

Indigenous Food, Culture and Tourism in Chamba region of Himachal Pradesh

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7601>

Received: 17 May 2023; Accepted: 01 June 2023; Published: 24 June 2023

ABSTRACT

India is one of the most beautiful countries in the world having an ancient and rich culture heritage viz grand architecture, delicious food, colourful fairs and festivals, beautiful handicrafts, sculptures, paintings, music and dances. Food is an important element of culture. Food in Sanskrit means “Bhojana” which helps to understand the daily life and identity of people in every society. India is a land which provides ample amounts of food for its population ranging with a variety of grains in different corners of the country. India can be called the Food bowl for the rest of the world as huge amounts of food items are exported from India to all parts of the world. Himachal is a land with rich culture and heritage, civilizations have thrived here in this land for ages. Himachali food is not just a feast but an amalgamation of different flavours representing the local identities, heritage and culture. Food in Himachal is cooked in traditional vessels and slow cooking is a unique technique used to prepare different cuisines in different parts of the state. The present paper tries to explore Chamba’s culture and describe the various indigenous cuisines of Chamba and suggest strategies for developing attractive tourism products and promote indigenous cuisines.

Keywords: Indigenous food, Slow cooking, Chamba, Culture, Promotion, Preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Himachal Pradesh is a state located on the northern part of India, known for majestic snow-capped mountains of Himalayas, gushing rivers, sprawling fruit orchards, dense deodar and pine forests, rich history and a great mix of culture (Haberman, 2006). Majority of people in Himachal live in villages which are located on beautiful mountains and far flung locations. (Jreat, 2004). When we discuss cultural development of a destination there are a number of elements which play an important role to define the culture of a destination like food, rituals & beliefs, fairs & festivals, folk dances, folk music, local art, handicrafts, local dialect etc. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Himachali culture is very rich and unique when it comes to culture and its elements like food, art, architecture, folk dance, handicrafts, fairs & festivals (Sharma, 2015). People of Himachal are very simple and kind and lead a very simple life (Ahluwalia, 1998). They are welcoming and warm hearted. People of Himachal have explored different ways and methods of preparing food on the basis of the availability of locally produced grains, fruits and vegetables (Panda, 2010). Himachali cuisine is very much influenced by the climatic conditions, topography, agricultural produce, cultural ethos and local lifestyle in the state. Food is an important part of lifestyle and culture in different regions of Himachal Pradesh. (Rana, 1997). Different traditional methods of food preparation, knowledge of storing food and knowledge of raw ingredients have been used since ages and passed to the next generations (Beoku-Betts, 1995). Food is produced and prepared at household level only. Not much has been done to scale the production and promotion of local delicacies to the outer world

(Hjalager & Richards, 2003). There are a variety of traditional cuisines which are prepared on various occasions and in daily life in every household. The present study focuses on the highlighting various local cuisines and methods of preparation in Chamba region and suggest ways to promote the indigenous cuisines to a greater audience, which can help creating new tourism products and local cuisines can come into light and can be added into the menus of various restaurants, cafes, hotels and dhabas.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Amit K Mathur and Shefali Saini (2014) in their paper titled “Food, Culture and Tourism, the Catalyst for sustainable Tourism: A study of Himachal Pradesh” highlights the importance of local cuisines as an asset which can help in tourism development as food as the ability to showcase the culture of a destination and can provide a unique feeling of Happiness and Joy. Availability of local Food can help the visitors to connect with the destination and local community. Local food should be preserved, which can help in making culture sustain and create more sustainable tourism destinations.

Arvind Kumar (2017) in his paper titled “Cultural Tourism Development in Himachal Pradesh Emphasizing Local Cuisines and Their Promotion” highlights the availability of different cuisines in various parts of Himachal Pradesh namely Chana ke madra, Alu chane ka madra, Bhatru, Bedun ki roti, Seera, Patrode, Bhruni ki sabji, Sepu vadi ka madra, Guchhi mutter, Siddhu etc and suggest local food & beverages outlets to add them in their menus and sell the traditional cuisines of Himachal, which can help in promotion of regional cuisines of Himachal Pradesh.

Stone et al., (2017) in their paper titled “Elements of memorable food, drinks and Culinary tourism experiences” highlights five main elements leading to a memorable experience at a destination namely location, occasions, food & drinks consumed, companions and touristic elements. The study also suggests to use food as an important element in creating everlasting experiences for the tourists visiting a destination.

Rana et al., (2018) in their paper titled “Potential of Food tourism in three major cities of Punjab” explains food tourism as an emerging form of tourism and tries to discover various issues and challenges attached to food tourism in selected cities of Punjab. The findings of the study reveal a positive relationship between tourism and food.

