

Livelihood opportunities in ethnic food system of Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh is a leading hub of traditional food heritage. These traditional foods are on the verge of disappearance due to changing food habits of people. Hence an effort has been made to document the method of preparation of various dishes included in traditional meal called Mandiyali Dham. Dham is traditional meal served to the people in Himachali culture on the occasion of marriages or any religious days. The information was collected from the chefs locally called Botis using focused group discussion method. Eight to nine dishes are cooked and served in Mandiyali Dham. Among all Sepu Vadi, an Urad Dal, *Vigna mungo* (L) Hepper-based recipe is the special delicacy of Dham. The production of dry Sepu Vadi has an immense potential for entrepreneurship not only in the country but across the globe if industrialized. Therefore it needs the attention of policy planners to grant the status of small scale industry to attract the unemployed youth towards Sepu Vadi business. Furthermore most of the recipes are pulses-based having good dietary protein thus it can play a vital role in sustainable pulse production in the region. Leaf plates locally called Pattals used for serving food are a source of livelihood for the people thus efforts are needed for its conservation. It also draws the attention of food technologists towards development of recipes of Dham as ready to eat meal and incorporation of these recipes in hotel management courses is suggested. Effective policy for registration of these traditional foods by granting geographical indications should be framed so that these products establish trust and create brands in the market.

Keywords: Mandiyali Dham; Sepu Vadi; traditional meal; dishes

INTRODUCTION

Food is an important part of any group's culture playing a role in everyday life as well as festivals. Traditional foods play an important role to describe local identity and transfer of cultural heritage for future generations. It also provides opportunity to share this valuable heritage with the rest of the world. The traditional foods made with domestic technology have beneficial effects on health. These not only have positive effects on rural economies but are also considered an effective instrument for brand creation and product diversification in the market. These foods can play an important role in the development of small and medium size enterprises (van Ittersum et al 2007). However this situation has not been sufficiently exploited so far (Tregear et al 2007). In many countries geographical indication (GI) is used as an effective instrument to

support the production of traditional foods. Protection of traditional foods not only protects the cultural heritage but it can create jobs, increase the women's contribution and contribute to the promotion of a country (Albayrak and Gunes 2010). The diversity in the traditional foods represents socio-cultural life of the people of any region. The dietary diversity of the people is directly associated with the farming system of that area (Oyarzun et al 2013, Jones et al 2014).

Himachal Pradesh is considered as traditional food heritage hub in general and Mandi district in particular due to diversity in culture, geography and climatic conditions. Dal-Chawal and Subzi-Roti are the usual everyday meal but special dishes are cooked during festive occasions as many festivals are celebrated with great pomp and show. People enjoy the feasty dishes during marriages, birthdays, Jagratas and get

together. These festive occasions are marked with a special traditional meal called Mandyali Dham to entertain the guests. With the modernization of food habits these dishes are on the verge of disappearance. Documentation of these recipes will help in keeping our heritage alive for future generations. Earlier various researchers have documented the traditional recipes consumed by people in different parts of the state (Kapoor et al 2010, Sharma and Singh 2012, Thakur et al 2004). However less efforts have been made in documenting recipes included especially in traditional Dham. Hence an effort has been made in this direction to document the recipes included in traditional meal called Mandyali Dham cooked and served in the district. Further strategies to popularize this traditional food to create brands in the market worldwide have been emphasized.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried out in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh during the year 2015-16. An explorative research design was used to document the method of preparation of traditional recipes included in Mandyali Dham. The data on different types of recipes cooked and served in Dham were collected from the chefs locally called Botis who have been in this profession for generations. Focused group discussion method was used to collect the information and systematically organized for interpretation of the results.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Many festivals are celebrated in the Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh with great pomp and show and people enjoy the feisty dishes during these occasions. A special traditional meal called Mandyali Dham is cooked and served during festive occasions. The detail of food items cooked and served in traditional Mandyali Dham is presented in Table 1.

Pre-preparedness and construction of temporary kitchen

The preparations for Mandyali Dham begin a night before when all the utensils are collected from people in the village/town. A temporary kitchen locally known Rasyalu is built outside the main house by using bamboo sticks and roof is covered with steel-sheets. The chefs locally called Botis prefer it to be open unless there are rains or windy weather. The deep trench called as Char (Fig 1) is dug out in the temporary kitchen

where fuelwood is used for cooking Mandyali Dham. The fuelwood is arranged well in advance with the active participation of the families on a particular day called Lakkad Pudai.

