

Health and Well-Being through Traditional Food Habits: An Ayurvedic Perspective on *Sattvik Ahara* and Indigenous Food Culture of Chhattisgarh (India)

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Abstract: The human body, understood in *Vedic* philosophy as the abode of *Jiva Brahman*, the individual soul connected to the supreme consciousness (*Param Brahman*) depends fundamentally on *Ahara* (food) for both physiological sustenance and psychological well-being. *Ayurveda*, one of the six *Vedangas* comprising the ancient Indian knowledge system, posits that the type, quality, quantity, method of preparation, and manner of consumption of food are integral determinants of holistic health (*Svasthya*). However, the forces of colonization, globalization, modernization, and rapid urbanization have profoundly altered traditional dietary practices, introducing processed, fast, and nutritionally deficient foods into daily consumption patterns. This shift has disrupted the equilibrium between body and mind that Ayurvedic principles seek to maintain. Against this backdrop, this paper examines traditional food practices and culinary preparations alongside their natural sources of Chhattisgarh, situating them within the framework of the *Ayurvedic Ahara Parampara* (dietary tradition). The analysis aims to address contemporary health challenges by articulating the relevance of ancestral dietary wisdom and advocating for its revival, particularly among younger generations, as a means of restoring physical and mental well-being.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Traditional Diets, Chhattisgarhi Indigenous Food, Food Culture, Holistic Health, Nutrition, Sustainable Food Systems, Indian Knowledge System.

Introduction

According to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Annam Brahma* (Food is Brahman). *Ahara* (Food) nurtures our body and mind. According to *Ayurveda*, *Svasthya* refers to a state of being firmly established in one's true self or natural condition, representing the ideal state of health and well-being. Achieving this condition requires harmony among the body's physical and biological functions, efficient physiological metabolism and waste elimination, optimal tissue nourishment and integrity, well-regulated sensory functions and psychological stability, self-awareness, and inner contentment. (Payyappallimana, 2015) Ayurveda evaluates an individual's health through ten key parameters known as *Dasa Vidha Pariksha*. These include body tissues (*dusya*), geographical and environmental conditions (*desa*), physical strength (*bala*), seasonal and temporal influences (*kala*), gastrointestinal and metabolic efficiency (*agni* or *anala*), constitutional and hereditary determinants and constitutional makeup (*prakriti*), age (*vaya*), mental strength and temperament (*sattva*), adaptability or habituation (*satmya*), and dietary habits (*ahara*) (Murthy, 2001). Ayurveda emphasizes the significance of both internal factors, such as body tissues, age, digestive capacity, and individual *Prakriti* (constitutional makeup) and external determinants such as diurnal cycles, seasonal variations, and dietary practices, in determining an individual's health. An important aspect highlighted in Ayurveda is the role of mental disposition (*satvām*) or mental strength, which may be understood as willpower, in maintaining overall well-being (Murthy, 2001).

In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara* (food) is regarded as one of the three fundamental pillars sustaining life, alongside proper sleep and disciplined sexual conduct. The classical Ayurvedic texts, composed between 300 BC and 700 AD provide extensive discussions on food and nutrition (Payyappallimana, 2015). Food occupies a central position in Ayurveda and is regarded as one of the fundamental pillars of health and longevity. Recognizing its profound influence on physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, classical Ayurvedic treatises such as *Charaka Samhita* (Sharma, 2001), *Susruta Samhita* (Sharma, 2004), and *Astanga Samgraha* provide extensive discussions on the nature, quality,

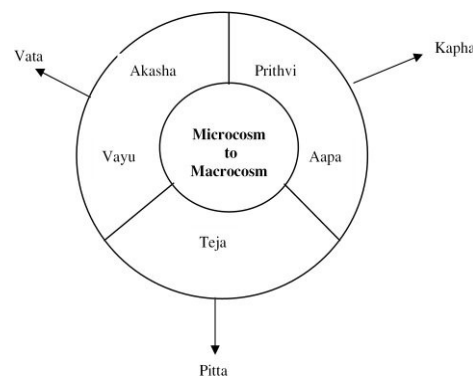
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preparation, and consumption of food. These texts emphasize that proper dietary practices are essential for maintaining health, preventing disease, and promoting overall well-being. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of dietetics, Ayurveda dedicates specific sections to various aspects of food and nutrition.

