



# An Overview of Indian Culinary Journey with Glimpse of Regional Cuisine

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## ABSTRACT

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With diversity in race, religion, culture, and language, Indian cuisine is unique to each region. The varied nature of the cuisine is mainly based on what is grown and harvested, depending on the climate and region. Various spices and herbs are added to enhance the flavor and to keep the food fresh. Moreover, spices and herbs are also used for medicinal purposes. History suggests that earlier people consumed traditional food and followed the dietary rules outlined in Ayurveda. In Ayurveda, food and wellbeing are highly related, with nutrition plays as a central role in ensuring a balance of the mind, body, and spirit. The influence of various invaders and traders such as the Greeks, Mughals, Mongols, the Chinese, British, and the Portuguese at different phases in time have immensely contributed to enriching and transforming the food culture of India. This article presents an overview of the Indian culinary journey with emphasis on regional cuisine from the northern to the southern and western to the eastern part of the sub-continent.

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## I. Introduction

India is the second-largest country in the areas with diversity in race, religion, culture, language, and cuisine. The geographical diversity is visible from Kashmir to Kanyakumari or from the peak of the Himalayas in the north to the tropical lush forest in the south. As there are 28 states and eight union territories in India, the cuisine is unique. Even in the different districts, there exist small variations. Indian cuisines originated from Ayurveda, where food and wellbeing are considered highly related, while nutrition plays a central role in the development of the mind, body, and spirit. The sages and rishis all over India use the holistic views of food consumption that what we eat not only nourishes our body but our brain and emotions. Also, there is a strong connection between food with the different religious festivals as food (Bhog) is offered to the worshipped Deities. The offerings (prasada) are then distributed among the people. The varied nature of Indian cuisine is mainly based on what is grown and harvested, depending on the climate and region. Most people tend to cook and eat seasonal vegetables and fruits as there are readily available, cheap, abundant, and fresh. Spices are a part of Indian cuisine used to enhance the flavor and to preserve food. Thus, each state's cuisine is different and unique due to the use of different spices, ranging from mild to strong and from hot to hotter. The commonly used spices are cumin (*jeera*), Turmeric (*haldi*), *Paanch-Phoron* (five whole spices), Coriander, Nigella seeds, whole chilies, Asafoetida (*Hing*), Mustard seeds, Cardamom, Javitri, Nutmeg, Cloves, Cinnamon, Onion, Garlic, Ginger, Black pepper, and fenugreek seeds. Some spices were cultivated in India. The leaves of certain plants (coriander leaves, curry leaves) are also used in cooking as it enhances the flavor and has a certain health benefit. Several herbs and spices that are widely used in Indian cooking contain many phytochemicals with medicinal properties (Krishnaswamy, 2008). Moreover, onion, garlic, and ginger which are widely used in Indian cooking, also have therapeutic attributes like Antimicrobial, antithrombotic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-cancer activities (Dubey, 2010). The remaining part of this article is organized as follows, the origin of Indian cuisine is presented in section 1, followed by regional cuisine from North, South, East, and West are presented in section 2, and section 3 concludes the paper.

## II. Discussion

### A. Origin of Indian Cuisine

The origin of Indian cuisine dates to more than 8000 to 10,000 years. With rich cultural background, diversity in language, religion, and ethnicity, the cuisine is unique to each region. In ancient times, food availability was restricted due to a lack of infrastructure and transportation, so people had to consume what was produced and procured locally. The vegetables that were planted and harvested were pulses (*Masur dal*, *Moong Dal*, *Urad Dal*, *Channa dal*), pumpkin, eggplant, bitter melon, long melon, jackfruit, ginger, turmeric, black pepper, tamarind, papaya, citrus fruit, banana, millets, mustard, and many tubers. The term cuisine represents a traditional method of cooking that belongs to a particular area, region, or country. Thus, the cuisine between states or regions is different based on the climate, soil, and production of that area. Moreover, Indian cuisine is a collection of cuisines from local and regional areas based on their culinary practices, choice of ingredients, and method of preparation. Also, the influence of trade, foreign invasion, and colonialism has immensely contributed to Indian traditional cuisine by adding new elements and making its flavor richer. Besides, Indian cuisine is also highly influenced by the British, who introduced the art of making bread, pastry, soup, various sandwiches, tea, drinking, and roasting (Sen, 2014).

