global domesticity through custom. In their pages, a kitchen became truly clean when it was smeared with mud and cow-dung in the traditional manner. Clay vessels were ranked higher over metal utensils in terms of purity and pollution. Traditional mud-stoves (*chulhas*) were ubiquitously advocated for cooking, and kerosene stoves, when mentioned, were only to be used for heating water or cooking meat outside the traditional kitchen. This advice seamlessly blended Western sanitation with caste-based purity and pollution.

The centrality of caste in Hindu kitchens is evident in the recipe repertoire of Hindi cookbooks, particularly in their taxonomy of *satvik* cooking. These cookbooks categorize dishes based on the ritually ordained requirements of Hindu domestic cooking, primarily distinguishing between *kaccha khana* and *pakka khana*.[80] *Kaccha khana*, cooked in water, is considered the purest form of food but also the most susceptible to ritual contamination, hence reserved for sharing only among close family members within the domestic space. On the other hand, *pakka khana*, fried in ghee or oil, is deemed more ritually stable and is shared during feasts and

[78] Olivelle, *Abhaksya* and *Abhojya*, p. 350.
[79] McKim Marriott, 'Caste Ranking and Food Transactions: A Matrix Analysis' in Milton B. Singer and Bernard Cohn (ed.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, Chicago, Aldine Publishing, 1968.
[80] Khare, 'Anna', *The Hindu World*, S. Mittal, & G. Thurs by (eds.), Routledge, 2004.

festivities. This distinction is prominently featured in upper-caste traditional cookery, appearing explicitly in some cookbooks and implicitly in others. Even the trade cookbook *Pak Prakash athwa Mithai*, adheres meticulously to this classification. During ritual or social feasts, social hierarchy is reflected in proximity to the kitchen. Those closest in familial or social ties, such as immediate relatives and friends, are welcomed into the kitchen and seated near the cooking area and invited to partake kaccha food. Others, depending on their social, ritual, or caste distance, are placed progressively farther away, highlighting their relative status and degree of acceptance; they will be readily fed during a feast, but not within the precincts of the home kitchen. At its core, this division reflects the rules of commensality aimed at maintaining ritual and culinary boundaries between different castes and communities.

How was caste purity to be maintained during travel, when home-cooked meal was unavailable? During such times of potential 'pollution,' a solution was found in the use of "*achooti roti*" – an 'uncontaminable' bread. The recipe was straightforward: instead of water, banana stem or strained liquids from roasted vegetables like aubergines or radishes were used to make the dough. This bread was long-lasting, and served as travel food. Thus, the caste-conscious traveller was spared consuming food prepared by unknown hands. The concept of ritual impurity through the touch of a lower caste person is normalised through these instructions.

III. (iv) Local Tastes and Graded Vegetarianism

Recipes across these cookbooks catered to regional and local tastes. Pan-Indian dishes or cooking techniques are not present in the cookbooks published in the early years of the twentieth century, though we do find them entering from the late 1950s. Most cooking techniques use the Awadhi or Purvanchali slow cooking method. Thus we can call these hyper-local products. This is also clear from the ingredient list. Many vegetables like *dhendas*, *pindalu*, *noniya*, *chuka*, and *marsa*, are today unfamiliar to urban dwellers; however, in rural central UP, the names of these vegetables still evoke a feeling of nostalgia. They are also available as 'lost recipes' and 'forgotten foods' in various YouTube vlogs.

Interestingly, local customs and tastes often led to modifications of Ayurvedic instructions in satvik cookbooks, despite being broadly based upon the sastric canon. For instance, the avoidance of garlic stemmed from the belief that certain foods like garlic, leeks, onions, mushrooms, and other impure items were "unfit to be eaten" by *dvijas*, and consuming them would render one an outcast. This was a deep-seated bias, despite the fact that many Ayurvedic

texts, including the *Susrutasamhita* and the *Sarngadhara*-samhita, acknowledged the positive medicinal values of garlic.[81] In texts like *Amarokosa*, the word *maha-aushadha* was synonymous with *lahsuna*, which was referred to as an exceptionally efficacious drug. It was considered "useful in affections of the nervous system, flatulence, hysteria, etc." The oil was used externally in rheumatic afflictions and paralysis…a small clove of garlic put in the ear was considered to allay ear-pain.[82] *Pakdarpanam* also included a *lahsuna* payas, or a sweet dish made of garlic.[83] It is clear that by the early 20th century, culinary tastes were as much dependent on social customs as on textual Ayurvedic knowledge, as evident from the discontinuation of the use of garlic in satvik cooking.