The Ayurvedic literature offers detailed descriptions of different food substances and beverages under *Drava Dravya Vijnaniya*, highlighting their properties, therapeutic applications, and effects on the body. The classification of foods based on their qualities, characteristics, and physiological effects is elaborated in *Annasvarupa Vijnaniya*, which serves as a guide for selecting appropriate foods according to individual needs and health conditions. The concept of food safety is addressed through *Annaraksha Vidhi*, which outlines measures for preserving food quality and preventing contamination. Equally important is the discussion on *Viruddhanna Vijnaniya*, which explains the incompatibility of certain food combinations and their potential adverse effects on health. Guidelines related to the proper methods of food consumption, including eating habits and behavioral practices during meals, are presented in *Annapana Vidhi*. Furthermore, *Matrasitiya* provides recommendations regarding the quantity and proportion of food intake, emphasizing moderation and the importance of consuming food according to one's digestive capacity. Collectively, these principles reflect Ayurveda's holistic approach to nutrition, wherein food is not merely a source of sustenance but a vital determinant of health, vitality, and disease prevention. The systematic treatment of dietary practices in classical Ayurvedic texts underscores the enduring relevance of traditional food wisdom in promoting healthy lifestyles and holistic well-being.

Classical Ayurvedic texts contain a dedicated section, known as *Matrasitiya*, which focuses on the appropriate amount of food intake and discusses illnesses that may arise from improper eating habits. According to these texts, the ideal quantity of food depends primarily on two key determinants: an individual's digestive strength and the characteristics of the food consumed. A traditional Ayurvedic dietary guideline recommends that half of the stomach be filled with solid foods, one-fourth with liquids, primarily water, while the remaining one-fourth should remain vacant to support the proper movement of *vayu* and facilitate efficient digestion. This recommendation is particularly beneficial for individuals with weak digestion, limited physical strength, compromised health, or sedentary lifestyles. Such dietary principles are highly individualized and can be effectively understood and practiced only through consistent self-observation and awareness of what suits one's body best. (Murthy, 2001)

In Ayurveda, the classification of food into wholesome (*hita ahara*) and unwholesome (*ahita ahara*) dietary practices categories is considered highly significant. It is believed that consistently following a diet based on adherence to wholesome dietary habits throughout one's lifetime reduces the likelihood of illness. Food is regarded not merely as a means to satisfy taste or hunger, but also as a vital source of nourishment and overall well-being. Therefore, foods that are appealing to the palate may not necessarily be beneficial for bodily nourishment, and the act of consuming food solely to curb appetite does not ensure proper nutrition. The opening verses of several renowned Ayurvedic classical texts also highlight a close relationship between disease manifestation and six psychological dispositions, that is lust, anger, greed, attachment, desire, and ego (Sharma, 2001). These mental and emotional states are believed to be strongly influenced by dietary habits and the nature of food consumed. This concept is further explained through the three fundamental conditions of consciousness: *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. *Sattva* represents a state of harmony, clarity, and contentment; *Rajas* signifies activity, excitement, and restlessness; while *Tamas* is associated with inertia, dullness, and lethargy. According to Ayurveda, different types of foods have the capacity to stimulate and shape these psychological states of mind (Prabhupada, 2002). The primary categorization of food is categorized according to its suitability in relation to an individual's physical and psychological temperament or mental disposition, guided by the theories of the five elements (*Pancha Mahabhuta*) and the *Tridosha* system. According to this philosophy, all living and non-living matter undergoes continuous transformation through the combination and separation of these five fundamental elements (Dhyani, 1994).