### B. Ayurveda

Ayurveda is India's ancient traditional system of medicine, and its origin is divine. Ayur means life, and Veda means science or knowledge. Thus, it is a way of living, learning, and healing from the surrounding environment as it provides a holistic approach to treating man as a complete whole in relation to his environment (Heyn, 1990; Jaiswal & Williams, 2016). According to Heyn Bigit (Heyn, 1990), the Ayurvedic way of thinking considers the universe as a macrocosm and human beings as a microcosm with a direct relationship that reflects one another. Thus, there is a connection between the five sensory organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and smell) of a human being and its surrounding. Also, according to Ayurveda, good health and wellbeing depend on the proper use of the five senses and equilibrium among the three forces or principles, the *Tridoshas*. The name of these three *doshas* is *Vata* (wind), *Pitta* (bile), and *Kapha* (phlegm), which corresponds to the three elements of the universe fire, air, and wind. In Ayurveda, Buddhist medicine is based on four elements of the universe, earth, fire, air, and wind, as they are closely related to Ayurveda (Endo & Nakamura, 1995; Heyn, 1990).

With the increase in advanced technology in the field of medicine, medical practitioners have too little or no time to examine the patient's emotions, complexion, or expressions, such as fear and anxiety on the patient face. But in Ayurveda, diagnostic decision making involves an intrinsic understanding of factors, such as body humor, body tissue, emotions, complexion, and expression (Kurande, Bilgrau, Waagepetersen, Toft, & Prasad, 2013). Ayurveda is the ancient traditional system of medicine based on plant, minerals, and animal-based products (Jaiswal & Williams, 2016). The technique used for treatment was diet and medicinal herbs. For instance, some spices, such as fennel seeds, Ajwain (carom /caraway seed), cloves, and cardamom, are wrapped in betel-nut leaves and chewed after meals to increase the flow of saliva and aid digestion.

### C. Mughal Influences

The Mughal emperor, founded by Babur in 1526, invaded the Indian sub-continent and ruled from as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. They came from Central Asia and transformed the food culture of India with their fusion cuisine (Persian). With the advent of the Mughals during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Indian cuisine was infused with spices and dry fruits. They came with their own food culture, which flourished in the Royal kitchen of the Mughal empire. The dominance remains present in the kitchen in most parts of Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, and some places in Central Asia (Kale, 2020). The art of roasting, grilling meat in the Tandoor, Caramelizing onions, delicious kebabs, and a variety of pilaf and biriyani were also introduced by the Mughals. Meanwhile, the Awadhi cuisine, which is native to the Awadh region of North India, was developed and tested by the chefs in the royal kitchen of the Nawabs. Some of the dishes from Awadh are *biriyani*, *kebab*, *nihari*, *galwati kebab*, *Dum biriyani*, *korma*, *salan* (a thick gravy), a variety of *pulao*, different types of *rotis*, *kheer* and *firmi* (a sweet dish). The Nawabs' concept of *dastarkhwan* is a presentation of an extravagant range of scrumptious dishes eaten in a particular order (Edensor, 2021). The Middle east also influenced Indian cuisine. They bought a variety of meat dishes along with the spices and improvised the biriyani and deserts by incorporating dry fruits and fragrances from rose water (Dubey, 2010).



Fig. 1. Awadhi Cuisine of Lucknow (<https://indianculture.gov.in/food-and-culture/distinctive-cuisines/delicate-flavours-awadh>) (Edensor, 2021)

#### D. Regional Cuisine

The cuisine from the regions contributes immensely to Indian cuisine. There is a huge difference in how the food is prepared and cooked, the spices used, and the technique of cooking employed. Different spices have their dominance in the regions.



