



## DALIT'S AND THEIR CUISINE: A JOURNEY OF CULINARY HERITAGE AND EVOLVING TRENDS IN FATEHABAD DISTRICT, HARYANA

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### ABSTRACT

*This research delves into the rich culinary heritage and evolving food practices among Dalit communities in the Fatehabad district of Haryana. It explores traditional dishes and their deep cultural significance while examining the influence of economic shifts, social mobility, and modern trends on these age-old practices. The study employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on insights from autobiographical works like Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki and Baluta by Daya Pawar, alongside case studies from villages such as Bhuna and Dhani Gopal. Using secondary data*



*by purposive sampling, the research gathers perspectives from people of Dalit community both men and women through interviews, shedding light on how traditional dishes like bajra khichdi, kachri ki sabzi, and cholai saag are either being adapted or gradually replaced by more diverse and aspirational foods. The findings reveal that although modern culinary influences have gained prominence, traditional dishes still hold deep symbolic value, especially during festivals and communal gatherings. The study concludes that the culinary practices of Dalits in Fatehabad represent a delicate balance between preservation and adaptation. This dual dynamic underscores how these communities navigate their heritage while engaging with broader societal changes, reflecting both resilience and the evolving nature of Dalit identity in contemporary rural Haryana.*

**KEYWORDS:** Dalits, Fatehabad, Culinary Heritage, Modernity, Autobiographies.

### INTRODUCTION :

Food plays a crucial role in human life, functioning not only as a means of subsistence but also as an important cultural emblem. It has an extraordinary ability to convey the identity, history, traditions, and everyday experiences of a region. Haryana, located in northern India, has a rich and diverse culinary heritage that reflects its historical and cultural history. This intangible cultural heritage is characterized by unique ingredients, cooking techniques, and traditional dishes passed down from generation to generation. The cuisine of Haryana highlights the agricultural abundance of the region, with an emphasis on grains, dairy products, and vegetables. This culinary heritage is closely linked to the culture and identity of the local population. Preserving this intangible food heritage involves preserving not only the tangible aspects of ingredients and cooking methods but also the values, beliefs, practices, and customs that are an integral part of the culinary traditions of Haryana.

Dalits are considered Scheduled Castes in India under the legal and constitutional framework. According to the 2011 census, there are about 200 million Dalits in India. This Scheduled Caste includes

converts to Sikhism but excludes converts to Islam and Christianity according to the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index. Although the constitutional measures have had positive effects on the representation of Dalits in educational institutions, government organizations, and even in elections, Dalits continue to find themselves in the most unfavorable position in society, in the most inhuman and humiliating status. A significant percentage of Dalits live in rural conditions and their most serious problem is that of economic exploitation. They are mostly farmers or landless workers, and most of them suffer from debt and are forced to pay all their debts through forced labor, although forced labor and forced labor have been abolished by the law in 1976. Workers receive a loan from a lender. Or the owner and agree to work for the lender until the debt is paid. When the interest on the debt increases, the farmer fails to repay the loan, and the debt is passed on to the next generation of the farmer and so on. Mob violence, especially by landlords against Dalits, is also a common problem. Many Dalits migrate to cities and places less favorable for employment or to rural areas in various parts of India, where work is also scarce. Most of their families left the rural areas and migrated to the slums and suburbs of the rapidly developing cities. Even here they are forced to do worse, dirty, and mundane jobs for meager wages. However, in many countries, old jobs, such as cleaning, have been organized by government unions, which allow workers to work and receive a regular salary.

### **Background and Significance of Dalit Cuisine of Fatehabad District of Haryana,**

The cuisine of Dalit communities in Haryana's Fatehabad district is intertwined with the socio-cultural landscape of the region, displaying a history marked by marginalization, resilience, and cultural identity. Historically, the food practices of these communities have been influenced by their socio-economic challenges, which have limited access to resources and led to a reliance on local and efficient ingredients. Consequently, this has created a unique culinary tradition, which is defined by simplicity, creativity, and focus on food. Fatehabad district in Haryana enjoys a deep cultural heritage whose origins date back to the Indus Valley Civilization. This region has been home to various communities, including the Dalits, who have significantly influenced the local culinary landscape. Often referred to as 'untouchables', Dalits have been marginalized and excluded from wider society, which has contributed to the emergence of a distinct cuisine that embodies their cultural experiences and traditions. India's caste system influences food culture, with Dalits traditionally consuming foods considered inferior by higher castes. His cuisine relies on cheap and accessible ingredients, such as grains and expired grains. Rakthi, a popular dish among Dalits in India, is made from scapegoat blood, oil, chili paste, onions, and cotton swabs from western India. The blood is made into a spicy paste, which is usually eaten with jolada or roti. Fish, especially the smaller varieties, was a key part of the Dalit diet. Dalits preserve fish in various ways, such as boiling the water used to boil it in a sauce called Kaat. Chutneys and pickles are also important in Dalit cuisine, adding flavor and acidity to meals.