Awasthi et al., (2020) in their paper titled “Gastronomy tourism: Exploring local culture through Food in the city of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh” explains the importance of local food in Lucknow city. which represents the culture and lifestyle of various communities around the world. Food attracts a large number of tourists to a destination. Food is an important element of a tour package. The findings of the study highlights that most tourists consider food as cultural heritage and consider gastronomy as a pull factor to travel to such destinations. Culture and food are the top two variables which attract tourists to such destinations. Local food can be a great product and help in tourism development.

Maitra and Bansal, (2021) in their paper titled “Dimensions of Culinary tourism and hospitality in Golden triangle of India” mentions the range of food & beverages offered at various tourist’s attractions in the Golden triangle. The study tries to find out the impact of food as a pull factor for attracting tourists. The main findings of the study highlight the niche segment food & beverage of buyers and influence of the food on tourist experience. The study suggests creating new food & beverages products for creating niche segments for great culinary experiences.

Aman Sharma et al., (2022) in their paper titled “*Culinary Tourism & Himachali Cuisine: A study of local cuisines at selected destinations of Himachal Pradesh*” highlights the role of local food in attracting more visitors to a destination and creating business growth. Food is an important element of culture and helps in promoting the culture of the destination.

Aman Sharma et al., (2022) in their paper titled “Regional cuisine as a tool to destination development: A study on Himachal Pradesh” mentions about the uniqueness and taste of food in Himachal and also the irregularity of Himachali cuisines. Local cuisines can be a great tool for the development of a tourist destination and can be used as a brand.

Rana et al., (2022) in their paper titled “A study on traditional Foods and Beverages of Himachal Pradesh” tries to explore the traditional cuisines of Himachal and their popularity. The study highlights various food and beverages which are produced in households and during various fairs and festivals. Some of the common food & beverages include cereal based food. Fermentation method is used in the majority of food & beverages.

NEED OF STUDY

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, different forms of tourism are emerging and coming into light, one of which is cultural heritage tourism (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Cultural heritage tourism is one of the most important forms of tourism, contributing in terms of socio-cultural and economic growth of communities around the world (Ursache, 2015). Many countries around the world have successfully used their culture and heritage to create unique tourism products, which has helped them to attract a good number of tourists towards their destinations (Richards, 2012) India being one of the oldest civilizations of the world is very rich in terms of its history, culture and grand heritage (Sen, 2012). Chamba being one of the oldest kingdoms has an ancient history, culture and unique food (H????, 2005). Chamba region is rich in cultural heritage, which is a great opportunity for this region. By identifying the cultural heritage of Chamba, unique tourism products can be developed and a good number of visitors can be attracted to visit this land (Chakraborty, 2020). The present study will definitely help in the growth and development of tourism in this region.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

1. To explore the Culture of Chamba region.
2. To explore the Indigenous cuisines of Chamba region.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the secondary literature available on websites, books, journals, magazines and information was also collected through field visit, tasting and personal observation.

Culture of Chamba

Chamba is one of the twelve districts of Himachal Pradesh sharing boundaries with Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab and Kangra. Chamba ranges from 2000 to 21000 feet above the sea level. (Sharma & Sethi, 1997). Chamba is divided into two regions namely Bharmour and Pangi (Sidhu et al., 2013). Chamba has led to tribal ways of life because of the difficult terrains and far-fledged human settlements. Mainly the population of Chamba are of Bhotia and Pangwal the followers of two major religions Buddhism and Hinduism. People of Chamba speak Pangwali a native dialect (Handa & Hāṇḍā, 2004). Chamba is blessed with natural beauty and resources. People of Chamba are dependent on nature for food, medicines, timber and fuel. People of Chamba are also involved in agriculture and horticulture, different vegetables and fruits are grown to earn livelihood (Gupta et al., 2014). The local community has an immense knowledge about architecture, art & craft, attire and food passed by their forefathers. Chamba is also rich in their ethnic cultural heritage which includes unique traditional attire, architecture, fairs & festivals, dances, Handicrafts (Naik, 1996).

Attire: Mainly the attire of Locals in Chamba include attractive and bright clothes which are mainly made of woollen cloth. (Bhatt et al., 2018).

Female: Topi (Joggi), Kammej, Challan, Chadru (Shawl), Dodmala (Silver chain), Sankali & Kalu (Earrings).

Male: Tope (cap), Kamari (Shirt), Challan (Trousers), Likalh (Coat), Pulley (Slippers made with barley straw)

Food & Beverages: Different grains are grown namely Phullan, Bhares, Chinay, Kodra, Wheat, Siul (Chaudhry, 1998).

Architecture: The houses in Chamba are mainly built with locally available deodar wood, stones, mud and slates (Kumar & Kumar).

Fairs & Festivals: Minjar ka Mela, Chattradi Jatar, Phool Jatra, Miglyath, Sarjaat, Jukaroo, Punahie, Shivratri, Sakrant, Lishoo, Chajgi, Uttain, Baar, Pareed, Sheel, Daikhaan, Unoni, Jwaan (Sharma, 2022).