Cooking of Dham

The Dham is cooked in huge containers known as Charoti or Batloi (Fig 2) and its name varies from region to region. Copper or brass utensils are mostly used for cooking Dham. These utensils are collected in temporary kitchen from the village/town one day in advance. As the day starts all the villagers come together for 2-3 hours and assist the Botis in cutting vegetables and arranging raw material. The raw material placed before the Botis helps them to do their job effectively. The villagers also bring milk and buttermilk as most of them have these things at their homes. Dham is prepared by Botis belonging to the Brahmin families who have been in this profession for generations. Botis can usually be seen in Dhosis and barefooted (Fig 3). No one is allowed inside the kitchen with footwear.

Serving Dham

Dham is served in courses to people who sit on floor (Fig 11) and leaf plates locally called Pattals (Fig 4) are used to serve the food. These Pattals are made from the leaves of the *Ficus* species and prepared by the particular expertise groups of the society. Pattal making is a source of livelihood for many families in the district. Hence it becomes more important to conserve and promote the traditional Mandyali Dham so that livelihood of the farm families associated with Pattal making could be secured. It is interesting that Botis do not make use of onion or garlic in Dham and they use curd that helps in enhancing taste and digestibility. Serving Dham starts with hot rice in a bamboo made special container called Chhadolu (Fig 5). Other dishes are served in brass containers locally known as Dabru (Fig 6). Mandyali Dham usually starts from 2:00 pm onwards and continues till night.

Recipes of traditional Mandyali Dham

Sepu Vadi: Sepu vadi is a feasty dish and a special delicacy of Mandyali Dham. It is a preparation of Urad Dal, *Vigna mungo* (L) Hepper which is soaked in water overnight and ground to make thick paste after removing the husk. Balls (Fig 7) are made of this paste which are steam-cooked in big vessels of brass. After cooling these balls are cut into square pieces (Fig 8) and deep-fried. The dish is then cooked by adding paste of spinach

Table 1. Detail of food items cooked and served in traditional Mandyali Dham

Food item	Ingredients
Sepu Bari	Urad Dal, <i>Vigna mungo</i> (L) Hepper, ghee, spinach, turmeric, <i>Curcuma longa</i> , salt, curd
Dhotuan Dal	Urad dal, ghee, Garm Masala, turmeric, salt, curd
Ghandyali Ka Madhra	Colocasia, <i>Colocasia</i> spp, oil, spinach, <i>Spinacea oleracea</i> , spices, turmeric, salt, curd
Badane Ka Meetha	Green gram Dal, <i>V radiate</i> (L) Wilczek, oil, sugar
Kaddu Ka Meetha	Pumpkin (<i>Cucurbita pepo</i>), ghee, sugar, dry fruits
Kaddu Ka Khatta	Pumpkin, mustard oil, spices, tamarind, <i>Tamarindus indica</i> /dry mango powder
Chholia	Bengal gram, <i>Cicer arietinum</i> L, mustard oil, curd, Rai, <i>Brassica juncea</i> powder, turmeric, salt, spices
Kohal Ka Khatta	Red cowpea, <i>V unguiculata</i> , mustard oil, curd, Rai powder, turmeric, salt, spices
Urad dal	Urad Dal, ghee, turmeric, salt, spices
Jhol	Buttermilk, cumin, <i>Cuminum cyminum</i> seeds, Ajwain, <i>Trachyspermum ammi</i> , turmeric, salt, green chillies, <i>Capsicum annum</i>

(*Spinacea oleracea*), spices, curd and salt. This Sepu Vadi is available in the market even in dry form (Fig 9) proving its popularity among the people.

Dhotuan Dal: Dhotuan Dal is also a special dish served during marriages and other social functions. It is also Urad Dal preparation without gravy. Urad Dal is soaked overnight and after removing husk it is cooked on slow flame by adding lot of ghee, spices and salt. Little curd is also added after the cooking process is over.

