



**SRI VENKATESWARA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
FOR RESEARCH IN ACADEMICS
(SRI-VIPRA)**



SRI-VIPRA

Project Report of 2025:

SVP-2503

“From Kitchen to Community: An Ethnographic Study of Festival Foods and Social Belonging in Indian Households”


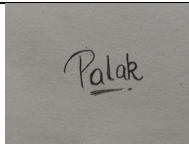



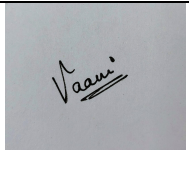
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SRIVIPRA PROJECT 2024

Title : From Kitchen to Community: An Ethnographic Study of Festival Foods and Social Belonging in Indian Households

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Certificate of Originality

This is to certify that the aforementioned students from Sri Venkateswara College have participated in the summer project SVP-2503 titled “**From Kitchen to Community: An Ethnographic Study of Festival Foods and Social Belonging in Indian Households**”. The participants have carried out the research project work under my guidance and supervision from 1st July, 2025 to 30th September 2025. The work carried out is original and carried out in an online/offline/hybrid mode.



Signature of Mentor

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18 Sept. 2025

Title: From Kitchen to Community: An Ethnographic Study of Food Festival and Social Belonging.

Introduction

Food is the strongest expression of culture. It is not just a source of information, it has the meaning of identity, memory and belonging. Not only this community but any community creates their distinctive food habits/style that speak of its history, environment and values. Festivals specially bring happiness and turn food into a cultural performance- uniting families, relatives and neighbours, reaffirming social bonds. Here, food traverses from the modern private space of the kitchen to the public sphere of the community, establishing connections between daily practices and broader identity questions. This research project, "From Kitchen to Community: An Ethnographic Study of Food Festival and Social Belonging," examines how food is used in Indian households and also about their uniqueness in social belongings of the Koppula Velama community of Andhra Pradesh. The research is based on an interview with Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai, a young girl who is currently studying in Sri Venkateswara College, in which she provides her understanding of her cultural traditions, favorite foods, and the function of food on special occasions. Through her stories and experiences, this project attempts to identify the everyday and special importance of food in fashioning both individual identity and collective belonging. The Koppula Velama group, identified as the Other Backward Classes (OBC), has been traditionally based on agrarian economies. Their cuisine mirrors both the agriculture-based richness and an intrinsic relationship with seasonal patterns, religious practices, and rituals. While festivals are celebrated, people prepare food and serve to eat it as the symbol of togetherness and unity since generations. These foods are not only objects but also cultural texts holding memories and passing on values generation to generation. By integrating ethnographic description with the recording of recipes, this study demonstrates how the kitchen is a place of cultural transmission, and how the communal coming together during festivals signifies continuity and belonging. Including recipes here holds importance, as they are living traditions—embodied knowledge that binds people to ancestors, territory, and community. From them, we can glimpse how mundane action contains within it layers of meaning and identity. Hence, this research highlights how Koppula Velama food festivals are not only celebratory events but also times of cultural rebirth. By placing individual testimony in conjunction with culinary practice, the project illustrates how food crosses the boundary between the private and the public, the personal and the communal, the kitchen and the community.

Methodology

Ethnographic research focuses on learning about culture practices by immersing oneself closely with people and communities. For the project, the methodology entailed mixed data collection of primary qualitative data collection via an in-depth interview and secondary data collection from online resources, including cultural articles, scholarly references, and publicly available information regarding the Koppula Velama community and their food practices. This twofold process ensured that the research was based on lived experience as well as aided by wider contextual knowledge. The first method was a face-to-face interview with Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai, a Koppula Velama from Andhra Pradesh. The interview was semi-structured, so there were a combination of targeted questions and open-ended answers. Questions included the significance of her full name, what foods she enjoyed eating, the role of food in festivals, and how she sees her community's practices as different from other communities. This is in format to encourage Ms. Jashmitha Sai. to provide not just facts but memories, reflections, and stories about how food becomes intertwined with identity and belonging. The informal format of the interview made room for deeper meaning that might otherwise not surface in a structured questionnaire. To complement the personal narrative, secondary data was collected from reliable online sources. This included academic articles on food and identity, ethnographic notes on Andhra Pradesh's cultural practices, and general information about the Koppula Velama community. Secondary research provided historical and cultural background, particularly regarding agrarian lifestyles, caste classification, and the social role of food festivals. This contextual information was crucial for situating Ms. Jashmitha Sai's personal experiences within a broader cultural framework. Data collection and analysis proceeded from an ethnographic perspective attention was given to cultural meaning over statistical representation. Interview narratives were examined closely for recurrent themes like cultural belonging, generational continuity, and the symbolic function of food. Recipes provided and explained were not merely treated as recipes to follow in the kitchen but as cultural artifacts that represent tradition and social bonding. By intertwining personal evidence with secondary data, this approach guaranteed depth and context. The primary data underscored lived experience and individual viewpoints, while secondary sources provided those experiences in the context of community identity and overarching cultural trends. Together, these approaches provided a comprehensive picture of food festivals as a social belonging medium in the Koppula Velama community.

Discussion

In the in-depth interview with Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai, the questions were asked to elicit both personal understanding and cultural understanding of her state and community. The interview touched upon the following domains: Personal Identity: What is her complete name and what does it signify? How does she understand the meaning of her name in

terms of her cultural identity? Food Preferences: What is her favorite food and why? How does food tie her to her family and community customs? Community Identity: How does she perceive the Koppula Velama community as distinct from other communities? What distinctiveness does the community have in terms of lifestyle, customs, and food habits? Regional Belonging: Why is her home state of Andhra Pradesh unique? What is the significance of food and festivals in constructing this regional identity? Historical Background: What is her history of the Koppula Velama people and its cultural life? Kitchen and Domestic Space: What is her kitchen to her? How does it express her family's values, practices, and traditions? Festivals and Celebrations: What are some of her favorite festivals and why? What recipes are traditionally prepared during these celebrations? How are families and communities united to celebrate? Rituals and Worship: What are some of the forms of worship in her community? What kinds of prasadam (sacred food offerings) are prepared and distributed during religious ceremonies? These were open-ended questions, which was asked to get responses from Ms. Jashmitha Sai to think about personal experience, memories, and thoughts. Through a movement from the personal (name, favorite dish) to the communal (uniqueness of community, festivals, worship), the interview found that personal and cultural identity are intertwined through food and tradition.