Fig. 2. Variety of Indian Spices (Dubey, 2010)

It is mainly due to the abundance and availability in that region. Rice is the staple for most regions, but the wheat-based product is mostly consumed in the Northern part. Rice is also considered a powerful symbol of both hunger and fertility (Srinivas, 2011). Additionally, spices are an essential ingredient that plays a vital role in Indian cooking as a touch of spice can completely transform a dish completely. Spices are used whole, powered, and in combination as required. Moreover, Indian spices are used widely around the world in various recipes. Apart from the regional dishes, there are traditional dishes from each of the states of the sub-continent. The traditional dishes are prepared during most festivals and on special occasions (Table 1).

The culinary diversity of the regional cuisine is mapped in Figure 3, showing the popular dishes of the states (Kate, 2020).

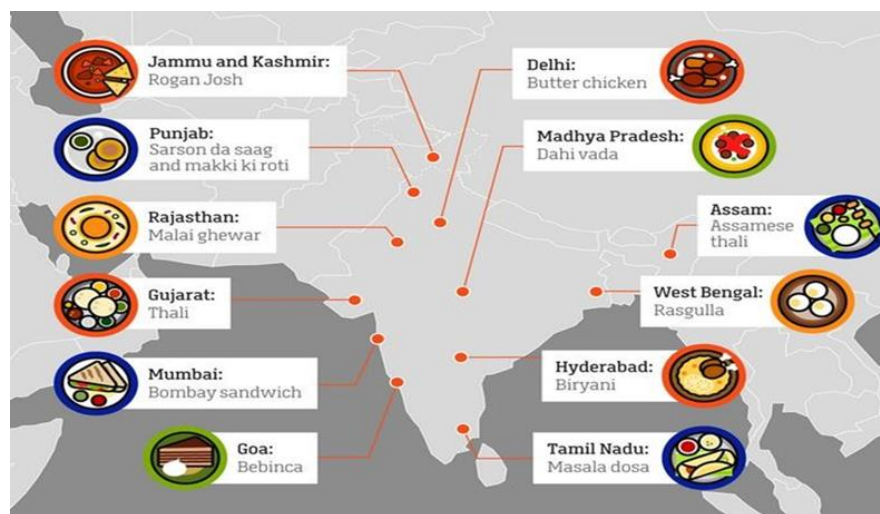


Fig. 3. Regional Cuisine of India. (<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/indian-food-dishes/index.html>) (Kate, 2020)

Table 1. Traditional Dishes from Each of the States of the Sub-Continent

States	Traditional Dish	States	Traditional Dish
Andhra Pradesh	Pootharekulu	Meghalaya	Jadoh
Assam	Khar	Manipur	Kangshoi
Arunachal Pradesh	Thupka	Maharashtra	Misal Pav
Bihar	Litti Chowkha	Nagaland	Pork with Bamboo Shoot
Chhatisghar	Chila	Odisha	Chenna Poora
Gujarat	Dhokla	Punjab	Makki Di Roti & Sarson Da Saag
Goa	Fish Curry	Rajasthan	Dal Baati Churma
Himachal Pradesh	Dham	Sikkim	Momo
Haryana	Bajre Ki Khichdi	Tripura	Chakhwi
Jharkhand	Dhooska	Telangana	Biryani
Kashmir	Rogan Josh	Tamil Nadu	Pongal
Kerala	Appam	Uttarakhand	Kafuli
Karnataka	Bisi Bele Bath	Uttar Pradesh	Tunde Ke Kebabs
Mizoram	Misa Mach Pora	West Bengal	Kosha Mangsho
Madhya Pradesh	Bhutte Ka Kees		

Culinary dominance and influence deviate from North to South and from East to West. The Northern part tends to be more wheat-based, with rich gravies and sweets made from mostly dairy and channa dal flour (besan). In contrast, the south is rice-based with spicy rasam and coconut chutney. On the other hand, the Western part is more cosmopolitan with more complex cuisine that includes a variety of dishes, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Besides, the east is based on milder spices and rely heavily on dairy, rice, seafood, vegetable, and fruits. The regions close to the coastline have an abundance of rice, seafood, and coconut, while the hilly areas are rich in dry fruits, a variety of fruits, and millet. The concept of vegetarianism is prevalent in the melting pot of diversity, religion, caste, and culture.