(Figure 1. Source:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7445897_Ayurveda_and_Traditional_Chinese_Medicine_A_Comparative_Overview/figures?lo=1)

Another notable aspect of Ayurveda is its detailed understanding of food incompatibility, encompassing both ingredients and methods of preparation. According to Ayurvedic principles, there are eighteen categories of dietary incompatibilities (Sharma, 2001), which are determined by factors such as the potency of food substances, processing techniques, quantity, mode of consumption, seasonal and temporal considerations, and the combination of different food items.

With increasing urbanization, traditional dietary practices have gradually shifted toward fast-food consumption, a trend that Ayurveda associates with *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible foods) (Kearney, 2010). This paper examines the ethnic and traditional food practices of the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, people of the state continue to preserve and promote the principles of Hita Ahara (wholesome diet) and Sattvik Ahara (pure and balanced food), which are closely linked to harmony, contentment, and overall physical and mental well-being.

Chhattisgarh, located in central India, derives its name from the words 'Chhattis' (thirty-six) and 'Garh' (fort), symbolizing the region's historic thirty-six forts. Widely recognized as the "Rice Bowl of Central India," the state has an agrarian economy, with nearly seventy percent of its inhabitants dependent on agricultural activities for their livelihood. Rice cultivation constitutes the dominant agricultural practice in the region and forms the primary dietary component of the local population (Directorate of Agriculture, Raipur, Chhattisgarh). Despite rapid modernization elsewhere, approximately eighty percent of Chhattisgarh's population continues to reside in rural areas, thereby sustaining its vibrant cultural legacy and indigenous food traditions. Chhattisgarhi cuisine encompasses a diverse range of nutritious and wholesome dishes that reflect the region's close relationship with nature. Owing to the region's vast forested landscapes and its predominantly rural and tribal communities supplement their diets with a variety of forest resources, including a diverse range of edible plant resources, including roots, tubers, foliage, blossoms, and fruits. These ingredients not only impart distinctive flavours to traditional dishes but also contribute significantly to their nutritional and medicinal value. More than seventy varieties of leafy vegetables and nearly twenty-five types of tubers and roots are consumed as part of the local diet (Chauhan, 2014). This paper explores both rice-based and traditional culinary preparations of Chhattisgarh that are independent of rice as a primary ingredient, while also documenting the diverse edible leaves, tubers, and roots that form an integral part of its food culture. Predominantly vegetarian in nature, Chhattisgarhi cuisine demonstrates the sustainable use of locally available natural resources to meet nutritional requirements while preserving taste, health, and cultural identity.

At present, fewer than thirty plant species contribute to approximately ninety percent of global food production. However, many naturally available food resources remain underutilized, leading to the gradual disappearance of numerous traditional varieties of grains and vegetables from cultivation (Misra, 2008). As these food resources fall out of use, valuable indigenous knowledge regarding their nutritional and medicinal benefits is also being lost. On a global scale, a considerable share of the population fails to meet the prescribed daily consumption levels of fruits and vegetables (Sachdeva, 2018). In contrast, the traditional Indian diet is characterized by a rich diversity fruits and vegetables, despite India being the second-largest producer of horticultural crops globally, following China. These food groups are vital sources of vital micronutrients, including vitamins and minerals, underscoring their importance in the dietary patterns of countries such as India, where micronutrient deficiencies remain prevalent (Meenakshi, 2016). The food culture of Chhattisgarh offers valuable insights into sustainable and eco-friendly dietary practices by encouraging the utilization of locally available natural resources to enhance nutritional intake. The preparation and processing of traditional foods serve as expressions of the ingenuity and cultural wisdom and rich culinary heritage of local communities but also demonstrate their profound understanding of ecological balance and environmental sustainability (Singh, 2007).

