

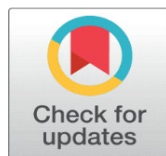
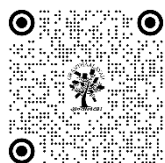
FROM FIELDS TO FORESTS - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CULINARY TRADITIONS IN BIHAR AND JHARKHAND

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the unique but intersecting culinary cultures of Bihar and Jharkhand, two culturally diverse states in Eastern India. Using a qualitative approach involving field visits, in-depth interviews, surveys, and secondary source analysis, the study examines how local cuisines are influenced by agricultural production, tribal culture, religious rituals, and socio-economic conditions. The research discovers that although the food culture of Bihar is more based on agrarian systems and festival-based preparations, the cuisine of Jharkhand portrays strong connections to tribal traditions, forest foods, and eco-sustainable cooking. With the support of software such as Dedoose for qualitative coding and correlation analysis, the research also identifies changing food preferences in urban and migrant communities, where traditional recipes are increasingly crossing over with modern and global food trends. This study emphasizes the need to preserve food culture in the times of urbanization and globalization, and documents an emerging cultural and health-conscious trend towards traditional, locally produced foods in both countries. The research adds to the wider conversation on food, identity, and sustainability in modern India.

Keywords: Culture, Culinary Heritage, Bihar, Jharkhand, Agricultural Production, Tribal Culture, Religious Ritual

1. INTRODUCTION

India's cuisine is a rich expression of the country's multilingual and multicultural society. Regional cuisines within the nation serve up distinctive eating traditions based on local ingredients, geography, history, and social-cultural dynamics (Achaya, 1994). India's regional cuisine is not only food for body but also is a signifier of culture, carrier of identity, and instrument of tradition delivered through generations.

This essay delves into and contrasts the culinary traditions of Bihar and Jharkhand, two culturally dense but otherwise distinct areas of eastern India. Historically within the same administrative region, Jharkhand separated as a state in 2000, and although the areas continue to share some linguistic and cultural affinities, their food cultures have

developed along divergent paths (Singh, 2020). Bihar's cuisine is greatly shaped by its agrarian past and religious festivals, with the extensive use of ingredients like sattu (roasted gram flour), mustard oil, and an assortment of traditional sweets (Chakrabarti, 2016). As opposed to this, Jharkhand's cuisine, with roots deeply embedded in its tribal culture, focuses on the consumption of forest products, indigenous cereals, and very little spices, indicating a more sustainable and seasonal food culture (Kujur & Oraon, 2019).

The goal of this research is to compare the culinary cultures of Bihar and Jharkhand based on ingredients, food preparation methods, cultural beliefs, and the socio-economic realities surrounding their foods. Through this comparison, the paper aims to draw attention to the ways in which regional food practice can be seen as a lens through which the complexities of identity, heritage, and social structure can be understood. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on preserving India's intangible cultural heritage through documentation and comparative cultural analysis (UNESCO, 2003).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

India's rich culinary diversity is a manifestation of the country's multi-dimensional cultural, social, and geographical identities. From the aromatic, rich tastes of the North to the seaside flavors of the South, Indian regional cuisines are molded by the interplay of environmental, agricultural, and socio-cultural factors. India's foodways, methods of preparation, and foods used reflect a vibrant interplay between history, religion, and geography with each state providing a distinctive gastronomic identity (Achaya, 1994). A body of literature has increasingly attended to these regional food systems, highlighting how food practices reflect more general societal dynamics such as concerns around caste, class, gender, and ecological sustainability (Narayan, 1997, Patel, 2012).

Even though much has been published regarding Indian regional cuisines, comparative studies of bordering regions are not well developed. Bihar and Jharkhand, formerly united as one state, present a unique case study on the development of regional identities by way of food following political separation in 2000. Despite common historical linkages, the two regions now possess distinct gastronomic traditions resulting from their dissimilar cultural, geographic, and socio-economic situations. Although the intrinsic similarities between Bihar and Jharkhand, especially the rural cuisine, are apparent, differences become notable when the role of agrarian practices in Bihar and the food systems of Jharkhand's tribal people are taken into account. This review discusses the literature on Indian culinary traditions that has been written so far and identifies the lacunae this study seeks to fill.