The Dalit community of Fatehabad district has a rich culinary tradition with local ingredients like ragi, jowar, and bajra. Historically, their occupations in hygiene, tanning, and meat processing have influenced their unique cuisine, which includes beef and pork. India's diverse society faces deep caste discrimination, which particularly affects Dalit communities such as Mahars, Chamars, Jatavs, Valmikis, Pasis and others. Being considered "impure" by society, as studied by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Regarding food practices, an interesting aspect of human life, Dalits often have limited access to the quantity and quality of food, unless they reach a certain social level. It should be noted that in these groups, the specific meats consumed were closely associated with their cultural identity.

Several Reviews have explored the intersection between caste, food culture, and socioeconomic status in rural India, yielding valuable insights into the culinary practices of Dalit communities.

**1. "Caste and Cuisine: An Exploration of Dalit Food Culture in North India" by Rajesh Kumar and Shalini Verma (2022):** This research investigates the significance of food as a cultural and social identifier within Dalit communities throughout North India, particularly in Haryana. It underscores how culinary traditions act as a means of cultural resistance and a declaration of identity amidst historical marginalization. **"Food Practices and Social Identity Among Dalits: Insights from Haryana"** by

Sunita Sharma (2018): Sharma's research examines the traditional culinary customs of Dalits in Haryana, highlighting their evolution over time. The study focuses on the influence of socio-economic transformations on modern Dalit food culture, especially in rural regions such as Fatehabad. **"Evolving Food Practices Among Dalits: An Ethnographic Perspective from Rural Haryana" by Anju Bala (2021):** This ethnographic research offers an in-depth analysis of the shifting dietary habits among Dalits in Haryana, including Fatehabad. Bala's findings reveal the effects of market dynamics, economic advancement, and greater access to a variety of foods on traditional Dalit culinary practices. **"The Intersection of Food and Caste in Rural Haryana" by Vandana Rao (2017):** Rao investigates the intricate connections between caste and food in Haryana, emphasizing how culinary practices are linked to caste-based discrimination and social stratification. The study illuminates how Dalit communities confront these issues through their food-related customs.

These studies highlight the importance of food in the cultural identity of Dalit communities in Fatehabad and the ongoing transformation of cuisine in response to wider social, economic, and cultural changes.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

**The main objectives of the research include:**

1. The importance of traditional Dalit cuisine in cultural identity and community unity is explored through historical analysis and the patronage of some autobiographies with recent examples in Fatehabad district, Haryana.
2. The Study investigates modernization, globalization impact on food habits, with suggestions for preserving Dalit culinary heritage in Fatehabad.

## METHODOLOGY

Using secondary data through purposive sampling, the researcher gathers the views of Dalit community members of Fatehabad district { Ratia block} of men and women, through interviews, highlighting their traditional foods like bajra khichdi, kachri ki sabzi and cholai saag and how these are gradually replaced by more diverse and aspirational foods.

## Omprakash Valmiki's 1997 autobiography, Jonathan:

A Dalit's Life, provides a compelling account of caste discrimination and its impact on daily life, particularly in terms of food consumption. The term Joothan denotes discarded food and is used to describe the humiliation experienced by Dalits, who are often obliged to consume what they can find. This idea is closely related to the study of Dalit culinary traditions in Haryana's Fatehabad district. Valmiki's narrative highlights how food serves as a symbol of social hierarchy and a means of exclusion, influencing the eating habits of Dalit communities. The research examines how these traditional food practices, rooted in a history of deprivation and stigma, have changed as Dalits in Fatehabad enjoy better economic prospects and integrate their cultural heritage and modern influences. Valmiki's reflections provide a vital perspective on the historical context of these evolving practices and highlight the connection between food habits, caste oppression, and cultural persistence. Thus they constitute an important source for the study of the development of Dalit cuisine in contemporary Haryana. **Urmila Pawar's memoir Aayadan** provides an in-depth exploration of the food customs and practices of Dalits in India. Similar to Bama's 'Karukku', Pawar's narrative presents a personal perspective on the realities faced by Dalits in South Asia. In 'Aayadan', she candidly discusses the constant poverty and hunger that plagued her Dalit community. Pawar illustrates how they often subsisted on minimal portions of rice and dal, with meat a rare luxury they could rarely afford. When available, meat was generally of the lowest quality, such as liver and intestines. Pawar also addresses the issue of the stigmatization of Dalit culinary traditions, noting that the dominant castes often consider their food impure and impure, leading to social isolation during communal meals. As a result, Dalits are often marginalized, and forced to eat separately from others. However, Pawar points out that food has also become a symbol of pride and resilience for his community. She recounts how Dalits came together to share meals and celebrate

