

Traditional foods and beverages of Himachal Pradesh

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Himachal Pradesh presents anthropological, cultural, environmental and topographical diversity. Its reflection is seen in the variations of architecture of houses, clothing styles, food and food habits. The variations in availability of raw materials, environmental conditions clubbed with the time tested traditional knowledge and wisdom have made the people of different regions of this hill state to formulate, develop and perpetuate the consumption of a wide range of traditional foods and beverages unique to its places since ages. *Bhatooru, siddu, marchu, seera, chilra, manna, aenkadu, sepubari, patande, doo, baari, dosha, malpude, babroo, bedvin roti, madrah, tchati, churpa, sura, chhang, kinnauri, angoori, chulli, lugri, arak/ara, rak, chukh* and pickles (e.g. brinjal, *lingri, bidana*, peach, pear, plum, tomato, bottle gourd, etc.) made from different fruits and vegetables, etc. are some popular traditional products that are unique to the tribal and rural belts of Himachal Pradesh. Some of these products, e.g. *bhatooru, chilra* and *tchati* constitute staple food in rural areas of the state while others are prepared and consumed during marriages, local festivals and special occasions, and form part of the sociocultural life of hill people. However, the production of these foods and beverages is largely limited to household level.

Keywords: Traditional foods, Traditional beverages, Himachal Pradesh

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Himachal Pradesh is a state having number of communities, races and cultures intermingled together. The people of Himachal Pradesh have developed traditional food processing technologies for preparing the foods from locally available substrates largely governed by the ethnic preference, agroclimatic conditions, sociocultural ethos and religion. However, there may be local variation from region to region. A number of traditional foods are prepared and consumed by people in Himachal Pradesh for centuries, and these form a part of sociocultural life of the hill people^{1,2}. However, the production of these traditional foods and beverages has been limited to household level. The know-how of traditional processes and technologies involved in the production of these products has been transferred from one generation to another. The types of traditional foods and beverages of Himachal Pradesh are unique and different from other areas.

The paper deals with the indigenous knowledge of traditional foods and beverages prepared and consumed in various regions of Himachal Pradesh. On the basis of the substrate used, the traditional

foods and beverages of Himachal Pradesh can be broadly classified as (i) Cereal and legume based foods (ii) Milk based foods (iii) Vegetables and fruits (mainly pickles) based products (iv) Cereal and fruit based beverages, and (v) others.

Cereal and legume based foods

Cereals and legumes meet a considerable requirement of protein and carbohydrate of the local population. Wheat, barley, maize, buckwheat, rice and millet are the major cereals that are cultivated in Himachal Pradesh. Traditional foods prepared from major cereals are common in almost all the parts of Himachal Pradesh. Some of them are used as staple foods, while other are used as festive foods. Most of these traditional foods are based on rice, wheat and barley and some are also prepared from other grains. These foods have been a part of staple diet in the rural areas of Himachal (specially the districts of Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur, Chamba, Shimla, Mandi, Kangra and Kullu). These products being highly nutritious, easily prepared and conveniently preserved are very popular among the rural populations. Following are the popular cereal and legume based foods prepared and consumed in different parts of Himachal Pradesh (Table 1).

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Table 1—Traditional cereal and legume based foods of Himachal Pradesh