Ghandyali Ka Madhra: Gandhyali, *Colocasia* sp is bigger than Arbi/Kachalu. Gandhyali Ka Madhra is the main dish of Mandyali Dham and relished by people of the district. Gandhyali is peeled and cut into big square pieces and deep-fried. It is advisable to apply mustard oil on hands before peeling and cutting of Gandhyali due to presence of acidity in it. The fried pieces are cooked by adding oil, spices, salt and paste of spinach and methi, *Trigonella foenum-graecum* leaves. Like Dhotuan Dal curd is also added to make thick gravy after proper softening of Gandhyali pieces.

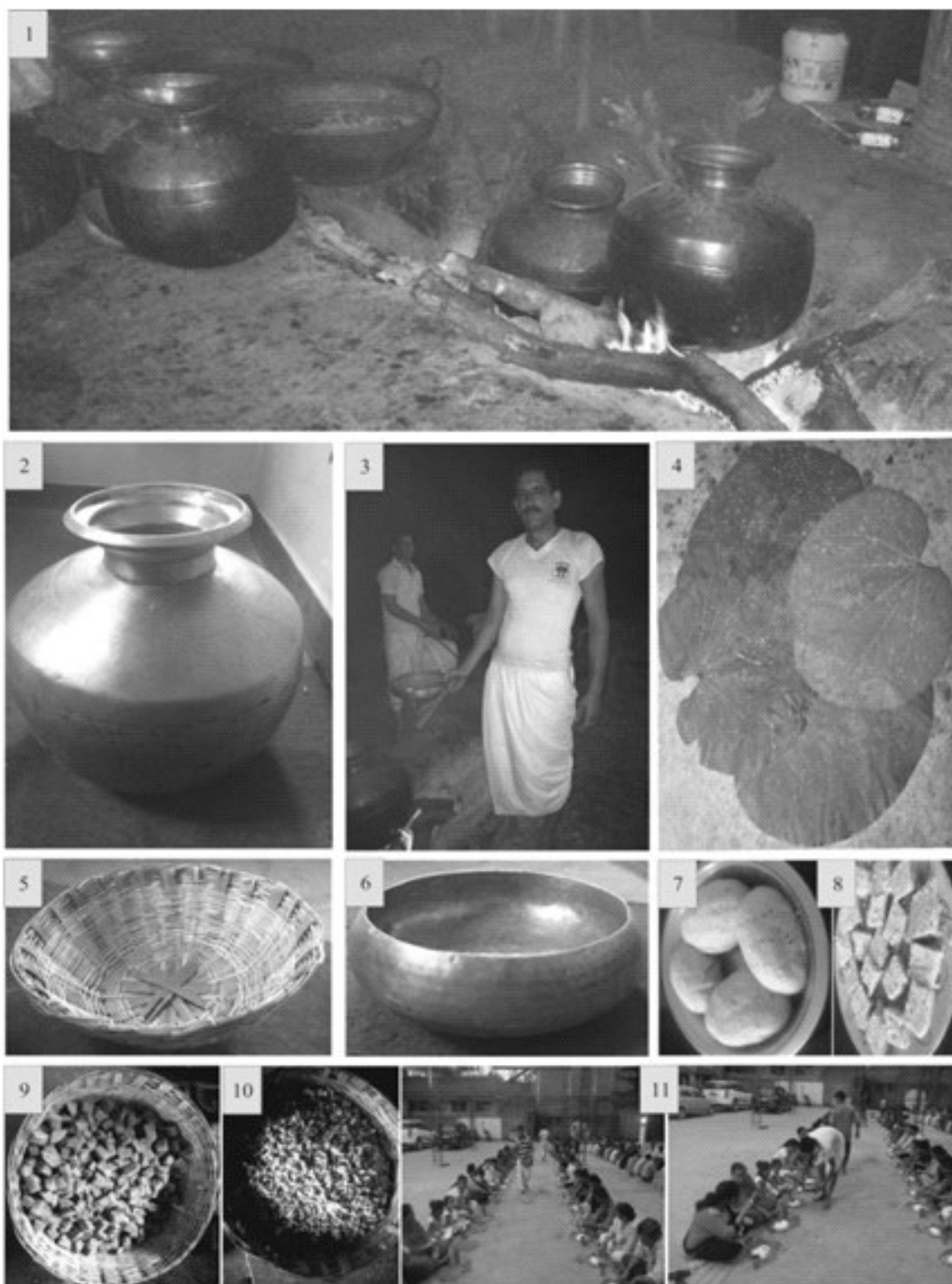
Badane Ka Meetha: It is a green gram Dal, *Vigna radiate* (L) Wilczek-based preparation which is served as a sweet dish in Mandyali Dham. For its preparation green gram Dal is soaked overnight and ground to make thick paste. This thick batter is kept aside for about half an hour. Oil is added to the batter so that it does not stick to the spoon. Ghee is heated in a pan over a flame and the batter is poured over a big perforated sieve and deep-fried till it is crisp but not brown. The fried crisp Badana (Fig 10) is then dipped in sugar syrup for about 10 to 15 minutes turning it into Badane Ka Meetha.

