

Culinary Adaptation in Diaspora: Sindhi Cuisine Across Borders

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Abstract: The research paper aims to explore the heterogeneous world of Sindhi Cuisine and Culinary habits as adapted by Sindhi diaspora. The paper intends to study the evolution of these food traditions having roots in ancient Indus Valley Civilization, facing distribution in post-Partition era and into contemporary adaptation of eating habits in the age of digitalization and global mobility. It explores the effects of community migration on cultural identity, religion and value system- wherein Sindhi community strives to maintain a delicate balance between adapting to new social setting and geographical landscape while consciously preserving traditional dress, folk recipes and language that anchors the sense of belongingness and comfort. The paper categorically highlights cultural culinary habits as intangible part of life, passed down from one generation to the next through observation, memory and shared meals, as these traditions are neither suspended in animation nor lost to modernity. Instead, they're affectionately maintained, transmitted, refashioned and adapted in response to changing circumstances, making Sindhi culinary cuisine a living bridge between past and present.

The aim of the paper is to stress upon the Sindhi culture, cuisine, eating habits, cooking patterns and its evolution over the period of time. Sindhi has deep cultural heritage, which they have taken great pride in and preserved it over the time, making adaptations and evolving it with demands of time. With the forced migration and rehabilitation in new territory, like many other communities who were in minority, Sindhi were always at the risk of losing their identity, native food habits and dishes, language...

Keywords: Sindhi, Cuisine, Migration, post-Partition, Cultural Memory, Digitalization.

Methodology

With the purpose to achieve the aim of the study, the present research is extensively drawn from existing scholarly literature. For this purpose, the study used various secondary sources which include journal papers, articles, digital news articles, blog post, videos, reports related to Sindhi Diaspora and Sindhi Cuisine in order to understand the origin, challenges, displacement and resettlement, preservation and evolution of Sindhi community. The study used the Boolean search string: "Sindhi Diaspora"; "Culinary Adaptation of Sindhi"; "Sindhi Cuisine"; "Sindhi Migration"; "Challenges and Obstacles for migrating community in post-partition"; and "Sindhi Cuisine in Global Diaspora". No papers were purposely translated and all the literature used for originally available in English.

Introduction

India is a land of remarkable demographic diversity, where numerous religions, communities and ethnic groups coexist harmoniously while sharing a common national identity and border. Indians take great pride in their religious traditions, customs, and cultural heritage, preserving, upholding, and celebrating them with deep reverence.

India continues to be a vast reservoir for population genomics research because there are many socio-culturally homogeneous population, of whom the origins as well as demographic history is little known. The Partition of India and Pakistan witnessed the most significant, rapid and largest.

migration of people, displacing millions of people and forcing them to leave their ancestral home and migrate across borders. Among these, one community that remains relatively less highlighted is the Sindhi community. Sindhis in India migrated from the erstwhile Sindh province of Pakistan following Partition. During Partition, millions of Sindhi immigrated to Gujarat, Rajasthan and Punjab¹.

Partition forced the creation of two separate nations on the basis of religion; Sindh province, predominated by Sindhi Muslims, remained in the newly formed nation of Pakistan and Sindhi Hindus were forced to abandon their homes, migrate and relocate in a new landscape, in newly formed India². Since then, they settled in different parts of India and formed a part of Indian Diaspora. They had to maintain their identity by preserving their culture, custom, language, cuisine and engaging with the new social setup.

As a result of the political and social strife that came in the wake of partition, the Sindhi Hindus had to migrate to India empty handed. As a result of this mass migration, they are spread in many countries. This has led to the breakup of their socio-cultural edifice-compelling them to maintain their identity mostly through social practices and business relations they indulge in.

From its ancient roots, such as the Indus Valley Civilization, to a modern language, Sindhi in India has been united and integrated by a broad range of language and Cultures, and as such possesses a special and unique strength. The story of Sindhi cuisine is one of remarkable resilience — born of forced migration, shaped by scarcity, sustained by collective memory, and passed down through generations with profound love. It exists as a living cultural essence, earnestly preserved and evolved within the simplicity.