Product	Raw material	Method	Area
<i>Aenkadu/Askalu</i>	Rice flour	Made from rice flour slurry, festive dish.	Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Solan
<i>Aet</i>	Wheat flour	Thin <i>roties</i> , made during marriages.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Aktori</i>	Buckwheat flour, buckwheat leaves, et	Thick <i>roties</i> , staple food.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Baari</i>	Wheat flour	Thick paste of wheat flour cooked in water, eaten with <i>ghee</i> .	Kullu
<i>Babroo</i>	Wheat flour	Fried discs made from fermented wheat flour slurry, festive dish.	Kullu, Kangra, Mandi, Bilaspur
<i>Bagpinni/pinni</i>	Roasted barley flour, <i>chhang/lassi</i>	Solid dough (uncooked) eaten during journeys.	Lahaul
<i>Bedvin roti</i>	Wheat flour	Baked or fried <i>roties</i> .	Kullu, Mandi
<i>Bhatooru</i>	Wheat flour	Baked fermented <i>roties</i> , staple food.	Mandi, Kullu, Lahaul Spiti
<i>Borhe</i>	Black gram	Fried discs with hole in the centre, made from fermented black gram.	Kullu, Mandi, Shimla, Kangra, Chamba
<i>Chhangpa</i>	Roasted barley flour, <i>lassi, ghee</i>	Solid dough made by mixing <i>sattu</i> and <i>lassi</i> , prepared during religious ceremonies.	Lahaul
<i>Chilra/ Chilte/ lwar</i>	Buckwheat, wheat or barley flour	Made from fermented wheat /buckwheat/barley slurry, staple food.	Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur, Kullu
<i>Chhura</i>	Wheat flour, <i>chhang, lassi</i> , spices	<i>Roties</i> , snack food.	Spiti
<i>Doo</i>	<i>Sattu</i> (roasted barley flour)	Solid dough (cooked), occasional food.	Lahaul
<i>Dosha</i>	Wheat flour	Deep fried spirals used as snack food.	Lahaul
<i>Gulgule</i>	Wheat flour	Deep fried sweet <i>pakorras</i> made from fermented wheat flour slurry, festive dish.	Kullu, Kangra, Mandi
<i>Khatta</i>	Gram, mango powder, walnut powder, mustard oil	Curry prepared during marriages.	Kangra
<i>Khawalag</i>	<i>Sattu</i> (roasted barley flour), tea, <i>ghee</i> .	Made by mixing <i>sattu</i> , tea and <i>ghee</i> ; occasional food.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Madrah</i>	Kidney beans	Curry prepared by cooking kidney beans with <i>ghee</i> and yoghurt.	Chamba
<i>Marchu/Poltu/ Pole</i>	Wheat flour	Fried <i>roties</i> , ceremonial food.	Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur, Kullu
<i>Mande/Manna</i>	Wheat flour	Very thin <i>roties</i> , festive food.	Solan, Lahaul Spiti
<i>Malpude</i>	Wheat flour	Fried sweetened oval shaped disc, prepared during marriages.	Bilaspur
<i>Mangjangkori</i>	Buckwheat bran	Thick brown coloured <i>roties</i> .	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Marpinni/ Marjag</i>	<i>Sattu</i> , <i>ghee</i>	Sweet dish made by mixing roasted barley flour with <i>ghee</i> and sugar.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Patande</i>	Rice flour	Very thin <i>roties</i> , festive dish.	Chamba, Sirmaur
<i>Tchoso roti</i>	<i>Kodra</i> flour, fats	Thick <i>roties</i> , occasional food.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Tchog</i>	Roasted barley flour, <i>chhang, ghee</i> , jaggery, <i>ratanjot</i> .	Hard solid balls prepared during religious ceremonies.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Tcung</i>	Wheat flour, fats	Steam cooked wheat flour dough balls stuffed with fat mixed with <i>sattu</i> , occasional food.	Lahaul
<i>Teliye mah</i>	Black gram	Semi solid.	Kangra
<i>Thuktal</i>	Roasted barley flour, boiled potatoes	Steam cooked.	Spiti
<i>Tiskori</i>	Wheat bran	<i>Roties</i> , occasional food.	Lahaul
<i>Warri</i>	Black gram and ash gourd/petiole of <i>Colocasia</i> .	Sun dried solids.	Kullu, Kangra, Mandi, Bilaspur
Siddu/khobli	Wheat flour, opium seeds, walnut, spices.	Steam cooked fermented oval dish stuffed with spiced paste of opium seeds/walnut, etc.; staple food.	Kullu, Shimla, Lahaul Spiti
<i>Sang</i>	Wheat grains, peas (Spiti), horse gram, etc.	Thick soup, prepared mainly during winters.	Lahaul
<i>Seera</i>	Wheat grains	Starchy white solids, sweet snack food.	Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Mandi, Kullu
<i>Sepubari</i>	Black gram	Sun dried solids/ deep-fried made from fermented black gram, prepared during marriages.	Mandi, Bilaspur, Kullu, Kangra
<i>Shunali</i>	Wheat flour	Small ball shaped solids, breakfast food	Lahaul Spiti