Findings and Analysis

The ethnographic interview with Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai was full of useful information on the intersection of food, festival, and identity in the Koppula Velama community. Her account brought to the fore the way kitchens are spaces of culture and the way festival foods transcend their role as nourishment to become bearers of memory, belonging, and spirituality. To start with, her very personal identity is premised on cultural meaning. The name Jashmitha means "smile," and her full name, Maddu Jashmitha Sai, indicates the concept of "the name of God- Laxmi." In most Indian cultures, names are not random but represent something symbolic—they contain blessings, wishes, and heritage. Her gotra, Paidipola, places her in a particular lineage of the Koppula Velama community as well, reminding us that identity is individual as well as collective. Just like names have meaning, so do food practices, which capture the values and traditions of the people.

Festival Foods as Cultural Identity

In her household, food preparation during festival time such as Sankranti, Ugadi, and Deepavali is the center of identity formation. Ritual traditional desserts such as Ariselu (jaggery and rice flour sweet), Poornalu (sweet dumplings filled with), and Payasam (milk pudding sweet) are made with ritual seriousness and care. These foods are not eaten in a casual state; they are preserved for special occasions and are considered to be markers of culture that signify happiness, prosperity, and continuity. For example, Ms. Jashmitha described how Ariselu was made at her home, which her mother used to grind rice flour slowly on traditional stone grinders. Although now the process is easy with modern

appliances, the meaning is still the same. But the taste she gets when it is made out using old practices is much better and reminds her of her hometown.

Kitchen as a Space of Belonging

The kitchen becomes a social and sacred space. Most women gather to cook during festivals, and the communal work unites the generations. The younger generation, especially the daughters, observe and take cues, guaranteeing recipe and process to be passed on. Ms. Jashmitha swore that this lifestyle rooted her culture, even when fast foods and sweets made in the shop dominate the cities.

Community and Sharing

Maybe the strongest theme in her testimony is the extent to which food extends from kitchen to community. It is the custom in her village to share festival food with neighbors, relatives, and community members. To offer Poornalu or Payasam to visitors is not hospitality—it is a reaffirmation of community and respect. In the Koppula Velama community, such acts of sharing enhance belonging and solidify social ties.

Symbolism of Ingredients

Ms. Jashmitha also highlighted the symbolic function of ingredients. Rice symbolizes success, jaggery signifies sweetness in relationships, and coconut is a sign of purity in offerings to god. Such ingredients are integrated into ritual meanings that go beyond the kitchen and connect the household with wider cosmological ideas.

Adaptation and Continuity

Even as packaged sweets and convenience-based preparations have entered the scene, thanks to modern ways of living, Ms. Jashmitha feels that traditional food still carries emotional and cultural significance. Even when store purchases are made, one or two home-based festive foods are always cooked, representing continuity in the midst of change. In conclusion, the research reveals that festival foods form the core of individual and group identity among the Koppula Velamas. Using the life of Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai as the lens, it is revealed how names, birth, kitchen routine, and meals together form a tapestry of belonging. It is not just about food but about smiles, blessings, and being together, cultural memory from the individual kitchen to the collective community.

History and Agriculture of the Koppula Velama Community

Koppula Velama (also spelled as Koppu Velama) is a Telugu Hindu caste located mostly in Uttarandhra in Andhra Pradesh, particularly in the districts of Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Rajamahendravaram. They belong to the state's Other Backward Classes (OBC-D) category and possess long-standing agricultural heritage and notable political and economic power in their native places.

Historical Origins and Identity

The Velama identity goes back to medieval Telugu inscriptions, although more defined as a caste category during the 16th and 17th centuries. Of its subgroups, the Koppula Velamas are identified by their name—perhaps from the habit of men knotting their hair ("koppu" in Telugu). They are related by kinship with Polinati Velamas, another well-known Velama subgroup along coastal Andhra.

Agricultural Tradition

Agriculture has been the sustenance of the Koppula Velama caste. Historical records show that, in villages such as Piridi (situated close to Bobbili), Koppula Velamas generally owned land and were the major cultivators, while other castes served as agricultural labor or artisans. Such a pattern reveals their socio-economic predominance in agrarian domains. They are most likened—figuratively—to the "riceball of India," a telling phrase that reflects their strong and abiding identification with rice farming and agrarian subsistence. Though this literary appellation is not based on academic sources, it is an effective description of the community as custodians of the earth, reflecting the cultural preeminence of rice in festival and ritual.

Cultural and Religious Dimensions

The culture of the community depends heavily on Hindu beliefs. Though there is no canonical proof that Lord Shiva or Venkateswara is worshipped by all Koppula Velamas, most Telugu agrarian communities have traditionally worshipped Venkateswara (in the form of Vishnu) and Shiva, and have incorporated them into domestic and temple practices. In rural settings, village deities—"jatara" or kuladevatas—are commonly worshipped in yearly festivities. Such gods would generally be the protectors of the village and the land, joining agricultural processes with religious life, although details for Koppula Velama villages would need local interviews and records.

Symbolic Resonances

The symbolic association of the community with rice—through festival preparations, harvests, and communal offerings—deepens their identity. Like a riceball (puffed or shaped) combines grains into a cohesive form, the Koppula Velamas unify agriculture, culture, and lineage. The conception of deities such as Shiva or Venkateswara watching over these festivals connects cosmic order to cycles of agrarian life, while the village jatara represents rootedness and collective protection

Summary

Origins & Identity: Koppula Velama subgroup appeared in coastal Andhra medieval history, identity crystallizing in 16th–17th centuries .

Agriculture: Their traditional vocation is farming, usually as land-holding cultivators who dominate village economy and social organisation.

Cultural Symbolism: The literary tag "riceball of India" underscores their inseparable tie to rice cultivation—sustenance and identity. Religion life—through deification of gods and village jatara—also strengthens their association with land and tradition.

Food, Festivals, and Traditions of the Koppula Velama Community

Food is one of the most powerful indicators of cultural identity. In the Koppula Velama community, with deep antiquities in agrarian Andhra Pradesh, food is not only a survival issue but also an expression of belonging, piety, and continuity. It becomes apparent through the interview with Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai that festivals, traditional recipes, and kitchens cannot be separated from the rhythms of communal life. Her thoughts on festive preparations, sacred offerings, and favorite foods show how the kitchen transpires into the sacred and social realms, serving as the foundation of communal identity.

Festivals and Food Traditions

Festivals in Koppula Velama community are characterized by complex food preparations. Sankranti, Ugadi, Deepavali, and Vinayaka Chavithi are the most significant festivals, and each of them has unique dishes appended to it.