For migrants, food has remarkable ability to keep cultural memory and roots alive, even when surroundings and settlements change. Food is the most enduring form of retaining cultural memory when every minute detail like language, clothes, landscape, demography and everyday customs begins to swap. The preparation, taste and remembrance of familiar dishes help keep communities connected to their ancestors. Sindhi cuisine stands as a powerful example of this quiet strength. The food itself grew out of Sindhi's landscape- embracing both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes; basic everyday meal and festive feasts; Hindu and Muslim traditions; mixing well with new changes that gradually takes place when families live far away from their original inhabitant³. Dishes like Sai bhaji, Koki, Dal Pakwan, Sindhi Kadhi, Seyal mani, Sindhi Biryani, Bhee aloo, Lolo, and Papads, Pickles, and Chutneys maintain the portrayal of Sindhi identity in home and community setting.

The paper explores into the various dimensions of Sindhi diaspora and their tradition; faith; cultural importance associated with food and evolution of culinary practices post-partition. It aims to highlight that how food as a cultural identity has been preserved by Sindhi community in India that has strengthened scattered communities to a common identity across borders. The paper pointedly highlights the significance of culinary habits as intangible part of cultural heritage- which has not only been preserved and celebrated in the past, but also something that keeps evolving from generations to generation.

Food and Memory: Repository to Cultural Tradition and Homeland

The guardian spirit of River Indus- *Jhuley Lal*- the patron saint of Sindhi community, also known as Uderolal or Lal Sai, representing unity, love and compassion, is celebrated during Cheti Chand festival, which also marks the beginning of Sindhi New Year and is the main festival for the Sindhi

¹ Kothari, R. (2018). *Unbordered memories: Sindhi stories of Partition*. Penguin Random House India.

² Hema Ravi, P. (2017). Hindu Sindhis: Roots and routes of diaspora. *Pune Research Discovery: An International Journal of Advanced Studies*, 2(2).

³ Dua S. Gandhi M. Sindhi Cuisine: A Study of Evolution and Eating Habits. *PUSA Journal of Hospitality and Applied Sciences*; ISSN 2395-020X

community- where people express their gratitude and devotion towards their deity⁴. The name “Jhulelal” means “ the one who swings on the waves”, and the oral traditional tales of deity performing miracles on the river; protector of sailors and travellers; preacher of harmony and peace- something that continues to resonate across generations, keeps his memory alive, cherished and celebrated amongst Sindhi.

The 16th Century historic shrine devoted to saint *Jhuley Lal* near Tando Adam Khan, present day Pakistan stands as a living emblem of fusion and correlative heritage. Devotees visit the place, offer prayers, perform ritual and participate in ceremonies that reflect the affirmation in common culture and spiritual bond⁵.

The inseparable relationship of River Indus and Sindhi people is most vividly encapsulated in the depiction of Sindhi patron saint *Jhuley Lal* sitting cross legged on a *Palla fish*- an image that effortlessly links spiritual faith with river’s life-giving abundance and unique Sindhi food⁶. In this sense, the devotion of people to their deity quietly reminds them of their enduring ties to their history even in the midst of migration and changes.

For the migrants, preserving their culture, religion, language, identity and tradition has been the biggest challenge. In the course of relocation and new settlement, what gives a sense of calm and belonging are the traditional food practices amongst the community. Culinary practices take a deeper significance, becoming one of the most substantial and irreplaceable way of maintaining an emotional connection to lost homelands. Food, apart from everyday ordinary routine, becomes a living symbolic resource through which identity is negotiated, maintained and restored⁷. The chronicles of Sindhi food offer a gripping and captivating case to fathom the interplay of survival and cultural continuity. The displacement and migration triggered by the Partition of 1947 entirely transformed the lives of Sindhi people, compelling them to rebuild, preserve and uphold their culture in a new landscape.

As many families migrated across borders and formed and shaped their identity in new geographical location, food became their foundational force and a vital anchor. For Sindhi in India, It became a living archive- a way to hold onto memories of lost homes and ancestral landscape. Similarly, Sindhis in Pakistan underwent transformations brought by urbanization; internal migration and transforming food market⁸. Traditional dishes like Koki, Sindhi Kadhi, Dal Pakwan, Sai Bhaji and various other sweets are not just recipes, they carry relics of memory and tradition. They are often linked to family rituals, festive gathering, daily family routine- evoking childhood stories, neighbourhood rhythms and profound sense of belonging.

Sindhi were global business community- probably the first group of traders to undertake long-distance trading in India⁹. Women often constitute an important base to ensure the continuity, survival and prosperity of any community. Similarly, herein, belonging to business-based community, many of its enterprising women made and sold papads and pickles to keep the kitchen fire burning. The Sindhi pickle is also distinctive as it is oil-less, consisting of carrots; small onions; cauliflower, okra, dry dates

⁴ M.Tanvi. (2024). Lord Jhulelal: An Analytical Study of Sindhi Community and Ritual.