Table 2. A Comparison of the Four Regional Cuisines of India

	North Indian Cuisine	South Indian Cuisine	East Indian Cuisine	West Indian Cuisine
Snacks	Samosas, Chat, Pani Puri, Pakoras	Upma, Idly, Poha	Peas Kachori, Singara, Puchka, Jhal Muri, Aloo Chop.	Misal Pav, Vada Pav, Dhokla,
Main Dishes	Roti, Naan bread, Paratas, Chole Bature, Rogan Josh, Dal Makhani, Tandooi Chicken, Amritsari Kulcha	Dosa, Plain rice, Coconut Rice, Tamarind Rice, Yogurt Rice, Vegetable Rice.	Rice, Khichuri, Aloo Posto, Sukto, Lucchi, Dal, Begun Baja, Chutney, Sweet Sour Fish	Rice, Aloo bhaji, Pooris, Vindaloo, Shaak, Roti.
Spices	Gram Masala, Jeera, Chilli, Paprika powder, Fennel, Fenugreek seed, Nutmeg, Turmeric, and so forth	Mustard Seed, Curry leaves, Red Chillies, Sambar Powder, Dried and Fresh coconut, Turmeric, and so forth	Panchforon, Mustard seed, Mustard Paste, Green Chillies, Kalonji, Nutmeg, Turmeric, Garam	Gram Masala, Jeera, Chilli, Paprika powder, Fennel, Fenugreek seed, Nutmeg, Turmeric, and so forth
Curries	Aloo Gobi, Palak paneer, Jeera Aloo		Fish Curry	Kadhi, Goan fish curry, Duck curry
Sweets	Dry Sweets		Rossogulla, Payas, Cham chum	Modak, Kaju Katli
Drinks	Chai, Lassi, Daulat	Coffee	Tea, Coffee	Tea, Coffee
Sour Ingredients	Amchoor Powder, Tamarind	Tamarind	Tamarind	Tamarind

### E. North Indian Cuisine

The northern region is the largest region, encompasses eight states which are Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Union Territory Chandigarh (joint capital of Punjab and Haryana). North Indian cuisine is influenced by its history, topography, invaders, and the migrant. The Mughal style of cooking is dominated by rich curries, tandoori chicken, thick gravies, and the use of the Tandoor. Primarily the staple of the north



was rustic with dal and roti. The diverse and rich food culture is affected by the Mughals, the Persians, Afghans, the Middle Eastern people, Turkish, and the Britishers.

The Persians introduced the rich and fragrant food culture that they brought along when they entered Indian during the eleventh century. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Mongolian conquerors introduced the Afghan and Persian styles of cooking which are most influential in some parts of northern India. The food is rich and gravy-based, such as kormas in a gravy sauce. In Kashmir, the preparation of *Wazwan*, a multi-course meal, is considered an art.



Fig. 4. Preparation of Wazwan and Prepared Wazwan (Dubey, 2010)

In addition, Punjabi cuisine revolves around both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. *Makki Ki roti* and *sarson da saag with Makhan* (butter) are essential, besides *chicken tikka*, *naan*, *rajma chawal*, *Amritsari Macchi* (fish coated in besan with spices and deep-fried). People adore the *dhaba style* of food, which are roadside eateries common along the highways in North India. Earlier, they used to serve the truck drivers home-cooked meals. In Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, the cuisine is like Punjabi and Tibetan food, with variations within the regions, such as some prefer vegetarian over meat-based meals. *Patande*, a pancake prepared from wheat, is popularly known as the Indian pancake of Himachal Pradesh. Haryana, situated in the east of Punjab, has an abundance of dairy products and vegetables. The wholesome, homegrown food (vegetable, dairy) mostly cooked at home is consumed.