Sankranti: The harvest festival, which is closely connected to rice farming, this community's lifeblood. Ariselu (jaggery-rice flour sweet), Poornalu (stuffed sweet dumplings), and Garelu (deep-fried urad dal fritters) are cooked. Neighborly sharing of food signifies prosperity and communal happiness.

Ugadi: Telugu New Year is celebrated through Ugadi Pachadi, a symbolic meal made of sweet (jaggery), sour (tamarind), bitter (neem), and hot (green chili) to remind individuals of the varied experiences of life.

Vinayaka Chavithi: Steamed dumplings (Undrallu and Modakalu) of rice flour and jaggery are offered to Lord Ganesha.

Deepavali: Sweets like Boondi Laddu and Bobbatlu (flatbreads stuffed with jaggery and lentils) reign supreme, representing light, prosperity, and happiness.

Ms. Jashmitha went on to say that while contemporary comforts have altered the way people cook, the symbolic significance of these foods does not change. To her, cooking and savoring these festival foods is a way of connecting her to her mother and grandmother, and indirectly, to the shared heritage of the Koppula Velama community.

Sacred Foods: Parvanam as Prasadam

A particularly important dish is Parvanam, which is cooked as prasadam (offering) to the gods, especially to Lord Shiva, Lord Venkateswara, and the village deity worshiped during jatara. Parvanam is a rice-and-milk preparation, like kheer or payasam, but with local twists.

Recipe for Parvanam

Ingredients: 1 cup rice (preferably sona masuri or a local variety)

1 liter full cream milk
1 cup jaggery (or sugar, though jaggery is conventional)
2 tablespoons ghee
10–12 cashew nuts
10–12 raisins
3–4 cardamom pods

Method:

1. Wash and soak rice for 30 minutes.
2. Boil milk in a heavy-bottomed vessel.
3. Add the soaked rice and cook on low flame till it becomes completely soft.
4. Add powdered jaggery and mix gently till it dissolves.
5. Heat ghee separately, fry cashews and raisins, and add it to the dish.
6. Season with crushed cardamom and serve it to the god before serving it to family and guests.

For Ms. Jashmitha, Parvanam is a symbol of purity and blessings. It is always prayed to God prior to consumption, so it is not only food but also a medium for communication with God. Prasadam is shared by everyone, also promoting the feeling of unity in the village.

Favorite Dish: Chicken Biryani

Notably, although festival food is all about tradition, Ms. Jashmitha loves to eat chicken biryani—a food that embodies contemporary tastes but originates from the region. Biryani, although not a "traditional" dish at festivals in her community, has entered mainstream cuisine to become a celebratory offering for birthdays, weddings, and family functions. It signifies celebration, bountifulness, and the impact of cultural exchange on Andhra cuisine.

Recipe for Andhra-Style Chicken Biryani

Ingredients:

2 basmati rice cups
500 g bone-in chicken pieces (ideal)
2 large onions (thinly cut)
2 tomatoes (chopped)
1 cup yogurt
2 tablespoons ginger-garlic paste
4–5 green chilies

Whole spices: bay leaf, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, star anise

2 teaspoons red chili powder
1 teaspoon turmeric powder
2 teaspoons garam masala

Fresh coriander and mint leaves
4 tablespoons oil + 2 tablespoons ghee

Instructions:

1. Wash and soak rice for 30 minutes.
2. Marinate chicken with yogurt, chili powder, turmeric, ginger-garlic paste, and salt for a minimum of 1 hour.
3. Heat oil and ghee in a large pan, add whole spices, then brown onions.
4. Add tomatoes, marinated chicken, and cook until the meat is soft.
5. Boil water with salt separately and cook the soaked rice until 70% cooked.
6. Cover half the rice, then chicken, then the other half of the rice. Sprinkle with mint leaves and coriander, chopped.
7. Cover tightly and slow-cook on low heat ("dum" method) for 20–25 minutes.
8. Serve hot with raita and eggs, boiled.

Chicken biryani, in Ms. Jashmitha's view, is the quintessential "family dish," always shared together and usually for Sundays or special occasions. Its appearance among her personal favorites reflects how younger generations of Koppula Velamas reconcile tradition-inspired festival foods with more pan-Indian and cosmopolitan fare.

Other Signature Recipes of the Community

Ariselu (Traditional Sankranti Sweet) Rice flour and jaggery dough is rolled flat and deep-fried, then pressed in sesame seeds. Represents prosperity and is presented to gods.

Poornalu (Sweet Dumplings) Black gram dal or Bengal gram dal is cooked and combined with coconut and jaggery. Filled in rice flour dough and fried deep. Indicates sweetness in relationships and is shared with neighbors.

Bobbatlu (Sweet Flatbread) Thin wheat or maida dough is filled with jaggery-chana dal mixture, rolled, and roasted in a griddle. Made in Ugadi and Deepavali.

These recipes are not just food products but cultural objects. They convey values such as generosity, sweetness of social relations, and the centrality of fertility and prosperity.

Transmission of Food Traditions

An important observation from Ms. Jashmitha's narrative is that these food practices are intergenerationally transmitted. Children observe their mothers and grandmothers preparing festival foods, and gradually learn the methods, symbolism, and associated rituals. Even when modern life leads to shortcuts—using pressure cookers instead of stone grinders, or buying sweets instead of making them—at least one or two traditional items are always prepared to preserve the cultural essence

Food as Social Belonging

Festivals and celebrations around food in the Koppula Velama community underscore the movement from home to community. Although food preparation starts in the domestic interior, eating it moves it into the public sphere of neighborhood and village. Sharing

prasadam at temples, sweets at festival times, and relatives at celebration biryanis all speak to a deep sense of social belonging.

Ms. Jashmitha put this so well: "Food is not just for eating—it is for remembering, sharing, and smiling together." Her statement connects her own name (Jashmitha, smile) with the cultural ethos that food must make self, family, and community happy.

The Koppula Velama community keeps a rich fabric of food traditions, weaving sacred offerings, seasonal fare, and changing favorites. Dishes such as Parvanam, Ariselu, and Poornalu ground them in tradition and faith, whereas popular modern dishes like chicken biryani indicate adaptation and international influence. Festivals are not complete without these dishes, which serve as cultural texts—documenting history, passing down values, and bonding people. Through the perspective of Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai, it becomes clear that food is at once personal, familial, and communal, carrying meaning from the kitchen to the community, from the everyday to the divine.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study of the Koppula Velama community, through the lived experiences of Ms. Maddu Jashmitha Sai, illustrates the deep and inseparable ties between food, festivals, and social belonging. Food emerges as more than nourishment—it is a carrier of memory, tradition, and identity. From Parvanam offered as prasadam to deities, to festive sweets such as Ariselu, Poornalu, and Bobbatlu, each dish represents a cultural text that embodies values of prosperity, purity, and collective joy.