Most of the traditional foods prepared by people in Himachal Pradesh are cereal based but some cereal legume/legume based foods are also common. *Bhatooru*, *marchu* and *chilra* are indigenous leavened bread or *roties* and constitute the staple diet of rural people in Himachal Pradesh (Figs 1 & 2). These are prepared with the wheat/buckwheat flour dough or slurry fermented with the addition of *malera* or *treh* (which mainly consist of lactic acid bacteria and yeasts), respectively. *Siddu* is a traditionally fermented steam cooked oval or disc shaped dish prepared in the rural areas of Kullu, Shimla and Lahaul Spiti districts (Fig. 4). In many parts of the state, *aenkadu* made of rice flour is a festive dish.

In Lahaul Spiti valley, the leaves of buckwheat are mixed with wheat flour and made into cakes called, *aktori*. Similarly *tiskori* and *mangjangkori* are thick *roties* prepared from bran of wheat and buckwheat grains. *Tchog* is a special kind of food prepared during religious ceremonies (Fig. 3). *Patande* (a sort of pancake) is a specialty in the Sirmaur area prepared from rice flour. *Gulgule*, *malpude* (*babroo*) are sweet snacks prepared during religious and marriage ceremonies in rural and urban areas. *Marchu* / *poltu* / *pole* are salted *roties* deep fried (in mustard oil) prepared in Lahaul Spiti and Kinnaur districts, especially during the tribal festivals of *phagli*, *halda* and marriage ceremonies; is also presented to relatives and friends while visiting them. *Madrah* of Chamba is unique and is prepared during marriages. For the preparation of *madrah*, *rajmah* (kidney beans) are cooked properly and mixed with *desi ghee*, spices, salt and beaten curd. It is cooked properly and served hot with rice. *Warries* are also very popular in Himachal Pradesh. *Warries* are prepared from black gram and ash gourd (*Benincasa hispida*) / petioles of *Colocasia*. These are spicy, hollow, solid balls used as condiment in cooking with vegetables or rice³.

Milk based foods

In addition to cereal and legume based traditional foods, milk based foods also constitutes a vital part of diet of people of Himachal Pradesh. Livestock are an integral component of the agricultural production systems in Himachal Pradesh. Traditional milk based products (Table 2) are prepared from the milk of several species of indigenous cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, and *churu* (hybrid of cow and yak).

In Himachal Pradesh, curd (*dahi*) is prepared and consumed in almost every home in village, which rear cattle. It is also called *noo* or *nuch* in Lahaul Spiti and

doyang in Kinnaur. Curd is churned, butter is separated and buttermilk (*chha* / *boti* / *bot*) left out is relished as a refreshing drink. The buttermilk is boiled, water is discarded and solids are dried to make *churpa* or *churpe* in Lahaul valley (Fig. 5). These are hard dried solids, which are used in preparation of soups. *Kadi*/ *kadu* or *kheeru* is a most popular dish made in most of the parts of state. It is prepared by cooking the buttermilk or *chha* with spices and a small portion of gram flour (*besan*). This forms a carrier of main food like rice or *chapatti*. *Nudu* is a ceremonial food prepared by cooking wheat flour in milk with small amount of salt to be eaten with ghee (Fig. 6). Similarly, *kulu* is made from buttermilk. *Tchaku cha* (salty butter tea) is an indigenous drink of Lahaul Spiti (Fig. 7). For its preparation, a special kind of black tea is used which comes in bricks of different shapes. Small amount of tea is added to water and boiled for some time. Butter, small amount of milk and salt is added and it is blended in traditional vessels called *dongmo* (Fig. 8).