K. T. Achaya's seminal work, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion* (1994), is still one of the most wide-ranging books on the history of Indian food ways. Achaya chronicles the impact of historical trade routes, colonialism, and farming practices on local cuisines. He finds Bihar to be a state where the farming prosperity of grains like rice, wheat, and lentils has deeply influenced its cuisine. Furthermore, the history of Bihar cuisine has been much impacted by many dynastic governments across centuries such as the Maurya and Gupta empires, and also the Mughal emperors, whose contribution to culinary culture is evident in modern cuisine (Achaya, 1994). But Achaya's work does not have a comparative study of neighboring states, like Bihar and Jharkhand, that enables a close understanding of their culinary development and the reasons for their divergence.

Additional research by Chakrabarti (2016) offers a detailed study of the food culture of Bihar. Chakrabarti emphasizes the agrarian character of Bihari cuisine, explaining the utilization of locally cultivated crops like rice, wheat, and pulses. The research highlights the importance of sattu (roasted gram flour), which is one of the major ingredients in a number of Bihari recipes, including Litti Chokha and Sattu Paratha. The food of Bihar, as Chakrabarti contends, is not only shaped by the local produce but also by the religious and cultural traditions of the state. Festivals such as Chhath Puja, for instance, are characterized by particular foods that are prepared in keeping with ritualistic tradition (Chakrabarti, 2016). Also, Bihari cuisine is characterized by a certain hierarchy of food based on caste and class, where certain foods are prepared and eaten by particular groups and others are still linked to ritual or ceremonial functions.

While most of the literature on the culinary culture of Bihar has been concerned with agrarian influences, Jharkhand's food culture is less studied. Jharkhand's cuisine, dominated by its indigenous tribal populations, is influenced by natural produce and forest produce, differing considerably from Bihar's grain-based cuisine. Kujur and Oraon (2019) explore the food habits of Jharkhand's indigenous people, specifically the diet of the tribal communities, such as the Santhals, Mundas, and Oraons. Their research highlights the use of wild vegetables, fruits, and herbs, some of which are collected from the forests. Others include bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and roots that form part of tribal

cuisine. Jharkhand's food is characterized by the use of few spices, trusting in the natural tastes of the forest fruits and vegetables and using straight-forward cooking methods like steaming, grilling, and fermentation. The research identifies a stark departure from the more elaborate, spiced-based food preparations of Bihar, presenting a contrasting approach to food habits anchored in sustainability and a harmonious relationship with nature (Kujur & Oraon, 2019).

Tribal food systems in Jharkhand are marked by an ecologically sustainable relationship with the environment that is based on traditional knowledge from generation to generation. Handia, a rice fermented beverage, and chilka roti, a pancake made from rice flour, are illustrations of how local food habits have been developed around forest products and traditional grains. In contrast to Bihar, whose cooking forms are characterized by frying and roasting, Jharkhand's culinary practices focus on boiling and fermentation due to the resource-scarce and environmentally sensitive food culture of the region (Kujur & Oraon, 2019). This environmentally conscious food system ties into worldwide efforts towards food sovereignty as indigenous peoples strive to maintain their foodways during the challenge of globalization and industrialized food systems (Patel, 2012).

Although there has been significant reporting on the food culture of Bihar and a developing interest in indigenous food systems of Jharkhand, there remains considerable shortage of comparative research examining the transformation of food culture in these two neighboring states. Singh (2020) discusses the socio-political transformation in Jharkhand after its separation from Bihar, and he observes that the reassertion of tribal identities by the state has resulted in renewed interest in its indigenous food habits. Political change has facilitated a new dialogue on preserving culture, involving the documentation and marketing of indigenous culinary culture. But Singh's research does not deal with Bihar's food culture directly, so it is hard to make comparisons between the two states' changing food identities.

Literature on Bihar and Jharkhand's food cultures gives a good idea about how agrarian and tribal cultures have influenced culinary traditions, but there is still a lack of research in comparative studies of these two states. This study aims to address the gap by looking not just at the variations in ingredients and preparation techniques but also at the cultural meaning surrounding food, the construction of food in identity formation, and the changing character of food practice to adapt to modernity, urbanization, and globalization. The conclusions of this research seek to advance the knowledge about how regional cuisines come to be influenced by an evolving interplay of cultural heritage, ecology, and social change.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research paper's methodology was structured with the purpose to offer a thorough and detailed understanding of the variations in cuisines between Bihar and Jharkhand. Due to the richness and regional nuance of cultural food traditions, a qualitative perspective was considered to be most applicable in examining rich cultural meanings and practices within culinary traditions of both regions. What follows is detailing of methods and tools applied towards data collection, the methodology for analysis, as well as limits faced during conducting research.

4. DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study was gathered from a mix of field visits, interviews, and secondary sources. All three methods were selected to confirm that the research identified both the lived experiences of individuals in Bihar and Jharkhand and the documented food practices.

1.Field Visits: Much of the data was obtained during field trips to both Jharkhand and Bihar. These visits were conducted in rural and urban settings to reflect the variety of food practice. Rural places like ghaghara (netar haat), Shalimaar, shisodiya(Ranchi), Barh, samastipur etc. were of specific interest in gaining an understanding of the traditional food systems and farming practices that constitute the basis of Bihari and Jharkhandi cuisine. The field visits consisted of watching cooking methods, recording ingredients used, and recording particular food festivals and rituals associated with their daily food habits and food culture associated with festivals like Chhath Puja, Holi in Bihar and Sarhul, Karma in Jharkhand.

2.Interviews: Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were taken with local cooks, food enthusiasts, cultural specialists, and elderly members of the community. These interviews gave insight into the cultural and historical importance of regional foods, the use of food in religious and social settings, and how culinary practices change over time. Interviewees represented both Bihari agrarian societies and Jharkhand tribal groups, providing a diverse set of

viewpoints on food practices. These conversations were essential in gaining an understanding of the complex relationship between food, identity, and tradition in each region.

3. Local Sources and Reference Books: Secondary sources, such as regional tourism books, Cook books, historical texts, and local publications, were consulted to supplement the fieldwork. They supplied a formalized account of traditional dishes, methods of cooking, and the use of ingredients in Bihar and Jharkhand. Agricultural practice texts, texts on foods eaten during festivals, and texts on cultural rituals were useful in a study of the wider socio-cultural contexts under which the cuisines evolved.

4. Surveys: Few surveys were carried out in cities (Ranchi, Patna, Netar Haat, Gaya, Barh, Samastipur, Khuti) to learn about evolving food habits in the wake of modernization and migration. Surveys were carried out among those who had migrated from rural places to cities in and outside Bihar and Jharkhand. The surveys inquired about food choices, maintaining traditional recipes, and the influence of modern trends in changing traditional food habits.

5. QUALITATIVE VS. QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

The research demanded a qualitative paradigm due to its nature. Qualitative methods were needed to make sense of the rich cultural meaning that food evokes, why certain ingredients carry such importance, and the social contexts of consumption in Bihar and Jharkhand. Participant observation and interviewing were key ethnographic methods required to capture people's lived experience in both the states. Through these encounters, the study managed to collect rich, qualitative information about the manner in which food relates to identity, community, and tradition.

Although the qualitative method gave a detailed insight into food practices, quantitative information was also gathered through the surveys to measure shifts in food tastes and eating habits, particularly in terms of urbanization and migration. Nevertheless, the quantitative information was secondary to the qualitative results since the main aim was to learn about the social and cultural dynamics of regional food systems and not to carry out statistical analysis.

6. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

1. Agriculture and Ecological Factors Impacted on Cuisine

One of the main outcomes of this study is the clear role of agriculture in the construction of the food culture of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Bihar: The Bihari cuisine has its agricultural ways very closely involved. Being an agrarian region, the cuisine mostly is comprised of rice, wheat, lentils, and a mixture of seasonal vegetables. Use of mustard oil, sattu (roasted gram flour), daal and cereals (lentil dishes) pervades the culture. Interviewers from rural residents highlighted the role of food depending on availability of agricultural crops and the seasonal/festival connection for some of these dishes. An example would be Litti Chokha, a Bihari traditional dish, where wheat flour dough filled with sattu is accompanied by mashed vegetables such as eggplant and tomato. This dish is indicative of the state's strong dependence on wheat and lentils as ingredients. Bihar food culture also carries strong religious overtones, especially during religious festivals like Chhath Puja, Holi, Jitiya, Satuni, Diwali when food is offered with a lot of ritualistic attention. The food for the festivals — like thekua, rasiya, kaddu dal, Pachaka etc confirms the dependence on local seasonal cultivates.