The research also shows how the kitchen becomes a repository of culture, and recipes and rituals are saved and handed down over generations. Women, particularly mothers and grandmothers, occupy prime positions in upholding these traditions, and cultural identity is sustained even through change. Future generations, such as Ms. Jashmitha, not only inherit the skills of cooking but also the symbolic significance of these practices.

Another major observation is the contribution of food in projecting private traditions into the public arena. Sharing a meal with neighbors, offering prasadam during jatara celebrations, or receiving relatives for biryani is an extension of individual kitchens into communal spaces. This shift highlights the project's main theme: food brings the personal to the communal, the sacred to the social.

Lastly, the research promotes adaptation as well as continuity. As global foods such as chicken biryani become household favorites, traditional foods are kept intact in ritual terms. That this is achieved with balance between modernity and tradition points towards the elasticity of cultural practices. Essentially, food acts as a bridge—between the past and the present, the house and the village, the individual and her community at large. Food constructs belonging, identity, and collective memory.

Therefore, the project testifies that festival foods are not just food items but living traditions—smiles, blessings, and togetherness, found in every offering from kitchen to community.

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From Kitchen to Community: An Ethnographic Study of Foods and Festivals in Mithilanchal Households

INTRODUCTION

India currently comprises 28 states and 8 union territories, each characterised by its distinct culture, traditions, history, and geography. A central element of these cultural practices is the food prepared within households on various occasions, including festivals and family gatherings. Such culinary traditions not only serve as representations of the region's rich historical legacy but also act as reflections of contemporary society, illustrating how customs and practices have been preserved and adapted over time.

A state of great historical, cultural, and sociopolitical importance, Bihar is located in eastern India. Home to some of the first republics and powerful empires, including as the Mauryan and Gupta dynasties, it is frequently considered the birthplace of ancient Indian civilisation. Different cultural regions have developed within this larger framework, with Mithila occupying a particularly significant position.

Mithila, also historically referred to as Tirhut, Tirabhukti, and Mithilanchal, is a prominent geographical and cultural region of the Indian subcontinent. The Mahananda River bounds it to the east, the Ganges to the south, the Gandaki River to the west, and the foothills of the Himalayas to the north. The region encompasses parts of the present-day Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, as well as adjoining districts within Koshi Province, Bagmati Province, and Madhesh Province of Nepal. The native language of

Mithila is Maithili, and its speakers, collectively identified as Maithils, constitute the primary cultural group of this region.

The historical significance of Mithilanchal

In Ramayana, one of the two great epics of India, Mithila holds an extremely significant position. King Janaka's kingdom, Mithila, is characterised as a model of justice, wisdom, and spiritual understanding. Sita, the protagonist of the Ramayana and the daughter of Janaka, is born and reared here. The epic tells the story of the well-known svayamvara (marriage contest) held in Mithila, when Rama wins Sita's hand in marriage by raising and stringing Lord Shiva's mighty bow. In addition to commemorating the marriage of two holy characters, this occasion symbolically connects Mithila's fate to Ayodhya's and the larger story of the triumph of good over evil.

After being colonised by Indo-Aryan peoples who founded the Videha empire, Mithila initially rose to prominence. Along with Kuru and Panchala, Videha emerged as one of Ancient India's principal political and cultural hubs during the Later Vedic era (c. 1100–500 BCE). The Videha Kingdom's rulers were referred to as Janakas. The Videha Kingdom became part of the Vajjika League, which was based in Mithila and had Vaishali as its capital.

Several native dynasties ruled over Mithila from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries. The Karnats of Mithila, the Oiniwar Dynasty, and the Khandwala Dynasty—also referred to as Raj Darbhanga—were the first of these. Both the Malla and Licchavi dynasties in Nepal have Maithil ancestry. Maithil Brahmins ruled both the Raj Darbhanga and the Oiniwar Dynasty. The village of Oini, located in the Samastipur district of the Mithila area, was the birthplace of the Oiniwar Dynasty. The capital of Mithila was moved to Darbhanga under the Raj Darbhanga family's rule.

In the past, Mithila had Maithil Brahmin kings, and the Maithil Brahmins dominated the Mithila territory.

Food and its cultural significance

The cuisine of Mithilanchal is distinguished by its unique combinations and diverse flavors, reflecting both cultural traditions and the agrarian lifestyle of the region. Simple yet distinctive dishes such as chura-dahi (flattened rice with curd) coexist with elaborate preparations, including a wide variety of fish-based recipes, underscoring the richness and versatility of Mithila's culinary heritage.



Some prominent food items and dishes of Mithilanchal

Fig: Chura-dahi and cheeni(sugar) served in a plate.

1. Maithils love Chura-Dahi with a passion, a traditional dish prepared with flattened rice (chura) and curd (dahi). While it is commonly eaten with sugar, variations based on individual preference are widespread. Usually prepared for breakfast, it is believed to be light, cooling, and easily digestible. Based on the season, it is accompanied by various fruits also like mango pulp or banana. Some people like having it with achar or pickle rather than fruits.

2. Sattu, a flour made from roasted grains like gram or barley, is a staple of Mithilanchal known for its cooling, energizing qualities. Simple yet nourishing, it is usually mixed with water, milk, or buttermilk and flavored with sugar, salt, or spices, making it both versatile and deeply tied to everyday life. Its cultural significance is reflected in household practices like my grandfather, who never began a day without his glass of sattu, carefully stirring two to three spoonfuls into water with just the right amount of sugar. He's only had that one glass of Sattu for breakfast for as long as I can remember. Among the most cherished dishes of Mithilanchal are sattu paratha and sattu puri. Sattu paratha is a stuffed flatbread, where the sattu filling is mixed with spices, mustard oil, green chilies, onion and coriander, creating a flavorful and hearty meal often enjoyed with pickles or curd. Sattu puri is prepared by stuffing the same spiced sattu mixture into dough, which is then deep-fried to golden. Both the sattu puri and paratha are meals perfect for a train trip with family.