Vegetable and fruit based products

Plenty of temperate fruits and vegetables are grown in Himachal Pradesh. Surplus produce of many of the vegetables and fruits is processed for pickles. Although pickles are produced in all regions of the country, the pickles made in Himachal Pradesh are unique and different (Table 3). Pickles from vegetables and fruits like *lingri* (fern), bottle gourd, pear, peach, plum, *bidana*, *galgal*, brinjal, etc are prepared and consumed in various parts of the state especially in Kullu district (Fig. 9). They are prepared by natural fermentation of fruits and vegetables. These pickles besides having nutritional value also act as food adjunct and appetizers and add palatability to the foods. Some locally available plants such as *aan* / *achhoka*, *prey*, *maslam*, *kachnar*, *ghandoli*, *lingri*, *tardi* and some species of mushrooms, e.g. *kanifru*, *chhachi*, *pili chhatri*, *kalakra*, *siun*, etc., which are collected by the people from the forests during / just after the rainy season and are used in preparing vegetable curries.

Cereal and fruit based beverages

In some tribal areas of India including Himachal Pradesh, the preparation of customary alcoholic beverages and the consumption are permitted at home scale⁴. There are a number of popular cereals and fruit based fermented alcoholic beverages prepared and consumed traditionally in rural areas of Himachal (Table 4). Some of the popular ones are given below:



Fig 1 *Marchu*



Fig 2 *Chilra*



Fig. 3 *Tchog*



Fig. 4 *Siddu* served with chutney



Fig. 5 *Churpe*



Fig. 6 *Nudu* served with *ghee*



Fig.7 *Tchaku cha* (Butter tea)



Fig. 8 *Dongmo* used for *Tchaku cha*



Fig. 9 Pickles of *bidana*, *lingri* and peach



Fig. 10 *Juma*: Sheep's intestines filled with wheat/millet flour paste



Fig. 11 *Chhang* (unfiltered and filtered)



Fig.12 *Chapkiyan*



Fig. 13 *Dham*: meals served by *botis*, large utensils used in preparation of food

Table 2—Traditional milk products of Himachal Pradesh

Product	Ingredient	Comments	Area
<i>Churpe/churpa</i>	Buttermilk	Solids recovered from buttermilk, used in soups.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Curd/dahi</i>	Milk	Thick gel used as savory.	All over Himachal
<i>Jhol</i>	Buttermilk/curd	Curry prepared by adding spices and boiling	Mandi, Kangra
<i>Kadi/kadu/ kheeru</i>	Buttermilk/ <i>dahi, besan</i>	<i>Dahi</i> cooked with spices and <i>besan</i> .	Kangra, Bilaspur
<i>Kulu</i>	Wheat flour, buttermilk	Semi solid dough prepared by cooking wheat flour in buttermilk used as occasional food.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Lassi</i>	Milk	Non-alcoholic fermented beverage.	All over Himachal
<i>Nudu</i>	Milk, Wheat flour	Semi solid dough, wheat flour cooked in milk, ceremonial dish.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Rehru</i>	Buttermilk, rice	Rice boiled in buttermilk.	Kullu, Mandi, Kangra, Hamirpur
<i>Tchaku cha</i>	Milk, green tea leaves, butter, salt	Salty non-alcoholic drink.	Lahaul Spiti