The traditional food practices of Chhattisgarh highlight the importance of recognizing and utilizing naturally available resources to improve nutritional well-being and overall health. Public health outcomes are closely linked to dietary habits, and food culture has evolved over centuries alongside human civilization. Traditional dietary systems are shaped by various factors, including geographical location, climate, seasonal variations, soil characteristics, water availability, forest ecosystems, agricultural practices, migration patterns, cultural influences, and occupational lifestyles. As an accumulated body of experiential knowledge passed down through generations, traditional food culture represents a time-tested approach to nutrition and health. Food serves purposes far beyond satisfying hunger; it plays an integral role in family life, social interactions, festivals, and religious ceremonies. Traditional foods are often well-suited to the nutritional needs of local populations and contribute significantly to the maintenance and promotion of health. In the context of globalization, the adoption of dietary patterns that are disconnected from local ecological and cultural realities may not always be beneficial and can potentially have adverse health consequences. The transition from traditional diets to Westernized food habits has been identified as a major contributor to the increasing prevalence of non-communicable and lifestyle-related diseases. Notably, the Global Burden of Disease Study (2015) recognized poor dietary habits are recognized among the major contributors to early mortality across the globe (Shukla, 2020). Every traditional food culture embodies a long history of adaptation and resilience, offering dietary patterns that are generally safe, nutritious, and well suited to the people of a particular region.

An ethnographic investigation was undertaken through face-to-face interactions to gain a comprehensive

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understanding of the food culture of Chhattisgarh. Information was collected using semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses from participants concerning their preferred food choices, methods of preparation, and variations in dietary practices across different seasons.

Although rice constitutes the staple diet of the people of Chhattisgarh, a typical meal also includes legumes, locally available leafy greens, tuber crops, and edible root vegetables. Owing to the state's extensive forest resources, indigenous and rural populations have developed a rich body of traditional knowledge that enables them to sustainably utilize forest-based foods to meet their nutritional needs. This deep connection with nature is clearly reflected in the region's food traditions, which largely align with the principles of *Sattvik Ahara* (wholesome and balanced diet). Chhattisgarh is particularly known for its diverse range of rice-based and traditional food preparations that do not rely on rice as a principal ingredient, several of which are described below.

Angakar Roti is a traditional dense flatbread made chiefly from rice flour and traditionally roasted over glowing charcoal embers. The term *Angakar* is derived from *Angar*, meaning burning embers or charcoal, which signifies its distinctive method of preparation. In some regions, wheat flour is also used as an alternative ingredient. Similar rice-based flatbreads are found across India; for instance, *Akki Roti* is a popular dish in southern states, where it is subsequently prepared on a heated griddle being lightly coated with oil.

Chausela is a savory deep-fried bread made from rice flour. The dough is formed by mixing rice flour with warm water, salt, and carom seeds until a uniform consistency is achieved. Small portions of the dough are flattened into circular discs and fried in hot oil or ghee until crisp and golden. It is a popular festive and household preparation in Chhattisgarh.

Cheela is a delicate savoury pancake traditionally prepared from rice batter, preferably using freshly harvested rice. Alternative formulations may incorporate flours obtained from green gram (*Vigna radiata*), black gram (*Vigna mungo*), or Bengal gram (*besan*). Although it resembles the South Indian *Dosa* and is sometimes referred to as the 'Chhattisgarhi Dosa,' it differs significantly in its method of preparation. Unlike *Dosa*, which relies on fermentation of Unlike several batter-based preparations that rely on fermentation, *Cheela* is typically made from a mixture of rice and black gram batter and cooked immediately after preparation. It is widely consumed as a breakfast item and is typically served with spicy chutney.

Dhuska, often referred to as *Mota Roti* (thick bread), is prepared from a mixture of cooked rice, rice flour, and salt. The dough is shaped into flattened rounds by hand and cooked on a heated iron griddle (*tawa*), with a small amount of oil or ghee applied during cooking. Its simple preparation and wholesome nature make it a popular traditional food.

Faraa is a steamed rice-based delicacy that reflects the region's preference for healthy and minimally processed foods. Rice flour serves as the primary ingredient in the preparation of the dough, warm water, and salt. It may be filled with a spiced paste made from Soaked black gram or green gram is blended with flavouring agents including ginger, coriander, cumin, turmeric, and black pepper to create a seasoned mixture, although unstuffed varieties are also common. The prepared dumplings are steamed over boiling water until cooked. Since it requires little or no oil, *Faraa* is considered a nutritious and easily digestible food. For enhanced flavour and texture, steamed *Faraa* may also be lightly, the ingredients are stir-fried with mustard seeds, cumin seeds, sesame seeds, ginger, garlic, and green chillies to enhance their flavour.