⁵ Pranjal, B. (2018). *O laal meri: Jhulelal and the Sindhi identity*. Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology. The heritage Lab. (2019). Sindhi voices from Partition. . <https://www.theheritagelab.in/sindhi-voices-partition/>

⁶ The heritage Lab. (2019). Sindhi voices from Partition. . <https://www.theheritagelab.in/sindhi-voices-partition/>

⁷ Suri, M. (2025). Food and Diaspora: an exploration in M.G. Vassanji’s *The Book of Secrets*. *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*, 6(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.04246>

⁸ David, M., & Ali, A. (2026). Partition, mobility, and identity transformation among Sindhi Hindu migrants. *Kulturní studia*. [https://doi.org/10.7160/KS.2026-01\(26\).05](https://doi.org/10.7160/KS.2026-01(26).05)

⁹ Khushbu, G. (2022). Disclosed: The burning truth of Sindhis. <https://iledu.in/disclosed-the-burning-truth-of-sindhis/>

and lotus stems, picked with vinegar and spices¹⁰.

Recipes, largely oral in nature, are handed down from generation to generation in many families, especially as language and script began to fade. Thus, food become a critical medium for inter-generational learning. Remarkably, a strong thread of uniformity endured across continents, sustained by community endogamy and shared social directories¹¹.

Food is a cornerstone of cultural identity as it binds together taste, family, ritual, memory and sense of place. At the same time, Anthropological scholarship reminds us that cuisines are never static; they evolve through migration, trade, class mobility, gender roles, and globalization¹². For diasporic communities, traditional cuisines in diaspora are often of symbolic importance precisely because they offer a familiar anchor and sense of belonging in unfamiliar surrounding and alien terrains.

At the same time, the diasporic position requires us to undergo a transformation. Because recipes are transmitted orally, through observation, practice, and embodied memory rather than written records, this knowledge is both vulnerable to change and remarkably adaptable—allowing Sindhi cuisine to remain alive, relevant, and deeply meaningful in new homes around the world.

With migration of people across borders, food and its preparation often take a new form. It is accompanied due to various factors like new geographical area, agricultural availability, cultural customs and like factors. Thereby, traditional culinary practices underwent modification and changes with the pinch of availability of resources, making a blend of necessity and creativity. For instance, any traditional ingredient like vegetable or spices might be replaced with the local available alternative, resulting in difference in the taste of preparation¹³. These evolutions reflect resilience rather than loss and reflect that culinary tradition changes throughout history.

Sindhi Cuisine is expressive and is known for its rich flavours, aromatic spices, fresh vegetables and protein rich lentils.

Sai bhaji

Sindhi kadhi,

Koki,

Seyal maani,

Non-vegetarian classics feature Seyal murgh, gosht, or machhi

Sindhi biryani or Pulhao.

Papads and pakoras

Sweets such as Sayun, Kheer kharkoon, Gheeyar,

The Sindhi word “*Seyal*” – refers to cooking method, where ingredients are slowly cooked in its own juice. The rich history of Sindhi cuisine, is perhaps rooted in its slow-cooking method rather than the culinary detailing or dishes. Sindhi cuisine and its cooking technique have diverse regional influence. The origin of stews and gravies in Sindh can be stemmed from Indus Valley Civilisation (3300-1300BC)¹⁴. Persian (550-330 BC) brought in tangy elements like Yoghurt and verjus along with

¹⁰ Radhika, S. (2021). Papads, pickles and partition: A Sindhi reminiscence. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/food/papads-pickles-and-partition-a-sindhi-reminiscence/article35891955.ece>

¹¹ Tiwari, R. TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE SINDHI DIASPORA.

¹² Parasecoli, F. (2014). Food, identity, and cultural reproduction in immigrant communities. *Social Research*, 81(2), 415–439. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2014.0015>

¹³ Dua, S., & Gandhi, M. (2019). Sindhi cuisine: A study of evolution and eating habits. *PUSA Journal of Hospitality and Applied Sciences*, 5, 71–78.