Table 3—Traditional pickles, vegetables and mushrooms of Himachal Pradesh

Product	Raw material	Comments	Area
Pickles			
<i>Bidana</i> (<i>Artocarpus lackoocha</i> Roxb.)	<i>Bidana</i> fruits	Semi solid mass	Kullu
Brinjal (<i>Solanum melongena</i> Linn.)	Brinjal	Semi solid mass	Kullu
Cauliflower (<i>Brassica oleracea botrytis</i> Linn.)	Inflorescence of cauliflower.	Semi solid mass	All over Himachal
<i>Alef</i>			
<i>Galgal</i> (<i>Citrus psedolimon</i> Tanaka)	<i>Galgal</i> fruits	Semi solid mass	Kullu
<i>Ghia</i> (<i>Lagenaria siceraria</i> Mol.) Standle	Bottle gourd	Semi solid mass	Kullu
<i>Lingri</i> (<i>Diplazium esculentum</i> Sw.)	Fresh ferns stem.	Semi solid mass	Kullu
Peach (<i>Prunus persica</i> Batsch)	Peach fruits	Semi solid mass	Kullu
Pear (<i>Pyrus amygdaliformis</i>)	Unripe pear	Semi solid mass	Kullu
Plum (<i>Prunus domestica</i> Linn.)	Unripe plum	Semi solid mass	Kullu
Tomato (<i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i> Mill.)	Unripe fruits.	Semi solid mass	Kullu
Vegetables			
<i>Aan/Achhoka</i> (<i>Urtica dioica</i> Linn.)	Leaves of nettle plant.	Leaves as vegetable.	Kullu, Lahaul Spiti
<i>Ambua/Khatiyai</i> (<i>Mangifera indica</i> Linn.)	Unripe mangoes.	As vegetable.	Kangra, Una
<i>Ghandoli</i> (<i>Silene vulgaris</i>)	Leaves (Cow bells)	Tender leaves as vegetable.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Kachmar</i> (<i>Bauhinia variegata</i> Linn.)	Flower buds	Flower buds steam cooked and roasted with oil and spices.	Bilaspur, Hamirpur
<i>Lingri</i> (<i>Diplazium esculentum</i> Sw.)	Fresh ferns	Fern used as vegetable.	Kullu
<i>Maslam</i> (<i>Barbarea intermedia</i>)	Leaves	Tender leaves as vegetable.	Lahaul Spiti
Winter cress plant			
<i>Patrodu</i> (<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>) (Linn.)	Leaves	Leaves rolled with slurry of gram flour steam cooked and then fried. This fried preparation is used as snack food / eaten with <i>roties</i> .	Mandi, Bilaspur, Kullu, Kangra, Hamirpur, Solan
Schott			Shimla
<i>Prey</i> (<i>Eremurus himalaicus</i> Baker) Foxtail lily plant	Leaves	Tender leaves as vegetable.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Tardi</i> (<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i> Linn.)	Tubers	Vegetable curry.	Mandi, Kangra
Potato yam plant			
Mushrooms			
<i>Chhachi / mogsha</i> (<i>Lactarius deliciosus</i> Fr.)	Fruiting bodies.	As vegetable.	Kullu, Kangra, Chamba, Mandi, Lahaul Spiti
<i>Chhunchhuru</i> (<i>Morchella esculenta</i>) (Linn.) Pers.	Fruiting bodies of morel.	Fresh and dried fruiting bodies as vegetable.	Kullu, Kinnaur, Chamba

Contd.

Table 3—Traditional pickles, vegetables and mushrooms of Himachal Pradesh—*Contd.*

Product	Raw material	Comments	Area
<i>Kanifru</i> (<i>Humaria hemisphaeria</i>)	Fruiting bodies.	As vegetable.	Kangra, Mandi, Kullu, Chamba, Kinnaur
<i>Peeli chhatri</i> (<i>Cantharellus cibarius</i>) Fr.	Fruiting bodies.	Vegetable curry.	Mandi, Kangra, Chamba, Kullu, Kinnaur
<i>Siun</i> (<i>Ramaria botrytoides</i>)	Fruiting bodies.	Vegetable curry.	Kinnaur, Kangra, Mandi, Kullu, Chamba

Table 4—Traditional cereal and fruit based beverages of Himachal Pradesh

Product	Raw material	Comments	Area
<i>Angoori/kinnauri</i>	Grapes	Dark brown liquid, alcoholic beverage.	Kinnaur
<i>Arak/ara</i>	Apple, <i>chulli</i> , barley, pear, etc.	Distilled clear alcoholic beverage.	Kinnaur
<i>Chhang/lugri</i> <i>Chulli</i>	Rice/barley Wild apricot	Cream coloured alcoholic beverage. Orange coloured alcoholic drink.	Lahaul Spiti, Kullu, Kinnaur Kinnaur
<i>Rak</i>	Wild almond (<i>Behmi</i>) apple, <i>chulli</i> , etc.	Dark brown alcoholic beverage.	Kinnaur
<i>Sra</i>	<i>Chhang</i>	Distilled clear alcoholic beverage.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Sura</i>	Millet flour	Brown coloured alcoholic drink.	Kullu (Lug valley), Mandi

Table 5—Other traditional foods and beverages of Himachal Pradesh

Product	Raw material	Form	Area
<i>Chakti</i>	Jaggery	Brown coloured alcoholic beverage.	Kullu
<i>Chukh</i>	Red chillies	Red chilly source prepared in mustard oil.	Chamba
<i>Geri/shakhal</i>	Mutton	Large boiled pieces	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Juma</i>	Sheep intestines	Wheat/millet flour dough stuffed in sheep intestines.	Lahaul Spiti
<i>Tchati</i>	Mutton pieces, <i>churpa</i>	Soup.	Lahaul Spiti