Muthia is another traditional rice-based preparation consists of boiled rice, rice flour, sesame seeds, garlic, coriander leaves, selected spices, and salt. The name *Muthia* originates from the Hindi word *Muthi* (fist), reflecting the hand-moulding technique used in its preparation. This dish is especially popular during the winter season and may be either steamed or fried depending on local preferences.

Pej is a liquid or semi-liquid rice preparation comparable to rice gruel. It is made by cooking a small quantity of rice in a relatively large amount of water and is commonly consumed with onions, pickles, or spicy chutneys. The consistency of *Pej* varies according to seasonal requirements; during the summer months, a higher proportion of water is used to promote hydration. Widely consumed throughout the year, particularly as a morning meal, *Pej* is also recommended during periods of illness because of its easy digestibility. Its characteristics closely resemble traditional Ayurvedic preparations such as *Manda*, *Peya*, and *Yavagu*, which are valued for their nourishing and therapeutic properties. (Dhanya, 2019)

Aamat is a traditional sour and spicy soup that is often regarded as the Chhattisgarhi equivalent of *Sambhar*, a lentil-based preparation widely consumed in southern India. The term *Aamat* signifies "sour" in the local dialect, reflecting its characteristic taste. Widely relished in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, this culinary preparation incorporates diverse vegetables, bamboo shoots, and a blend of aromatic seasonings, including asafetida, ginger, cumin, coriander, and garlic. *Aamat* is commonly served during festive celebrations and ceremonial gatherings and family gatherings, especially when guests are welcomed into the home. Rich in flavour and nutrients, it is typically consumed with cooked rice or traditional flatbreads such as *Roti* and *Chapati*.

Bara is a popular savory snack of Chhattisgarh that closely resembles the South Indian *Vada* or *Vadai*. It is prepared from a batter of black gram (*Vigna mungo*), often enriched with finely chopped green chillies, fresh ginger, coriander leaves, and occasionally onions. Traditionally, *Bara* is served on *Dona*, eco-friendly bowls fashioned from leaves

and accompanied by a spicy chutney prepared from green chillies, tomatoes, and fresh coriander.

Bafauri is a well-known steamed delicacy made primarily from split chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*) batter. The preparation incorporates ingredients including finely chopped green chillies, ginger, onions, coriander leaves, garlic paste, and turmeric powder to enhance flavour and aroma. The seasoned mixture is shaped into small dumplings or balls and steamed for approximately 15–20 minutes. Owing to its steamed method of preparation, *Bafauri* is often regarded as a healthy and nutritious traditional food.

Dubaki Kadhi is a distinctive regional variation of *Kadhi*, a tangy and mildly spiced curry prepared from buttermilk and gram flour (*Besan*). While *Kadhi* is popular across several Indian states, including Maharashtra, Punjab, and Gujarat, the Chhattisgarhi version is characterized by the addition of small dumplings made from black gram paste, which are immersed in the simmering curry. Besides *Dubaki Kadhi*, the state is known for several other varieties, including preparations made with okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*), colocasia tubers (*Colocasia esculenta*), and bottle gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*), reflecting the diversity of locally available ingredients.

Chhattisgarh possesses a rich tradition of sweet culinary preparations, many of which are deeply associated with local festivals, cultural practices, and seasonal celebrations. Some of the most prominent traditional sweet dishes are described below.

Anarasa is a traditional semi-firm sweet confection made by deep-frying a mixture of rice flour, jaggery, and sesame seeds. The preparation begins by soaking rice overnight, after which the moist grains are finely ground into flour. The rice flour is blended with jaggery to produce a pliable dough, to which sesame seeds are added for improved taste and texture. The dough is then moulded into flattened circular shapes and fried in ghee until a golden-brown colour develops. *Anarasa* is widely appreciated for its distinctive taste and traditional significance.