¹⁴ Samira, M. (2025). The slow-cooked art of seyal: History served on a plate.

spices like cumin, coriander and turmeric and the art of slow cooking, which introduced the first mix of tangy and spiced preparation¹⁵. Early Medieval. Arab period (circa 8th Century AD) made fish-based syeal dishes prominent and Mughal Influence (16th Century-18th Century) influenced aromatic, complex sauces through the integration of cardamom, clove and black pepper¹⁶. Furthermore, the popularization of Tomato- by Portuguese and British (early 18th Century) replaced tangy ingredients, while vegetarian transformation of the dishes occurred after 1947 followed by Partition.

The culinary preservation has been cherished within the community and has evolved with changing regional agricultural availability and local consumption.

Unfolding Savour in Diaspora: A Renaissance of Sindhi Food

As a result of Partition, enormous migration took place, displacing large number of non-Muslim Sindhi to Gujrat, Rajasthan and Punjab. Migrants were confronted with challenges of not only settlement to a new region, but also with the fear of loss of cultural identity and community representation. The people who migrated, inadvertently took the responsibility to preserve religion; language; ethnicity; culture; customs; folk dress; cuisine and legend and tales of their community.

With struggle of survival in refugee camps, cuisine became an emotional sentiment. As some recipes preserved as it is, remaining unchanged and untouched since inception, representing authentic Sindhi culinary heritage some recipes naturally evolved with changing landscape and accepting regional food and preferences. Similarly, Sindhi language which belongs to Indo-Aryan language family, over the period of time, encountered alterations such as Prakrit, Arabic and Persian due annexation by merchants and dynastic rulers¹⁷. Sindhi community in India has undergone enormous shift from its roots of Indus valley Civilization, which they have gracefully welcomed and integrated, representing their prejudice-free and desire to evolve outlook.

Safeguarding the traditional cuisines is imperative as it honours emigrant heritage, cultivate global identity and make certain that rich cultural past is passed on-to future generation. Sindhi food holds pivotal importance as it enriches and diversify Indian cuisine in the Global Indian Community by providing the non-Sindhi population with different food options, enabling them to explore the culture and savour of Sindhi community¹⁸. Cuisine exhibits vital element in the domain of Indian cultural globalisation, as Sindhi community in post-partition period migrated across Indian borders, forming majority of Indian diaspora settled abroad. They have maintained and preserved cuisine on International foreign land as Indians and have strengthened India's soft power by strengthening and adapting roots of their culture exhibited in the diaspora kitchen¹⁹. Therefore, preservation and transformation of Sindhi cuisine is not only essential for the member of community, but for the overall progress of the Nation, as it not only glorify the tradition of those who were displaced and deprived of their ancestral land but serves and uphold the concept of unity in diversity- signifying solidarity and togetherness among the people of diverse religion and culture- which is the highest strength on our nation, that is being Diverse and yet united.

Sindhi population had to face not only the challenge of displacement but also cultural duality- as Sindh province complete came under the newly formed Pakistan. West Punjab, East Bengal were

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wadhwani, Y. K. (1981). The origin of the Sindhi language. *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, 40, 192–201. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42931119>

¹⁸ Chhatwani, D.N. (2019). *Diaspora Discourse: Sindhi Community in India*. Central University of Gujrat, Gandhinagar.

¹⁹ Managt Sci Tech, I.R. Journa. Sindhiworkies: The Sindhi Merchantile Diaspora: A unique trade culture resulting in Today's NRI.

major areas for displaced people- but Sindhi lost its geography itself, becoming a major community forced to become a diaspora first and figured out its identity later²⁰. Sindhi community had no geographical borders drawn on the bases of language and culture. Sindhi population who relocated in India, had to build their own foundation, their own community and develop a feeling of belongingness. The foremost comfort came from their food and from past generations to following generations that followed, each have taken great pride in their community and rich cuisine.

To almost 79 years of India's Independence, the historical realities are passed-on from one generation to another in form of cultural narratives or oral testimonies of people who lived those realities. This transmission not only happens through textbook learning, but in form of community discussion, dinner table discussion or story telling time from elders to children in the household set-up. With each passing generation, these casual conversations, strengthen cultural emotions and community sentiments. This leaves the responsibility of preservation of culture to each living generation. In the contemporary times, where everything around the globe has been digitalised and easily accessible across border with click on mobile screen, cultures have travelled across borders- with people becoming conscious about their communities and traditions which were left unrevealed to the worldwide populace. Sindhi Communities take great pride in their cultural cuisine by rejoicing it, as Sindhi cuisine provides feeling of camaraderie to its diaspora and now it is not only limited to kitchen culture as Sindhi chefs, food photographer and bloggers worldwide telerecord, document, experience and share traditional recipes, its history, origin and evolution. With the help of global digitization and universal connectivity, the oral tales of plights and sufferings of those communities who were displaced and scattered is not only limited to its members but are now universally acknowledged with current generation taking great pride in their own community cuisine, language, folk wear and customs.