Delhi, the capital of India, food culture is influenced by the Mughals. In this city, an amalgamation of regional and traditional food is prepared and presented with a punch. It also caters to various western cuisine with a unique Delhi style, such as sandwiches, patties, and deserts. Chandni Chowk market in Old Delhi is famous for its street food and hosts the famous *golgappa* or *panipuri* chat place.



Fig. 5. Street Food Stall in Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi (Srinivas, 2011)

The central part of India comprises Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. The region is hot and dry, so people tend to eat food that keeps the body cool with heavy spices to prevent food from spoiling in the heat. The flavors of any dish are sour, salty, and sweet. The Galouti kebab of Lucknow, which is like a meat pate, is handed down from the Mughals as a melt-in-your-mouth kebab. In the desert state of India (Rajasthan), where the Marwaris and the Maharajas reside, due to the scarcity of water, the food is cooked in milk and ghee (clarified butter). A variety of savory and sweet dishes are prepared using Gram flour. *Daal-Baati Choorma* is a popular dish in the state. The Marwari community of Rajasthan is mostly vegetarian. Moreover, the Rajput community hunts and enjoys game meat. Some of its popular dishes include *laal maas*, *safed maas*, and *jungle maas* (Archana's Kitchen, 2017).

### F. South Indian Cuisine

The Southern part of India encompasses the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana, as well as the union territories of Lakshadweep, Puducherry, Andaman, and Nicobar Island. Rice is the staple food for the whole area of South India. The use of chilies, mustard, curry leaves (for fragrance), tamarind, coconut, and coconut oil in cooking make the food unique and tastier. *Dosa* and *idly* are examples of cuisines in the southern regions that have occupied a menu in every nook and corner of Indian eateries. It is served with *sambar*, *spicy urad dal/channa dal*, and coconut chutney tempered with mustard seed and curry leaves.



Fig. 6. Vegetarian Meal of Karnataka (left), Hyderabad Biryani (middle), Traditional Kerala Sadya/Feast(right) (Dubey, 2010)

The cuisine of Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana, is very similar to the Nabawi and Lucknowi styles of cooking. The food is very spicier and includes *Hyderabadi biriyani*, *dum ka murgh*, and *achaari subzi*. Plantain, which is abundantly available, is used in curries and chips (sweet and savory). The coastal region of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala uses seafood in a spicy seafood curry or *rasa*. Moreover, as Kerala is a port town, traders from Greek, Rome, China, Portuguese, Arab, and the Dutch visited the city, incorporating their culinary influences. The cuisine of Lakshadweep is like that of Kerala as it is within proximity. Coconut milk is used as a base for most curries cooked using Malabar spices (mixture of cumin, coriander, fennel, clove, mustard seed, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric, dedicated coconut, curry leaf, star anise, cardamom pods, red chili, fenugreek seeds and leaves, and black peppercorns). Additionally, a very distinct cuisine from the Coorgi region uses pork, game, and meat. Meanwhile, curd is served with each meal in most parts of South India.

People in Karnataka seem to use fewer spices, idli, and vada, with masala dosa as the popular breakfast items. Vegetarian food is consumed widely as the state has the highest percentage of vegetarian people. Originating in Mysore Palace, Bisi Bele Huiyanna or Bisi Bele Bhath is famous rice and lentil cooked together with spices ghee and asafoetida of Karnataka. Tamil Nadu has a rich cuisine that is characterized by its use of pulses and spices, including rose water. The foods in this state are spicier compared to the other states. Meanwhile, the rice and vegetable with *sambar* comprise a typical Tamil vegetarian meal. A very popular dish, *Chicken Chettinad*, is from the Chettinad region of Tamil Nadu.