Sura is a millet (*Eleusine coracana*) based fermented beverage mostly prepared in *Lug* valley of Kullu district. It is prepared by natural fermentation of finger millet (*kodra/kached*) flour. Flour is knead in the form of dough and is kept for 10 days in a container. After 10 days half-baked *roties* are made, put in to container and water is added. After two days, *dhehli* made from traditional herbs is added and it is kept for 8-10 days for fermentation. *Sura* is consumed during local festivals like *shoeri saja* and marriages in rural area in Kullu especially *lug* valley.

Chhang is an indigenous rice beer made in the tribal belt of Lahaul & Spiti. It is a very popular traditional alcoholic drink consumed during marriages and other local festivals. It is offered to the deities and also exchanged as an important gift during weddings and other auspicious ceremonies. *Chhang* is an

indispensable hospitality beverage among tribal of Lahaul valley, and is considered to provide protection against cold during winter months. The preparation of *chhang* involves solid-state fermentation of cooked rice and *phab* (the traditional inoculum) for 4-5 days. After 4-5 days, it is filtered and filtrate is called *chhang* (Figs 11 & 12). Distilled form of *chhang* is called *sra*. In Sikkim, similar kind of beverage is prepared which is called *bhaate jaanr*⁵.

Apart from these, various fruit based fermented beverages made from a number of local fruits are popular in Himachal Pradesh especially in Kinnaur district. *Chulli*, *angoori / kinnauri*, *arak/ara* and *rak* are prepared by fermentation of wild apricot, locally available grapes, apple / pear and wild almond respectively. These beverages have been a part of socio-cultural life of people in Kinnaur.

Others

Traditional foods and beverages (Table 5) using meat are very limited. *Juma* is a favorite dish of Lahaul Spiti prepared in winters. Wheat flour/millet flour is mixed with spices and this paste is stuffed in sheep intestines (Fig. 10). This is then steam cooked and eaten hot with *chutney* or *tchati* (mutton soup). *Geri* or *shakhal* is large mutton pieces mixed with spices and cooked in water. It is also consumed during winters especially in local festivals (*phagli* or *halda*).

Traditional community meals

In some regions of Himachal Pradesh (Kullu, Kangra, Mandi and Chamba) during functions and marriages, traditional community meal is prepared which is called *dham* (Fig. 13). *Dham* is a traditional festive meal, cooked only by *botis* (a particular caste of Brahmins who are hereditary chefs). Preparations for this elaborate mid-day meal begin a night before. Food is cooked in big brass utensils and everyone sits on the ground in rows to have food. It is served in courses on *pattals* or leaf plates. The typical menu for a *dham* would start with rice and *madrah* of *rajma* (red kidney beans) cooked in yoghurt in Chamba, *sepubari* in Mandi district and mash dal in Kullu. This is followed by *kadi* and a *moong dal* (green lentil broth). Topped by *khatta* (sweet and sour sauce), the *dham* ends with the *mittha* (dessert) – sweet rice, liberally mixed with raisins and dry fruit.

Conclusion

A large number of traditional foods and beverages are prepared in rural and tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. These traditional products are unique to Himachal and some of the traditional foods still form a staple diet of sizeable population of the state. Some foods and beverages are also prepared during special occasions and constitute an important part of culture and tradition of the state. Cereal and legume based foods and beverages are most popular followed by fruit, vegetable and milk based products. The preparation of most of these foods and beverages involves fermentation of raw materials available in

the region. The prevalence of traditional foods in the state is largely linked to availability of raw materials, geographical barriers, environmental conditions, and different ethnic and tribal groups. Traditional starter cultures like *phab* (consortium of microflora), *treh* (left over fermented wheat flour slurry) and *malera* (left over fermented wheat flour dough) are used as inocula/starter cultures for initiating fermentation. Many of these traditional foods need to be analyzed for nutritional and nutraceutical values.

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