Dances: Gaddiyali Natti, Jhamakhara, Dangi, Jhangar, Dandras (Singh et al.,)

Handicrafts: Chamba Rumal, Miniature paintings, Chamba Chappals, Metal craft, Wood work (Tyagi, 2008).

INDIGENOUS FOOD OF CHAMBA REGION

Chamba is culturally one of the most important region of Himachal Pradesh. Chamba has a variety of indigenous food of its own. Most of the ingredients used for cooking are locally grown and taken from the environment (Attri, 2016). Ancestral methods and techniques are used in cooking of different dishes. Food in Chamba region is mostly influenced by the availability of produce and raw material depending upon the climate and geography of the region (Sharma & Singh, 2012). There is variation in food when it comes to taste and flavour. The main staple food includes locally grown rice, maize, wheat and lentils (Sarkar et al., 2015). A number of ethnic food is prepared during the year in local households and at the time of fairs & festivals. The above mentioned cuisines are part of Chambas culture, which makes this region culturally rich and unique in its flavours. The following list has been created on the basis of information collected from locals and secondary available literature.

Table 1: Indigenous food of Chamba Region

Food Item	Description	Category of Food
Chambyali Madra	Kidney beans curry prepared with Indian masalas (spices), curd and ghee.	Staple food
Mah dal ke Pokuru	Fried snack prepared from fermented black gram and deep fried.	Snack
Mukund Badi	Curry prepared with Urad dal and masalas(spices), yoghurt and ghee.	Festive dish
Bichu kuti ka Saag	Stinging nettle based vegetable cooked in mustard oil and masalas (spices).	Seasonal food
Lungdu ki sabzi	Vegetables made with Fiddle head fern cooked in mustard oil and masalas (spices).	Seasonal food
Bhruni ki sabzi	Vegetables made with Green chillies and mustard oil and masalas(spices).	Seasonal food
Channe ka Khatta	Jaggery and Imli based curry.	Festive dish

Gaddi	Butter milk based beverage (lassi)	
Meethe Chawal	Sweet rice cooked with milk, ghee and dry fruits like raisins, cashews, almonds, coconut.	Festive dish
Kaddi	Thick gravy curry prepared with lassi (buttermilk) based on gram flour.	Staple food
Teliya maah ki daal	Dal prepared with black gram, mustard oil and masalas (spices).	Festive dish
Babru	Pancake made with wheat flour and ghee.	Snack
Tudkiya Bhath	Stir fried cooked local rice with mustard oil and masalas (spices)..	Staple food
Palda	Thick gravy prepared with lassi and local grown rice.	Staple food
Khoru	Curry prepared with yoghurt.	Staple food
Ori Kadhu	Vegetables made with pumpkin cooked in mustard oil with masalas (spices).	Staple food
Makki ki roti	Indian bread made with maize flour.	Bread
Mithidi	Wet Sweet dish made with sugar, coconut, cashews, almonds, raisins.	Desert
Shwarii	Thick Desert based on soya and dry fruits like date palm, cashew, almonds and raisins.	Desert
Chunchru ka Achar	Pickle made with Yellow Morel (<i>Morchella esculanta</i>)	Accompaniments
Kanifru ka Achar	Pickle made with Brown haired fairy cup or Peeli chatri (<i>Humaria hemisphaeria</i>)	Accompaniments
Chukh	Chutney made with sun dried red chillies and mustard oil.	Accompaniments
Siun ka Achar	Pickle made with clustered coral mushroom (<i>Ramaria botrytoides</i>)	Accompaniments
Arakh	Alcoholic distilled drink based on barley fermentation.	Beverage
Barah ki chutney	Chutney made with Rhododendron flowers, ginger and green onions.	Accompaniments
Danu ki chutney	Chutney made with green pomegranate fruit.	Accompaniments
Chiichaa	Chutney is made with green mangoes, mint, and green chillies.	Accompaniments
Kulfa ka saag	Purslane green (<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>) based vegetable cooked in mustard oil with masalas (spices).	Seasonal food
Chha Gosht	Mutton curry cooked in mustard oil with ginger, garlic, onions and masalas (spices).	Staple food
Siddu	Dumpling made with maize.	Staple food
Jot ki barfi	It is a dense milk based sweet prepared with milk, sugar and dry fruits.	Desert
Lucchi/Thapli	Thin round pancake prepared with wheat flour and desi ghee.	Religious food
Chambyali dham	Feast prepared on special occasions, constitute of Rice, Rajma ka Madra, Channa ka Khatta, Kaddi, Meethe Bhaat	Seasonal food/ Religious food
Kachnaar ki sabzi	Vegetables made with Bauhinia Variegata Buds, onions, ginger, garlic cooked in mustard oil along with masalas (spices).	Seasonal food