### G. East Indian Cuisine

The eastern part of India encompasses West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, the union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Island. As both Bihar and West Bengal lie on the Indo- Gangetic plain, the land is fertile with an abundance of fresh vegetables and seafood. The culinary style of Bengal has the Mughal influence bringing mutton into mainstream Bengali cuisine. The cooking style and ingredients, although procured locally, are differed widely. Even fish is prepared in myriads ways. *Rice*, *fish curry*, *shukto*, *aloo posto*, *dal*, *tak (sour)*, *sweets* are their main staples. The eating pattern of the people from the east and western part of Bengal differ. The west (*ghoti*) tends to use fewer spices and chili, with sugar to enhance the flavor of anything, while the east (bangal) is heavy-handed in the use of chili. Also, both regions love hilsa and prawn, but the latter is preferred by the ghoti. Moreover, Bengals share a love for dried fish. They curve our mouth-watering dishes from them as curries, *bortha*, and chutney. Sweets, such as *Rosogolla*, *Misthi doi*, *Rajbhog*, and *Mihidana*, are famous throughout West Bengal. The mesmerizing north-eastern states of India comprise *Assam*, *Meghalaya*, *Manipur*, *Mizoram*, *Nagaland*, *Arunachal Pradesh*, *Tripura*, and *Sikkim*. In this region, the dominant portion of food is rice, fish, vegetables, and dairy. The popular dish of Assam is *Tenga* (sour) and the use of Khar in cooking, while in Manipur, bamboo shoots are used in a tasty dish *Iromba*. In Meghalaya, pork called *Jadoh* is viral. Sikkimese are fond of *Momos*, *Thupka* and *Sael*



*Roti*, while the Nagas are fond of smoked, dried, and fermented meat or fish. Odisha shares a border with West Bengal to the north and Andhra Pradesh to the south, so the cuisine is similar except for the use of raw mangoes in curries. Moreover, being closer to the coast (Bay of Bengal), fish and other seafood are widely eaten along with *Dalma*, *Pakhala*, *Kanika*, and others.



Fig. 7. Pakhala (left), Litti Choka (Middle), Bengali Thali (Middle), Assamese Lunch Platter (Right) (Dubey, 2010; Incredible-northeastindia.com, 2022; Wikipedia, 2020)

#### H. West Indian Cuisine

The western part of India consists of Gujrat, Maharashtra, Goa, Dadra and Nager Haveli, Daman, and Diu. The west Indian cuisine varies from region to region as the small number of people consume non-vegetarian food here. Gujrati people are mostly vegetarian, so many sumptuous vegetarian dishes are prepared using rice, chickpea flour, and ghee. The dishes are sweet, sour, and spicy. A Gujrati thali consists of *dal*, *roti vegetable spicy curry or kadhi chawal*, *saak*, *buttermilk*, *jalebi*, and so forth. Chickpea flour is predominantly used to make *Dhokla*, *Khandvi* *fafda*, and *Kadhi* which are popular dishes.



Fig. 8. Gujrati Thali (left), Lamb Vindaloo (middle), Misal Pav (right) (Dubey, 2010; Wikipedia, 2018)

Situated along the coast and on the hilly region of the Western Ghats and Deccan plateau, Maharashtrians enjoy both mild and spicy dishes. Their staple includes rice, vegetable, lentils, fruits, and bajri. The food culture is diverse in the urban area, with influences from the rest of India, Asia, and the west. Popular vegetarian fast-food snacks include *pav bhaji*, *wada pav*, *misal pav*, *kanda poha*, and *aloo poha*. Goa is surrounded by Maharashtra to the north and Karnataka to the south and east, with the Arabian Sea on the western coast. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Goa was ruled by Ashoka of the Maurya Empire. The Goa cuisine originated from the Indo-Aryan community which originated from Konkan and was then influenced by the Portuguese and the Sultanate rule. Vindaloo, a meat-based curry dish, is based on the Portuguese *dish carne de vinha d'alhos* (Wikipedia, 2018).

### III. Conclusion

With rich cultural background, diversity in language, religion, and ethnicity, Indian cuisine is exclusive to each region. Different spices have their dominance in the regions, mainly due to the abundance and availability in that region. The cuisine is based on the principle of Ayurveda, which is also considered the ancient traditional system of medicine. Also, the influence of trade, foreign invasion, and colonialism has immensely contributed to Indian traditional cuisine since they add new elements that make the cuisines richer.

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