Dehrauri is a soft-textured sweet delicacy prepared from rice, curd, and jaggery and cooked by deep frying. The preparation involves soaking rice for an extended period, followed by coarse grinding. Curd is then incorporated into the rice paste, which is left to ferment mildly before further processing. The fermented mixture is shaped into small balls or flattened discs and fried in ghee until it develops a dark brown colour. Separately, a jaggery syrup flavoured with cardamom is prepared, and the fried pieces are immersed in the syrup, allowing them to absorb its sweetness and aroma.

Gulgula is a traditional sweet snack consisting of small, deep-fried balls made from wheat flour mixed with jaggery syrup and other ingredients to obtain a homogeneous batter. The mixture is subsequently shaped into small balls, typically 2–3 cm in diameter and deep-fried in ghee until fully cooked. The dough is prepared by blending wheat flour with jaggery syrup and the remaining ingredients. Small spherical portions, generally measuring 2–3 cm in diameter, are then fried in ghee until they attain a rich brown colour. Owing to its dense composition and high energy content, *Gulgula* is considered relatively heavy to digest and is therefore commonly prepared during winter months and festive occasions.

Khurmi is a widely enjoyed traditional sweet snack prepared from wheat flour, ghee, and a sweetening agent such as jaggery or sugar. The dough is formed by blending wheat flour with ghee and water sweetened with dissolved jaggery or sugar. It is then divided into small portions, shaped appropriately, and fried over medium heat until a crisp texture and golden-brown appearance are achieved. One of the distinguishing features of *Khurmi* is its long shelf life, allowing it to be stored for several weeks. Consequently, it is frequently prepared during festivals, particularly Deepawali.

Tikhur-based sweets occupy a unique place in the traditional cuisine of Chhattisgarh. *Tikhur* (*Curcuma angustifolia*), also referred to as white turmeric or East Indian arrowroot, is a rhizomatous species recognized for its significant nutritional value and therapeutic potential. Starch extracted from its fresh rhizomes is widely utilized in the preparation of various traditional desserts. The rhizomes have long been employed in folk medicine for managing conditions such as fever, joint pain, leucorrhoea, kidney stones, inflammatory disorders, bone fractures, peptic ulcers, indigestion, and stomach ailments. In several regions of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, *Tikhur*-based preparations are also used as supplementary foods for children.

Among the most popular *Tikhur* sweets are Barfi, Halwa, and Jalebi. *Tikhur Barfi* is prepared by slowly cooking *Tikhur* starch with sugar and water until a thick consistency is achieved, after which the mixture is spread onto a flat surface and allowed to cool and set. *Tikhur Jalebi* is produced by combining *Tikhur* with *Khoa* (condensed milk) to form a batter. The mixture is then dispensed through a specially designed cloth into hot ghee in circular patterns, creating characteristic spiral shapes. Once fried, the *Jalebis* are immersed in sugar syrup, resulting in a sweet, crisp, and flavourful dessert that is highly cherished in the region.

India possesses a remarkably rich and diverse culinary heritage, with dietary patterns strongly influenced by social identity, religious beliefs, cultural traditions, local agricultural systems, and the availability of regional food resources (Vecchio, 2014). Among the various food crops cultivated across the country, rice occupies a central position as one of the most important cereal grains. It serves as a primary food source for over fifty percent of the world's population and is cultivated extensively throughout Asia, where it forms the foundation of daily meals (Pathak, 2020). In Indian society, rice holds significant cultural and symbolic value, representing prosperity, fertility, and auspiciousness due to its life-sustaining role. In addition to being an excellent source of readily available energy, certain varieties such as brown and red rice varieties constitute valuable sources of dietary fibre, B-group vitamins, calcium, zinc, iron, manganese, selenium, magnesium, and numerous other micronutrients essential for human health (Rathna, 2019).