Jharkhand: As opposed to that, Jharkhand's food is mainly influenced by its native tribal populace, who bank significantly on forest foods and sustainable agriculture. Jharkhand's tribal folks use a diverse range of locally found ingredients including bamboo shoots, wild mushrooms, root vegetables, and wild fruits. Dishes such as kukhari chokha, sanai bhunjia, maar jhor, rugra jhor, munga bhunjia, handia, chilka roti, patra pitha etc are just a few examples of dishes that indicate the state's dependence on seasonal, locally foraged ingredients. These results are consistent with the literature that highlights the region's limited use of spices and the use of simple, environmentally friendly cooking methods such as steaming and boiling. In interviews, Jharkhand's tribal people discussed how living in harmony with nature mattered to them, where food was taken in a sustainable manner and every ingredient is utilized respecting its natural abundance. This is very different from Bihar's more farming-oriented, grain-based diet.

2. Role of Rituals and Festivals in Food Preparation

Another important research finding is the contribution of rituals and festivals to the food habits of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Bihar: Religious and cultural festivals are strongly linked to the food culture of Bihar. As mentioned above, Chhath Puja is a prominent festival that has a strong influence on Bihari cuisine, with certain foods being prepared as offerings. The practice of fasting and preparation of festival foods such as thekua, rasiya, and prasad (holy offering) holds importance to the religious and social life of the state. Food is not just a source of sustenance but is considered an offering to the gods, strengthening social relationships within the community.

Jharkhand: Tribal celebrations such as Sarhul and Tusu in Jharkhand serve the same purpose of connecting food and ritual. These celebrations are all about community come-togethers, where traditional foods form the centerpiece, and locally foraged ingredients are featured. Handia, the rice drink that has undergone fermentation, is central to these celebrations. Interviewees from Jharkhand highlighted the symbolic aspect of food offerings in these celebrations, which are occasioned by harvests and seasonal transitions. The emphasis lies not on extravagant preparation but in respecting nature's abundance.

3. Urban and Migrant Food Preferences

One of the strongest findings of the research was from the surveys among urban groups, especially migrant groups. Since both Bihar and Jharkhand witnessed heavy migration to urban areas in India (Patna, Ranchi, Delhi, Bangalore, Pune, Mumbai and Kolkata), food habits changed, merging traditional food items with urban tastes.

Bihar: In Bihar cities, food habits are changing as a result of the entry of processed and readymade foods. Traditional food items such as Litti Chokha and Sattu Paratha are giving way to more convenient and contemporary foods such as packaged food and fast foods. Yet, most migrants, particularly in urban areas such as Delhi and Kolkata, still manage to maintain their traditional recipes, particularly during festive seasons. Home-based food entrepreneurship selling traditional Bihari dishes like sattu & makhana products and thekua have gained popularity in recent times, reflecting a penchant to preserve culinary heritage in spite of urbanization.

Jharkhand: Jharkhand urbanization has also caused changes in eating habits, albeit less extreme than in Bihar. Citizens of urban centers such as Ranchi continue to maintain their traditional diet, but consumption of fast food and processed food is on the increase, particularly among the youth. In spite of this, some traditional dishes based on tribal foods, such as wild mushrooms, green leafy vegetables, local red rice and fermented vegetables, are still cooked in some homes, particularly those that have maintained indigenous knowledge and practices.

4. Globalization's impact on food systems

Both Bihar and Jharkhand are seeing the impacts of globalization upon food systems in the two regions. The introduction of global fast foods, packaged snack foods, and convenience foods in urban centres is causing an eating habits transformation. But its intensity and rhythm are weaker in rural areas where old food routines persist.

During interviews, a number of respondents brought out the tension between tradition and modernity, with some worried about losing original food practices. Especially in rural Bihar and Jharkhand, the increasing presence of supermarkets and chain restaurants is viewed as a threat to traditional food culture, as such globalized food establishments bring in convenience at the expense of cultural importance.

5. Health and Sustainability Considerations

In both states, food is coming to be considered more and more in terms of health and sustainability. Most of the respondents across Bihar and Jharkhand mentioned a developing consciousness about the health advantages of traditional foods, particularly those based on local and organic ingredients. There is also a growing trend towards sustainable food culture, where people in Jharkhand and Bihar are turning back to traditional, environmentally friendly methods of cooking that require minimal processing, local sourcing, and seasonal produce. These results parallel international food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture discourses (Patel, 2012).

7. CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS

In conclusion, the findings of the research pinpoint the distinctive food cultures of Bihar and Jharkhand, shaped by their respective agricultural, tribal, and socio-cultural environments. While both regions share some common ingredients, there are distinct differences in food preparation methods, the role of food in festivals, and the influence of modern and global food systems. The results highlight the need for maintaining traditional food cultures in the light of urbanization and globalisation, and indicate an increasing aspiration in the two states to reconnect with their gastronomic heritage for health, sustainability, and national pride reasons.