Digital platforms like Youtube, Facebook, Instagram are ultra-modern techniques being used by present generation to preserve and transform Sindhi diaspora cuisine. With these available platforms, its trouble-free to comfortably watch, observe and comprehend their traditional recipes, at any hour and place. Online available videos, blogs, articles, virtual cooking classes allows people to share recipes, cherish their lost memories and connect with millions of people without actual direct encounter. Digitalization not only makes recipes accessible but encourages cuisine alterations and blending-changing culinary knowledge and making it more searchable and handier.

Globally integrated Indian economy clasps and honours Sindhi food as Sindhi people evolved with the changing time but held strong to their cultural cuisine with grace, protecting its legacy. More than just Sindhi cuisine, it reflects community strong value system- reminding people of their orientation and genesis. With rapid changes, Sindhi food furnishes the comfort of home savour. The heritage continues to grow stronger with each passing generation, enriching and honouring both, the past culinary tradition and celebrating it in contemporary setup.

Conclusion

The Constitution of Indian protects and uphold the linguistic identity of Sindhi community by recognizing Sindhi language as one of the official languages through under Eighth Schedule via 21st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1967²¹. India was confronted with issue of integration in post-partition period. There was migration across borders, refugee camps and identity crises. Sindhi community as well was confronted with several challenges- ensuring resettlement, protecting culture, language, customs and traditions. For the migrants, preservation of their language, eating habits, traditional attire- the small minute details of their everyday life become a challenge because in midst all the chaos what gives a sense of serenity are these traditional food practices within the community. Culinary practices take a deeper significance, becoming one of the most substantial and irreplaceable way of

²⁰ Goldie, U. (2025). Gen Z Sindhis: From hidden to seen. Medium. <https://goldieuttam.medium.com/sindhis-from-everywhere-from-nowhere-3432d952cdec>

²¹ https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/EighthSchedule_19052017.pdf

maintaining an emotional connection to lost homelands. After 79 years of India's Independence, it can proudly be justified that Sindhi in India not only successfully maintained and preserved their identity, but also made themselves conspicuous. They have remarkably flourished and upheld their heritage, values and rich culture.

The aromatic Sindhi culinary tradition is distinctive and nutritious. It has diverse regional influence since its inception from Indus valley civilisation to Persians, Arab, Mughals, Portuguese, British and post-partition era. Sindhi diaspora evolved with changing need and time, and thereby brought their spiced blend of recipes and dishes to global cuisines. Sindhi women have played an important role in keeping the old traditions alive. Preparing and passing on authentic Sindhi recipes, keeping kitchen culture alive and taking pride in their heritage cuisine. It is the culmination of these factors, that traditional Sindhi Cuisine, is honoured and celebrated by both-members and non-members of Sindhi community. Traditional Sindhi staples like Sai Bhaji, Koki, Sindhi Kadhi, Seyal Mani, Lola, Pappad, Beeh Patata and many more are known for its rich flavours, aromatic spices, fresh vegetables and protein rich lentils.

Migration forces people to adjust to the changing environment. As many Sindhi settled in India, many migrated across Indian borders as well, as a result of which the Sindhi Cuisine underwent changes due to the factors like new geographical area, agricultural availability and local consumption requirements. Thereby, traditional culinary practices underwent modification and changes with the pinch of availability of resources, making a blend of necessity and creativity.

Digitalization of world economy has encouraged and boosted the cultural cuisine. With current generation not only taking the responsibility of preservation of their native food and eating habits, but also promoting them with the help of digital platforms. One such example is Sindhi Rasaoi, the popular Sindhi food blogger, aiming to preserve and share Sindhi traditional home-flavours and recipes. With the help of digital transformation of world, it can become a privilege for people to savour their traditional flavours not earlier known to them due to resettlement and loss of contact with native roots.

Sindhi have created their own identity and popularity by forming a strong diaspora, united with language and cuisine. With progressive generations, Sindhi Cuisine continue to evolve and strengthen-remaining grounded and loyal to its native origin and also accommodating and enriching with present-time requisites..

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