Kaddu Ka Meetha: Pumpkin, *Cucurbita pepo* locally called Kaddu is found in abundance in Mandi district as it is grown by the people in almost every household and is used in preparing many dishes. Among all Kaddu Ka Meetha is a popular sweet dish served in Mandyali Dham. Pumpkin, sugar and dry fruits are the main constituents of this dish. Pumpkin is peeled and cut in small square pieces. These pieces are cooked in ghee, water and sugar solution. After cooking, dry fruits are added at the end.

Kaddu Ka Khatta: Kaddu Ka Khatta is another special item of the menu of traditional Mandyali Dham. Pumpkin is peeled and cut in big square pieces. Mustard oil is heated and these pieces are sauted with spices, turmeric, *Curcuma longa* and salt. It is cooked on slow heat without adding water. Dry mango powder/Galgol, *Citrus pseudolimon* juice/tamarind, *Tamarindus indica*/buttermilk are used at the end for sour taste. Little jaggery is also added to make it sweet and sour.

Chholia: Curd is used abundantly in Himachali cuisine and used in majority of the local gravies. Chholia is whole Bengal gram, *Cicer arietinum* L-based dish soured with curd or buttermilk. Bengal gram is soaked overnight and boiled in pressure cooker. Oil is heated and boiled Bengal gram is sauted with spices. Curd/butter milk is added for making gravy. Rai, *Brassica juncea* powder is also added in it at the end that gives pungent flavour.

Kohal Ka Khatta: Red cowpea, *Vigna unguiculata* is called Kohal in local language in Mandi district. Kohal Ka Khatta is a special item in Mandyali Dham menu. For making this dish red cowpea is boiled in pressure



Figs 1-11. (1) Dham being prepared on Char, (2) Charoti/Baltoi, (3) Botis in Dhotis, (4) Pattal, (5) Chhadolu, (6) Dabru, (7) Urd Dal balls, (8) Square pieces of steamed balls of Urd Dal, (9) Fried Sepu Vadi, (10) Badana, (11) Mandyali Dham being served

cooker. Oil is heated and spices are added along with turmeric and salt. Curd/buttermilk is used to make gravy. Like Chholia, rai powder is also added at the end for pungent flavour.

Urad Dal: This dish is prepared by using Urad Dal which is boiled in pressure cooker by adding turmeric asafoetida (*Ferula assa-foetida*) and salt. It is sauted with oil and spices.

Jhol: The traditional Mandyali Dham is considered incomplete without Jhol. It is buttermilk-based recipe in which cumin, *Cuminum cyminum* seeds, ajwain, *Trachyspermum ammi*, salt, turmeric powder and green chillies, *Capsicum annuum* are added. After adding all ingredients to buttermilk it is boiled by continuous stirring. People relish to have it with Urad Dal hence it is served at the end and considered good for digestion.

CONCLUSION

Most of the recipes of traditional Mandyali Dham are pulse-based that can play a vital role to boost up sustainable pulse production in the region. Sepu Vadi in dry form has a great potential to grow into a small or medium scale industry not only in India but across the globe. Therefore it needs the attention of policy planners to grant the status of small scale industry to attract the unemployed youth towards Sepu Vadi business. Proper branding, labeling and packaging are suggested for its promotion. Efforts need to be initiated on the part of food technologists for the development of recipes in ready to eat meal for its worldwide recognition. Further recipes of Mandyali Dham should be incorporated in the syllabus of hotel management courses for its recognition. Making of leaf plates used for serving Dham is another area directly linked with the livelihood of the people. It also has potential to grow into small/medium scale industries if scientific, technological and financial support is extended to people engaged in this enterprise. All these products need to be registered with geographical indications to establish trust and to create

brands in the market. On the whole the value of traditional foods as an element of cultural heritage and their protection are important.

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