Below is a table summarizing the key findings of the research:

Finding Area	Bihar	Jharkhand	Key Insights
1. Agricultural and Ecological Influences on Cuisine	- Grain-heavy diet (wheat, rice, lentils) - Use of mustard oil, sattua, and lentil-based dishes - Strong ties to agricultural cycles	- Forest-based food system - Use of locally foraged ingredients (bamboo shoots, wild mushrooms, wild fruits) - Minimal use of spices	- Bihar's food system is deeply rooted in agriculture, while Jharkhand's is shaped by forest produce and sustainable practices.
2. Role of Rituals and Festivals in Food Preparation	- Strong connection to festivals like Chhath Puja - Foods like thekua and kheer prepared as offerings	- Festivals like Sarhul and Tusu - Handia (fermented rice drink) central to celebrations	- Both regions use food as a means of religious devotion and community bonding. Bihar's focus is on fasting and offerings, while Jharkhand's is centered around harvests and nature.
3. Evolving Food Preferences in Urban and Migrant Populations	- Shift towards processed foods in urban areas - Continued preservation of traditional dishes (e.g., Litti Chokha) during festivals - Rise of home-based food businesses	- Urbanization leads to a rise in fast food consumption, especially among youth - Preservation of tribal food practices in some households	- Migration and urbanization lead to shifts in food preferences, but there is a continued effort to preserve traditional dishes.
4. Influence of Globalization on Food Systems	- Increasing presence of fast food chains and supermarkets in urban areas - Concerns about loss of traditional food systems	- Similar rise in global food chains, but rural areas maintain traditional food systems	- Globalization is influencing food practices, particularly in urban areas, where convenience is prioritized over tradition.
5. Health and Sustainability Considerations	- Growing awareness of health benefits of traditional foods - Increasing trend towards sustainable food practices (local sourcing, seasonal eating)	- Focus on local, organic ingredients - Traditional food systems are seen as more sustainable and healthy	- Both regions are reconnecting with traditional food practices, driven by health and sustainability concerns.

The conclusions of the study bring into focus remarkable divergence and convergence between the food traditions of Bihar and Jharkhand, led by historical, geographical, cultural, and economic determinants. The information based on field interactions, interviews, and secondary information points towards peculiar food practices both in the two states, drawn from agriculture, tribal culture, and religious processes. However, the two locations have similar themes drawn from a wider cultural basis of Eastern India.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were a number of limitations to this research work -

Geographic Limits: The research was mostly conducted in rural and urban settings of Bihar and Jharkhand but did not extend to all parts of the geographic diversity of the regions. For example, the research did not examine the food cultures of certain sub-regions or nuances among various tribal groups of Jharkhand. Future research could extend the geography to cover more isolated pockets, like tribal settlements of the Chotanagpur Plateau or the Madhubani area of Bihar.

Access to Tribal Communities: Though attempts were made to interview members of indigenous tribal communities in Jharkhand, there was difficulty in accessing far-flung villages due to logistical limitations and the sensitivity of speaking about cultural practices. Some tribal communities guard their food heritage, and there was hesitation to open up to outsiders, especially when it came to sacred or ritualistic food practices. Future studies can be more oriented towards establishing trust with such groups to provide an even fuller account of their foodways.

Bias in Secondary Sources: Whereas historical context came in the form of recipe books and local press publications, some sources were constructed by and with the bias of either colonial or metropolitan perspectives. In doing so, they perhaps predisposed presentation on rural or native food traditions, and region recipe books omitted the intricate contexts whereby foods get produced, with ensuing difficulty to observe the completeness in food traditions occurring in each part.

Changing Food Practices: The process of globalization and modernization of food systems brings a limitation to recording traditional food practices in their true spirit. Urban areas, especially cities such as Patna (Bihar) and Ranchi (Jharkhand), see traditional food practices being slowly overtaken by processed foods and globalized food influences. While this shift was documented through surveys, capturing the full extent of this change is difficult, as it occurs over time and is influenced by numerous socio-economic factors. Future studies could benefit from longitudinal research to track the evolution of food practices over decades.

Language and Translation Issues: Language issues posed some difficulty in interviewing and gathering oral histories. Some of the traditional cooks and community elders communicated in local dialects or tribal languages, necessitating interpretation and translation. As much as possible, accurate translations were ensured, but there could still be meanings lost in translation, especially when talking about traditional food words and recipes that cannot be simply translated.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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