3. Aduari and Kumhrauri

Kumhrauri, also referred to as Pethe ki Badi or Vadi, is a traditional culinary preparation integral to the cuisine of the Mithilanchal. It is typically prepared using ash gourd (*Benincasa hispida*) or pumpkin, combined with gram flour (*Cicer arietinum*) and black gram (*Vigna mungo*). The mixture is shaped into small spheres and subsequently sun-dried, resulting in a product with a distinctive chewy texture and rich, layered flavor profile. Historically, Kumhrauri held significant importance in Maithil households, particularly during periods when fresh vegetable produce was scarce, serving as a preserved food that ensured dietary continuity throughout the year. Over generations, its role has expanded beyond subsistence, becoming a valued delicacy within regional cuisine.

Urad Dal Bari, locally known as Adauri, is a traditional Indian delicacy from the Mithilanchal region, prepared using black gram. This sun-dried lentil dumpling is distinguished by its hearty texture and robust flavor. The preparation involve ssoaking urad dal, grinding it into a smooth Fig:Kumhrouri(left) and Adouri(right) in Mithilanchal households



paste, and blending it with selected spices and herbs.

The mixture is then shaped into small

dumplings and sun-dried, a process that not only enhances its flavor but also extends its shelf life. A widely cherished dish made with Adauri is Bhata Adauri, a combination of these lentil dumplings with brinjal, where bhata is the Maithili term for brinjal.

4. Arikanchan Curry: A Traditional Mithila Leaf-Based Preparation

Arikanchan (locally termed Arikanchan or Arikanchan patta) is a traditional leafy green used in the culinary practices of the Mithilanchal region of Bihar, India. The preparation of Arikanchan ki Sabzi (Arikanchan Curry) is considered a distinctive part of Maithil cuisine. The leaves bear a close resemblance to taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) or arabi leaves in terms of appearance and culinary use; however, they are botanically distinct. Traditionally, arikanchan leaves are collected from areas

surrounding small ponds or lakes, reflecting the region’s ecological practices of foraging and localized food systems. In the absence of arikanchan leaves, taro leaves are occasionally employed as substitutes in contemporary kitchens.

Fig: The Arikanchan leaves in a garden.

Festivals and their specific food

- **Judh Sheetal:** Judh Sheetal, also known as the Maithil New Year, is celebrated annually on 14 April across Bihar, though it holds particular significance for the Maithil community. Judh Sheetal



emphasizes themes of cleanliness, care, and ecological balance. A central ritual involves adults pouring water over the heads of younger family members. This act is believed to provide relief from the summer heat throughout the year and symbolizes the nurturing and protective ethos of

Maithil society. On the preceding evening, known as *Satuani ki Raat*, a special meal of ‘Badi-Bhaat’ (lentil dumplings with rice) is prepared and consumed the next day, while kitchens remain unused as part of the ritual and hence it is called Basiya badi bhaat where Basiya translates to stale.

- Tila Sakrait: Celebrated as Makar Sankranti in other parts of India, it is one of the major festivals in Mithilanchal. The term ‘til’ refers to sesame seeds as it's called in hindi and maithili. As part of ritual, sesame seeds are sprinkled in the fire while the adults of the family ask the kids in Maithili, “Til chaur bahabe na?” The kids are asked whether they will look after their parents, grandparents or guardians after they start earning and stand on their own feet. Earlier, only the sons were asked this question as they were believed to be the sole provider of the family while the daughters were only meant to be married off into another family. But times have changed, for the better, and now sons and daughters alike are made to recite the answer to this question, thrice.
- Holi: This beautiful festival of colors and vibrance is celebrated with zeal and elation, all over the country. The preparation of sweets like gujiya are the highlight of this festival. In Maithil homes, this gujiya or pirikiya as we call it, is an essential on Holi. However, the lesser known fact is that it is not the gujiya which is the highlight for us. It's the famous Malpua. Before anything, it's this sweet dish that is prepared on Holi and is a must in the households across the region.
- Chaurchan, unique to Mithila, is celebrated in August–September with the worship of Lord Ganesha and the Moon God. Families fast until moonrise, when rituals are performed under the open sky. Food plays a central role especially curd and pidikiya (or gujiya), which, unlike in other

regions where it is linked to Holi, is the key festive dish of Chaurchan. Other offerings include curd in earthen pots, poori, kheer, khaja and sweets like laddoo arranged in bamboo trays (daliya).

Interview Segment I

Sweets hold a special place in Mithilanchal's culture, woven into festivals, rituals, and daily life. From traditional recipes to seasonal specialties, they reflect the region's love for rich flavors, hospitality, and heritage.

We have Mrs. Nirmala Devi, a 79 year old woman from Madhubani reciting about the preparation of Malpua and pirikiya (gujiya) in Mithilanchal households.

Aashleshaa: Thank you for taking part in this project, Nirmala ji. Please tell us about how pidikiya is prepared.

Nirmala ji: Thank you for giving me an opportunity to talk about the food of Mithilanchal. It's really nice to be able to share these recipes with the world. Pidikiya is a sweet dish closely associated with the Chaurchan festival. Depending on the filling, it can be prepared in two main ways. One variety uses khoya (a milk-based product) as the stuffing, while the other uses suji (semolina) roasted in ghee. The dough is prepared from refined flour, and small rounds are rolled out, much like for paranthas. The filling, often enriched with grated coconut, sugar, and dry fruits such as cashews, almonds, or raisins is placed inside before the pidikiya is folded and sealed. Closing the edges by hand, a process known as madhna in Maithili, is considered an art form, though machines could also be used. The stuffed pidikiyas are then fried in ghee until they turn crispy and very light golden. Sometimes, both fillings are combined to create a richer flavor.

Aashleshaa: Another famous sweet dish is the Malpua. How is that prepared and what all ingredients are present?

Nirmala ji: Malpua in Mithilanchal is of two main kinds, one made with wheat flour and jaggery, and the other with refined flour (maida) and sugar. For the wheat flour version, jaggery is mixed with flour, along with grated coconut, mashed banana, milk, and a few dry fruits. Water is added gradually to form a smooth batter, which is then left to rest for about 3 to 4 hours. Once ready, the batter is poured into hot ghee, where it spreads naturally and is fried until golden brown. The batter should not be too thick or too flowy.

For the maida version, sugar replaces jaggery, but the preparation method remains the same. The result, in both cases, is a deliciously crisp and golden sweet that holds a special place in Mithila's festive cuisine.

Aashleshaa: Thank you very much, ma'am for sharing this knowledge with us. I had a wonderful time talking to you.

Nirmala ji: Thank you for listening with so much patience. God bless you.