Bhey	Fried lotus stem cooked with onion, ginger, garlic in mustard oil along with masalas (spices).	Seasonal food
Khata Moraa	Tangy flavoured mutton cooked in mustard oil with raw mango powder, onions, tomatoes, ginger, garlic with masalas (spices).	Seasonal food
Seera	Halwa made with semolina (rava).	Desert
Gudanji	Local alcoholic beverages made with jaggery.	Beverage
Jhol	Alcoholic white colour milk like drink made with rice fermentation.	Beverage

LIST OF FIGURES

Indigenous food of Chamba Region



Figure 1: Chambyali Dham

Figure 2: Lungdu ki sabzi

Figure 3: Mukund Badi



Figure 4: Bhey

Figure 5: Chukh

Figure 6: Lungdu ki sabzi

**Figure 7: Chha Gosht****Figure 8: Khoru****Figure 9: Kulfa ka saag**

METHODS OF PREPARATION

Mostly food is cooked on Chulas (fire place), firewood is used in the chulas. There are various techniques used in cooking. Slow cooking is preferred while preparing most of the food as it helps to get unique flavours and aroma (Tanwar et al., 2018). Most of the food in Chamba is cooked in thick utensils made of copper and brass, as these metals are good conductors of heat, which helps to cook well and keep the food warm for long hours (Tanwar et al., (2017). While cooking the food various methods and techniques are used like fermentation, boiling, frying, baking, roasting, smoking, steaming, poaching, simmering and stewing (Albala, 2011).

INTEGRATING FOOD, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Hills stations in India are the prime choice of most travellers. Chamba is a hill station located in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Chamba is blessed with both natural beauty and rich cultural heritage which dates back to the 2nd century BC. This land was inhabited by the Koli tribe. Later it came under the rule of Pratiharas, Rajputs, Sikhs and British. Chamba was finally merged with India post-independence (Singh, 1999). Chamba is known for its unique culture which includes music, fairs, festivals, costumes, food, architecture, handicrafts and dances. There are ample cultural and natural resources available in Chamba, which have been attracting a good number of tourists each year. Chamba is home to some of the ancient temples in India namely Laxmi Narayan temple, Vajreshwari temple, Kunjar Mahadev temple, Champavati temple, Chamunda Devi temple, Hari Rai temple, Chattradi temple, Sui mata temple (Goetz, 1955). Chamba is located in the lap of Himalayas which makes it a perfect adventure tourism destination and offers various adventure activities like trekking, camping, skiing, rafting, river crossing etc (Kohli, 2002). Khajjiar lake, Kalatop wildlife sanctuary, Chamera dam and ManiMahesh lake are some of the most popular natural tourist attractions. Chamba is unique when it comes to food and culture, there are numerous elements of culture like fairs & festivals, handicrafts, architecture, folk dances, food etc which make this region culturally rich, Food being one of them. By amalgamating culture, food and tourism new products can be developed, which can act as USPs for tourism development in this region and can help in attracting more tourists (Dodds & Jolliffe, 2016). By developing and promoting culture tourism and specifically Food tourism, new opportunities for the local community can be created that can help in socio-economic growth of this region.

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTION

The following strategies can be adopted for promoting the regional cuisines of Chamba region:

1. More emphasis should be given to social media promotions.
2. Participation in local events like fairs & festivals can help in promotion.
3. Cooking classes should be organised for the tourists visiting Chamba.
4. Promotion of local food through Himachal tourism website.
5. Regional cuisines should be added in menus of local restaurants, cafes and hotels.
6. Focus should be given on collaboration with local food & beverage outlets.
7. Highlighting the health benefits of the food can also contribute to promotion.
8. Promotion through print media like newspaper, weekly, magazines.
9. Promotion through organising and creating gastronomy tours and food trails.
10. Competition and food shows should be organised at tourist destinations which will help the local community, especially the younger generation to learn and appreciate the regional culture.

DISCUSSIONS

Unique cultural image of a destination can be seen and experienced in its culture and food. Chamba region is a culturally rich land, there are enormous opportunities for tourism development in this area. The need is to identify the available cultural resources and bring them into light and create unique tourism products out of them, which can be offered to the tourists. Food is one important part of every culture. Many unique indigenous recipes of food are available in the Chamba region. Stakeholders need to bring these delicacies in front of the visitors that can help in promotion of the indigenous food. Emphasis on marketing should be a top priority for stakeholders.

Integrating food, culture and tourism can offer opportunities to create attractive tourism products. These unique tourism products can help in creating an unforgettable experience for the tourists visiting the Chamba region. Offering unique experiences to the tourist through distinctive tourism products will create opportunities for the local communities and help in socio-economic growth of the Chamba region.

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