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Lal Bhaji (Iron)	40%
Kodo-Kutki (Iron/Magnesium)	35%
Chaulai Bhaji (Calcium)	30%
Kulthi Dal (Iron)	28%
Aamat (Potassium)	25%
Kadhi (Calcium)	22%
Cheela (Zinc)	20%
Fara (Magnesium)	18%
Anarsa (Phosphorus)	12%
Bore Basi (Potassium)	15%
Chousela (Phosphorus)	10%

(Figure 2. Source:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7445897_Ayurveda_and_Traditional_Chinese_Medicine_A_Comparative_Overview/figures?lo=1)

The following figure highlights the estimated contribution of selected traditional food items of Chhattisgarh to the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of specific minerals and micronutrients. The data underscore the nutritional significance of indigenous foods that have traditionally formed an integral part of the dietary practices of rural and tribal communities in the state. These foods not only provide energy but also serve as valuable sources of essential micronutrients required for maintaining health and preventing nutritional deficiencies.

Agriculture forms the backbone of the economy of Chhattisgarh, where approximately 4.78 million hectares of land are under cultivation, representing approximately 35% of the state's overall geographical area. Around 3.7 million hectares are devoted to rice cultivation, predominantly under rainfed conditions across both upland and shallow lowland ecosystems. This extensive cultivation has earned Chhattisgarh recognition as one of the major rice-producing regions of India.

With nearly 44% of its geographical area covered by forests, Chhattisgarh has long been home to rural and tribal communities that have maintained a close and sustainable relationship with their natural environment. Over generations, these communities have adopted eco-friendly practices that contribute to the conservation and management of forest ecosystems. Alongside cereals, a wide variety of cultivated and wild leafy vegetables, tubers, and roots constitute essential components of the local diet. These plant-based foods not only enhance dietary diversity but also provide seasonal health benefits owing to their medicinal properties. Traditional food systems of the region incorporate numerous ingredients known to support immunity, promote longevity, and aid in the prevention and management of common ailments.

Furthermore, many traditional Indian foods are increasingly recognized as functional foods because they contain biologically active compounds, including antioxidants, dietary fibres, probiotics, and other health-promoting phytochemicals. These functional constituents contribute to physiological well-being by enhancing immune function, supporting recovery processes, and assisting in the mitigation, prevention, and effective management of numerous health disorders. Consequently, traditional dietary practices represent a valuable repository of nutritional wisdom that continues to hold relevance for contemporary health and wellness.

The traditional food habits of Chhattisgarh represent a unique convergence of indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, ecological wisdom, and health-promoting dietary practices. Viewed through the lens of Ayurveda, particularly the concept of *Sattvik Ahara*, these food traditions reveal a holistic approach to health that nurtures the body, mind, and spirit. Traditional foods embody generations of accumulated knowledge, ensuring that dietary practices remain both wholesome and sustainable. Chhattisgarh, often referred to as the "Rice Bowl of Central India," possesses a rich and vibrant indigenous food culture. Rice serves as the staple food of the region, while its extensive forest ecosystems provide a diverse range of edible leaves, wild tubers, roots, and other natural resources that supplement local diets with distinctive flavors and therapeutic benefits.

In an era characterized by rapid dietary transitions, increasing dependence on processed foods, and the growing burden of lifestyle-related diseases, the traditional food culture of Chhattisgarh offers valuable lessons for sustainable health and well-being. These practices not only provide nutritional security but also support biodiversity conservation, environmental sustainability, and community resilience. In recent decades, globalization and changing lifestyles have contributed to a gradual decline in the diversity of traditional foods worldwide, limiting dietary patterns to a narrow range of ingredients. Despite these trends, the people of Chhattisgarh have largely preserved their traditional food practices, demonstrating the value of utilizing locally available natural

resources. This underscores the importance of living in harmony with nature, conserving biodiversity, and making judicious use of ecological resources. Consequently, safeguarding traditional dietary knowledge extends beyond the preservation of cultural heritage; it represents a vital approach to enhancing public health outcomes and fostering sustainable development.

Reintegrating indigenous food systems into contemporary lifestyles can help to address modern health challenges while fostering a deeper appreciation of local resources and cultural identity. Future research, policy initiatives, and community-based interventions should focus on documenting, preserving, and promoting these traditional food practices. By embracing the wisdom embedded in Ayurvedic dietary principles and the rich food heritage of Chhattisgarh, society can move toward a more balanced, healthy, and sustainable future.

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