Interview Segment II

Fish holds a special significance in Mithila. As the region is rich in rivers and ponds, fish has long been a staple of the Maithil diet and is regarded as a symbol of prosperity and fertility. It features prominently in festive meals, religious ceremonies, and social gatherings, often served alongside rice as a traditional delicacy (Macch bhaat). Fish is considered so essential to wedding feasts that a popular saying goes, "the baraat will return if there is no fish on the bride's family's menu." As amusing as this is, it highlights the deep-rooted cultural importance of fish in Maithil traditions, where it is seen not just as food but as a symbol of respect, hospitality, and prosperity.

Since fish is such an important aspect of Mithila's food culture, we have the popular Mithila macch recipe recited by Mrs. Mamta Mishra, a 50 year old born in a family from Darbhanga. She was born and brought

up in Katihar. We'll also try to delve into the gender and caste divide in Mithila with respect to food and kitchen.

Aashleshaa: Why is fish so culturally significant in every aspect of our culture, especially in events like weddings?

Mamta: In Mithilanchal, maach (fish) is regarded as highly auspicious (shubh). A common saying reflects this belief: “jatra shubh manal jaye chhai, ya kaaj safal hoye chhai” i.e., if one sees fish while setting out, the journey is believed to be successful. This symbolic value explains its central presence in weddings, where its absence is considered inauspicious. Fish is also a recurring motif in Mithila paintings, further underscoring its sacred and cultural significance.

Aashleshaa: What is distinctive about the Mithila style of preparing fish dishes?

Mamta: There are a lot of ways to prepare fish curries. I'll try to explain about the one which is the most popular in Mithilanchal. So, the first step is to clean the fish thoroughly after cutting them into pieces. They are then coated with salt and turmeric. It's kind of marinating them. The fish pieces are then fried in the oil. For the gravy, oil is heated in a kadhai (wok) and tempered (phoran) with cumin seeds, bay leaves, and onions. Mustard (sarson) has traditionally been the defining flavor, though modern adaptations sometimes substitute or supplement it with garam masala.

Aashleshaa: Which varieties of fish are most popular in Mithila?

Mamta: Larger fishes such as rohu are widely preferred, as they contain fewer bones. Other common varieties include catla and buari, though the latter is considered comparatively bland. Smaller fishes such as pothi and mangur are also enjoyed and are sometimes incorporated into vegetable curries, such as pothi with brinjal.

Aashleshaa: How have recipes changed from earlier generations to the present?

Mamta: Earlier, tangy flavors in fish curries were achieved with lemon juice or raw mango, but now tomatoes are widely used due to their availability and ability to enhance both taste and appearance.

Aashleshaa: What role does food play in cultural events such as barkhi (death anniversaries)?

Mamta: On major occasions like shraddh and barkhi, food preparation traditionally involved the men of the household and neighborhood, who cooked in large open spaces (dalan) using wood-fired stoves and large brass or iron vessels (karah and tokna). Preparations began early in the morning, with digging tiras which are long man made stoves that can incorporate upto 10-15 large vessels at once and men managing the main cooking while women contributed to tasks such as frying papad or preparing salads. In villages, these large vessels (tokna) were bought for such events so that whenever someone needed, they could use them. In today's day and era, people usually opt for catering service for such occasions.

Aashleshaa: What role did caste play in food practices in Mithilanchal?

Mamta: Caste divide used to be very prominent in the earlier times. In Brahmin households, cooking for auspicious ceremonies was carried out exclusively within the family, while helpers were restricted to preliminary tasks like washing or cutting vegetables. They were not permitted to approach the stove. In contemporary times, however, such practices have significantly diminished, particularly with the growing reliance on catering services, where food is prepared and served without regard to caste since no one knows who's making the food and who's serving it.

Aashleshaa: Thank you very much Mamta ji for answering all the questions with so much patience. It was a wonderful experience interacting with you.

Mamta: Thank you, the pleasure was all mine.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the cultural roots of Mithilanchal's food traditions, particularly their role in festivals and family gatherings. By combining literary sources with oral histories, the

research highlighted some of the region's most prominent and celebrated dishes while situating them within a broader cultural framework. Beyond recipes, the study also explored the social dimensions of food, including the influence of gender roles in culinary practices and the historical imprint of caste divisions. Together, these perspectives underscore how food in Mithilanchal functions not merely as nourishment but as a living archive of identity, ritual, and community.

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Serving Faith: An Ethnographic Study of Langar and Social Harmony in Delhi's Gurudwaras

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Abstract

The following report delves into the institution of langar, a system of providing free meals at every Gurudwara irrespective of the person's caste, creed, gender, religion etc. The concept of Langar dates back to the 16th century when Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, introduced this as a practice of selfless service, social cohesion and equality among all, a core aspect of Sikhism practiced till date. Where the cultural and social aspect of langar has often been emphasised in ample sources and reading, this report, with the help of surveys and interviews, accentuates the logistical processes ranging from cooking to funding that goes behind serving this sacred institution of free meals. The report concludes that langar is not only a religious institution but also a powerful socio-cultural practice with contemporary relevance in addressing hunger, inequality, and social fragmentation.

Introduction

On account of a world divided by religions, witnessing religious wars, anti-religion agendas, communal violence on a daily basis, it is rather farcical that the one thing every religion inherently proliferates is the practice of social harmony. Different religions have a different way of bringing equality to all and for all. Hinduism emphasises on the value of Dharma, certain ethical duties expected of people to sustain harmony in the world or the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", a Sanskrit maxim from the Mahā Upanishad, which means that the whole world is one family. The practices like Dana (charitable giving) and Anna-

dāna (offering food) reflect a responsibility towards others, reducing inequality and fostering goodwill. In Islam, the Qur'an teaches that all humans are part of one family under God (Ummah), institutionalizing care for the poor through Zakat (compulsory charity), reducing inequality and strengthening solidarity between rich and poor through wealth redistribution. In Christianity as well, the idea of giving is deeply emphasized through Tithing (giving a tenth) and almsgiving. Jesus strongly emphasized charity as central to faith: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." In Buddhism, Dāna (Generosity/Charity) is one of the Ten Pāramitās (perfections) in Mahāyāna Buddhism and part of the Ten Duties in Theravāda Buddhism, considered as the first step towards reducing attachment and cultivating compassion.