The same distance can be seen in the vegetarianism versus meat consumption issue. It is well known that vegetarianism in Hinduism has been a graded practice, and signified social and ritual power. Vaishnav Brahmin and Baniya communities from UP remained pure vegetarian, though many other Brahmin and most Kshatriya communities of India consumed meat, finding sanction for it through rituals emanating from Shakta or Shaiva tradition. Consuming meat was understood as a feature of *rajas*, or kingly quality. As this article has shown, Ayurvedic *samhitas* regularly contained meat-based preparations. In his classic study *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats*, Francis Zimmermann has highlighted a tension in Ayurvedic texts between two therapeutic approaches: one emphasizing purity, nonviolence, and vegetarianism, and the other centered on force, vitality, and the use of meat or purging. Surprisingly, early classical medical treatises—despite their Brahmanic context—treat meat consumption casually, incorporating it into diets and medicines without ethical concern or alignment with food purity rules.[84] Sanskrit culinary manuscripts emanating from royal households, like the *Manasollasa*, *Bhojan Kutuhalam* or the *Pakdarpanam* prided meat consumption and contained many preparations of wild and non-bovine domesticated animals. Scholars have noted the development of a critique of taking life for food in the later Vedic period, even as meat remained a major part of consumption. While non-violence was an important article of faith for Buddhist and Jain philosophies, influential reformist and devotionalist schools of Hindu philosophy also started espousing vegetarianism from early medieval India. The early Ayurvedic texts reflect a transitional period before vegetarianism became dominant. While

[81] H.L. Hariyaapa and M.M. Paktkar (ed,), *Professor P. K. Gode Commemoration Volume*, Poona Oriental Series, No.33. 1960.
[82] R.N. Chopra, *Indigenous Drugs of India*, Calcutta, 1933.
[83] *Pakdarpanam*, p.85.
[84] Francis Zimmermann, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, chapter on 'Vegetarianism and Nonviolence', pp. 180–194.

meat consumption was justified in both medical and Dharma texts, its practice increasingly became a source of discomfort. Over time, despite textual allowances through the invocation of the concept of *apaddharma*, "in circumstances of emergency and distress," meat-eating was progressively discredited in favour of vegetarian ideals.[85] Consequently, many upper-caste communities gradually adopted vegetarianism. The promotion of vegetarianism was buttressed by removing or reducing references to meat dishes from the retellings and subsequent editions of culinary manuscripts and Ayurvedic injunctions.[86] By the twentieth century, most Hindi cookbooks were primarily vegetarian and practically erased meat from the recipe repertoire of average Hindu households.[87]

It is not difficult to look for an additional reason for this vegetarianism in these cookbooks. In the early 20th century, the issue of vegetarianism versus non-vegetarianism had become a cultural question with much significance for nationalist thought.[88] Meat eating became a marker of the materialist West, and vegetarianism of the spiritual and civilizationally superior East. This was buttressed by Gandhi's very public espousal of vegetarianism.[89] Further, twentieth-century nationalism imagined home as the ideal space for nurturing culture. Concerned with the intimate domain of domestic cookery these Hindi cookbooks corroborated the ideas about the sanctity of the home, and brought the full weight of vegetarianism to rest primarily on the kitchen and on women managing that kitchen. Thus, in these early 20th-century Hindi cookbooks, ancient tradition and Ayurveda, both were rendered meatless.

Conclusion

By the early 20th century, a pure cultural identity became the anchor for the battles between colonial modernity and emergent nationalism. The imagining of the nation was progressively projected on cultural artefacts—whether in terms of language, clothing, or cuisine. Hindi cookbooks were participants in this process, eschewing the 'excess' associated with elite cuisine, grounded as they were in a culture of thrift and vegetarianism. The family and home become the primary socializing agents of the nation in a microcosm. Attention to these social

[85] Ibid.
[86] Gutiérrez, A. 'Meat on and off the Royal Menu: The Medieval Delight of the Mind & the Erasure of Meat from Indian Recipe Collections,' *Global Food History*, 10(2), 2024, 140–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2024.2347180.
[87] Saumya Gupta, 'Culinary Codes for an Emergent Nation: Prescriptions from Pak Chandrika, 1926,' *Global Food History*, 9(2), (2022), pp. 175–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2022.2118461.
[88] Jayanta Sengupta, 'Nation on a Platter: The Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal', *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food and South Asia*, Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas (ed.), University of California Press, 2012, pp. 73–87.
[89] Gandhi, M.K., *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism*, Navajivan Mudranalaya, 1959.

codes embedded in everyday rules of cooking and eating signals the deep roots of Hindu culinary identity in the Hindi belt. This was forecasted onto the project of what an ideal nation should be and should eat.

This article has attempted to trace the foundational aspects of domestic cooking in Hindu households by focusing on ancient food reference, tracing their prescriptions in medieval culinary manuscripts and in representative twentieth-century Hindi cookbooks. It has made connections between the complex symbolic meanings attached to food and its practical everyday preparation. It has also pointed towards social rules of inclusion and exclusion that underlay the cooking and sharing of food. It has noted how the gendered notion of cooking buttresses traditional rules of home and domesticity. As we explore their common recipes, cooking techniques, and advice on gender and commensality, these cookbooks come across as guardians of cultural conventions and social mores, rather than as instructional guides for beginners in the kitchen.

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