Sikhism, as a religion, strictly rejects caste, gender and social hierarchies. In Dasam Granth, Guru Gobind Singh mentioned the verse: "Recognize the entire human race as one." In a core principle of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev mentioned: "Naam Japo (recite God's name), Kirat Karo (earn by honest work), Vand Chakho (share with others)", giving this as a threefold path to balance spiritual life, honest living, and social justice, making it a foundation of social harmony in Sikhism. A very prominent aspect of Sikhism includes the practice of 'Langar'. Langar is a Persian term meaning 'an alms house', 'an asylum for the poor and the destitutes' (Singh, 1994). Langar refers to a communal kitchen managed by volunteers which provides gratuitous meals to all regardless of their caste, creed, gender etc. It involves people of any social hierarchy sitting side by side in rows on floor- Pangat (Singh, 1994), where volunteers prepare and serve them food. The food tends to be rather simple exemplifying modesty, giving people a space for community bonding. Gurdwaras are in every sense community centres as much as they are places of worship (Mandair, 2013).

While theological aspects of langar have been studied extensively, fewer studies examine its logistical and economic impact at the grassroots level. This research aims to address this gap by analysing how langar functions as a site of community-building, how resources are mobilized into building a place that provides

free meals every single day. With the objective of examining the processes of organization, funding, and volunteerism behind langar, the main questions include the sourcing of raw materials, maintaining freshness, quality of raw materials given the large-scale cooking, seasonal variations, estimated quantity of food prepared, cleanliness and hygiene, providing food during disaster reliefs and how the langar experience has transformed over the years.

Literature Review

Books and journals were all consulted as part of research for the project pertaining to Langar, Seva culture, Sikh traditions etc.

Eleanor Nesbitt's Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction (2005) provides a concise yet comprehensive overview of Sikh history, beliefs, practices, and identity. It traces the development of Sikhism from Guru Nanak through the ten Gurus, the formation of the Khalsa, and the Sikh scriptures, while also addressing themes of worship, community, and diaspora.

In Deciphering a Meal (1972), anthropologist Mary Douglas analyses the social and symbolic structures embedded in meals. She contrasts meals with drinks, snacks, and festive banquets, showing how food practices communicate hierarchy, inclusion, and social boundaries.

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair's Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed (2013) offers a critical and accessible introduction to Sikh thought, history, and practice. The book situates Sikhism within both its indigenous Punjabi context and global religious studies, while questioning colonial and orientalist frameworks that have shaped its interpretation.

Prakash Singh's Community Kitchen of the Sikhs (1994) provides a detailed study of the institution of Guru ka Langar, tracing its origins in the time of Guru Nanak and its development through Sikh history. The book highlights the principles of equality, humility, and seva (selfless service) that underpin langar, while also examining its organization, funding, and social impact.

Methodology

As part of the research project, 4 Gurudwaras in Delhi namely- Bangla Sahib Gurudwara near Connaught Place, Sis Ganj Sahib Gurudwara in Chandni Chowk, Sri Rakab Ganj Sahib Gurudwara near Parliament House and Moti Bagh Sahib Gurudwara near Dhaula Kuan were visited and certain volunteers and permanent employees were interviewed the questions mentioned above. Certain pictures, in the following report, from the food preparation sites were taken.

Result

All the major Gurudwaras in Delhi are managed by Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC), created under the Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Act of 1971. Headquartered in the Rakab Ganj Gurudwara, the committee works in areas of education, hospitals, social welfare, and langar besides gurdwara management. Further, in 1974, under the Delhi Sikh Gurudwara (Management) Rules, 1974, rules were notified under the 1971 Act.

The Bangla Sahib Gurudwara was originally a bungalow of Raja Jai Singh, where the 8th Guru, Guru Har Krishan Ji stayed in 1664. It is believed that during a smallpox and cholera epidemic in Delhi, the Guru

served the sick by giving them water from the well at this site. In an interaction with a volunteer, GS Sodi, it was informed that the funding for the purchase of raw materials for langar is primarily derived from the contributions of the sangat. The sangat, meaning association (Singh, 1994), comprises attendees and participants who come for kirtan and other religious congregations and voluntarily donate money which is then utilized for running the langar. Along with monetary donations, many devotees also offer food items such as wheat, flour, bread, rice, pulses, and vegetables in large quantities. The remaining raw materials are purchased according to requirements. Since Gurudwara Bangla Sahib is one of the most prominent and revered gurdwaras in Delhi, it witnesses an exceptionally high daily footfall, serving meals to around 50,000 people on average, with the number rising to 70,000–80,000 on weekends and special occasions. The food, therefore, is prepared in mass quantities, generally cooked and served in slots that cater to 300–400 people at a time. To meet the needs of such large-scale operations, extensive provisions are made for the storage and preservation of raw materials. Facilities like cold storage rooms, deep freezers ensure the freshness and quality of perishable items, especially vegetables. The menu of the langar is generally simple and vegetarian, making it accessible and suitable for everyone regardless of dietary or cultural restrictions. It varies depending on the availability of raw materials, with certain seasonal changes, but one item—Kadha Prashad, which is offered after the prayers, made simply of wheat flour, ghee, sugar and water, is prepared daily as a matter of tradition and devotion. Despite the immense number of visitors and meals served, there is never a shortage of food in Guru ka Langar. If ever an excess of food is prepared, it is never wasted, instead, it is distributed among the poor or donated the following morning to ensure it reaches those in need. Cleanliness and hygiene in the cooking and serving areas are maintained with utmost care. Volunteers work in designated shifts to clean the kitchen and dining spaces, with a thorough final cleaning carried out in the evening. The actual preparation of food, along with cleaning and serving, is largely managed by volunteers under the principle of Dera Kar Sewa, selfless service, offered at the gurdwaras. While there are permanent

employees to support operations, the majority of the work is done by these dedicated volunteers, who embody humility and devotion through their service. The spirit of langar extends beyond the gurdwara premises as well. At times of crisis, such as disaster relief operations or the COVID-19 pandemic, food from Bangla Sahib was provided in huge quantities to those in need across Delhi. Over the years, the fundamental concept of langar has remained unchanged, continuing to symbolize equality, service, and devotion, however, the number of participants has grown significantly, especially on holidays and weekends.



Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib, located in Chandni Chowk, Delhi, stands on the sacred site where Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, the 9th Sikh Guru, was executed in 1675 by Aurangzeb for defending religious freedom. The gurdwara today is not only a historical and spiritual landmark but also a hub of service, feeding approximately 30,000 people daily, as shared with us by Manager Gurpreet Singh. The funding for langar here, much like in other gurdwaras, comes from the sangat. Devotees contribute both financially and in kind, offering raw materials such as grains, flour, and vegetables. Purchases of additional requirements are made on a daily to weekly basis depending on consumption. To ensure freshness and quality, provisions such as cold storage facilities are maintained. The langar menu remains simple and vegetarian, usually consisting of sabzi, daal, and rotis, with Kadha Prashad being prepared every day as a ritual of devotion. Seasonal variation in the menu depends primarily on the availability of raw materials, yet there is never a shortage of either food or funding reported at the gurdwara. Cleanliness and hygiene are considered integral

to the preparation and serving of food. The premises are cleaned multiple times during the day, with a specified slot between 5:00–7:00 pm reserved for thorough cleaning. A unique feature of langar preparation here is its deeply spiritual environment, food is cooked and served while gurbani (hymns) are recited continuously in the background, which enhances its sanctity and makes it especially revered among devotees. The scope of the langar at Sis Ganj Sahib also extends beyond the immediate congregation. During times of disaster relief, the gurdwara not only distributes meals locally but also sends raw materials to regions such as Punjab to support those in distress. Furthermore, the gurdwara provides housing and shelter, serving as a refuge for people in times of personal hardship. While the core principle of langar at Sis Ganj Sahib has remained unchanged over the years, symbolizing seva (selfless service), equality, and humility, what has evolved is the sheer scale of participation. The number of attendees has consistently grown, reflecting the gurdwara's continuing role as a vital spiritual, cultural, and humanitarian centre in the heart of Delhi.



Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, situated directly opposite the Parliament House in Delhi, holds immense historical and spiritual significance. It marks the site where the body of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, the 9th Sikh Guru, was secretly cremated in 1675 by Lakhi Shah Vanjara and his son Bhai Naghaiya. To protect the Guru's remains from Mughal detection, they set fire to their own house and performed the cremation within the burning structure, an act of extraordinary sacrifice and devotion. The gurdwara today stands as a powerful symbol of that legacy of courage and faith. In terms of service, Rakab Ganj Sahib feeds approximately 1,000–1,200 people daily. As with other gurdwaras, the sangat remains the primary source

of funding for the procurement of raw materials. However, in addition to the contributions of the devotees, the gurdwara committee, located on the premises, plays a central role in coordinating both the financial resources and the acquisition of raw materials. Oversight is further provided by the Daftar, which serves as the headquarters of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), and is responsible for finalizing the daily langar menu. The menu generally includes daal and sabzi, cooked in large quantities ranging from 50 to 100 kilograms, along with Kadha Parshad, which is prepared and distributed daily. The freshness and quality of the food are ensured through the use of cold storage facilities, and raw materials are usually acquired on a weekly basis. A register, which was shown to us by the Langar manager, is maintained for all purchases and supplies, ensuring accountability and smooth functioning. Since Rakab Ganj Sahib is comparatively smaller in size than gurdwaras like Bangla Sahib or Sis Ganj Sahib, the management of cleanliness and langar operations is handled in a more compact structure. The cleaning of the langar premises is undertaken by 3 designated workers, while food preparation and serving are managed by a mix of volunteers and permanent employees, among whom bibis (women) play a prominent role. The overall coordination of langar is overseen by two managers, who ensure efficiency in both preparation and distribution. Moreover, the langar at Rakab Ganj Sahib extends beyond routine service, in times of disaster or crisis, food and raw materials are dispatched, particularly to Punjab, to aid those in need. A distinguishing feature of Rakab Ganj Sahib is the strategic location of its langar hall at the back of the gurdwara, unlike many other gurdwaras where it is more centrally placed. Over the years, the essence of langar at Rakab Ganj Sahib has remained unchanged, however, the number of people partaking in the meals has grown significantly, reflecting both the enduring relevance of langar in Sikh tradition and the gurdwara's central role in upholding it.

Gurudwara Moti Bagh Sahib, located near Dhaula Kuan in Delhi, is historically associated with Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the 10th Sikh Guru, who camped at this site with his army on his way to meet Emperor

Bahadur Shah. Today, it continues to function as a prominent spiritual and community centre, with its langar serving as a vital expression of Sikh values of seva, equality, and humility. The funding for raw materials required in langar preparation is provided primarily by the sangat, who contribute both financially and in kind. Purchases are made either daily or 2-3 times a week, depending on immediate requirements. To ensure quality and freshness, raw materials are preserved in cold storage facilities. The menu remains simple and vegetarian, depending on the availability of raw materials. The Kadha Prashad is prepared daily, along with daal cooked in large quantities, approximately 60 kilograms at a time. As one volunteer explained, the daal is cooked for nearly four hours in large kadhais, owing to the scale of production and the need to feed a large number of devotees. Despite the mass preparation, volunteers emphasized that there is never a shortage or wastage of food in Guru ka Langar. The tradition has remained largely unchanged over the years, with the focus continuing to be on simplicity, sanctity, and service. Volunteers also highlighted the strong sense of discipline, safety, and purity maintained in the gurdwara premises, which ensures that the langar retains its spiritual and social significance.

Conclusion

The study of langar practices across major gurdwaras in Delhi—Bangla Sahib, Sis Ganj Sahib, Rakab Ganj Sahib, and Moti Bagh Sahib, reveals the enduring vitality of this centuries-old tradition. While each gurdwara reflects its own unique historical legacy and scale of operation, the essence of langar has remained unchanged: it is a sacred institution rooted in seva (selfless service), equality, humility, and social harmony. From the vast kitchens of Bangla Sahib that serve tens of thousands daily, to the smaller but equally devoted operations at Rakab Ganj Sahib, langar emerges not merely as a food service but as a spiritual and social equalizer. The reliance on sangat contributions for funding, the commitment of volunteers through Dera

Kar Sewa, and the emphasis on simplicity and accessibility of meals all underscore how the Sikh community has successfully preserved this tradition in its purest form, even while adapting to modern logistical needs such as cold storage and structured management systems. Beyond their daily function, these gurdwaras also demonstrate how langar extends into the realm of humanitarian aid, offering food during disasters and crises, thereby reinforcing its role as a lifeline of compassion and resilience. Despite variations in scale, menu, and management, the underlying principle that “no one goes hungry in Guru ka Langar” continues to define the institution. In essence, langar is more than nourishment, it is a living practice of faith in action, breaking down barriers of caste, creed, class, and religion. It sustains not only bodies but also the ideals of equality, inclusivity, and collective responsibility, making it one of the most powerful and timeless embodiments of Sikh philosophy in the modern world.

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