festivities, often preparing special dishes and foods to assert their cultural identity and dignity. In **"Aayadan," the story of Dalits in India** is heartening to witness their ability to thrive despite the challenges presented by food practices, which are often associated with caste-based discrimination and exclusion. By soaking the fruits or vegetables in oil, vinegar, or spiced brine to preserve them, pickles are made. In Dalit cuisine, popular chutneys include coconut, peanut, and mint. Due to limited resources, the Dalit community has innovated culinary techniques to enhance flavors. Roti's are a common accompaniment, made with wheat flour and sometimes chickpea flour. The dough needs time to become soft and form circles. Red ant chutney, originally from Chhattisgarh, is hot and spicy, made from red ants and crushed eggs. A dish called Jhunka, which is made from gram flour and enriched with spices and vegetables, was first introduced in Maharashtra. Besides providing food, food is also an emblem of identity, resistance, and community cohesion for Dalits, as demonstrated by the **Untouchable Spring** about the study of Dalit culinary heritage in the district of Fatehabad. As the novel presents traditional Dalit foods as markers of cultural survival in the face of changing socio-political environments, this study examines how Dalit communities in Fatehabad continue to follow their traditional culinary customs while adapting to contemporary influences. Rao's representation of food as a reflection of inherited hardship and a means of asserting one's dignity in the face of ongoing discrimination is supported by research. **Sujatha Gidla's 2017 memoir Ants Among Elephants** focuses on a Dalit family in Andhra Pradesh dealing with caste-based discrimination. Caste identity is a key factor in shaping the social, educational, and eating habits of individuals. Similarly, a study on the food heritage of Dalits in Haryana shows how modern influences are reshaping traditional practices. These two examples reveal how Dalit communities navigate between maintaining their cultural customs and adopting new food habits as they strive for social and economic progress in the face of caste oppression and modernity.

### **An illustration of Dalit cuisine in Ratia block:**

Bajra Khichdi with Desi Ghee: Cultural Significance: This inexpensive dish, very nutritious and simple to prepare has a special place in diets. 2. Kachri Ki Chutney is a cultural symbol of the inventiveness of Dalits, who have traditionally relied on locally grown ingredients such as kachri. 3. The Cultural Value of Chulai Saag: Not only is it a source of sustenance, but it is also considered an essential element in the culture. The region's culinary heritage has been shaped by its long-standing presence in this dish. Dalits' relationship with food reflects the complex social dynamics of caste discrimination in India. Culture and history are intertwined with food, not just food. But Dalit cuisine is resilient and creative with dishes like chutneys and pickles, which are made using local ingredients. These culinary traditions are passed down from generation to generation, strengthening the identity and cultural heritage of Dalits. Recently, Dalit cuisine has emerged as a tool of resistance, promoting social change and empowerment. Many people and organizations have recognized the cultural and economic importance of Dalit cuisine, leading to the establishment of Dalit-owned restaurants and food businesses. These businesses not only create economic opportunities for the community but also challenge caste-related prejudices and stereotypes associated with Dalit cuisine. The research article highlights the emergence of spaces that celebrate Dalit cuisine, allowing people from various backgrounds to explore its unique flavors and cultural significance and serves as a catalyst for social change by fostering dialogue and dismantling social barriers.

The research article highlights the important role of social media and online platforms in creating a global community for Dalit food lovers, enabling them to share recipes, stories, and experiences. In contemporary India, Dalit cuisine transcends simple culinary practice; she embodies the resilience, strength, and creativity of a historically marginalized group that has overcome centuries of oppression. Social media platforms and digital spaces have created a global platform for Dalit food lovers, allowing them to share recipes, stories, and experiences. In modern India, Dalit cuisine transcends a simple culinary tradition; it symbolizes the resilience, strength, and creativity of a marginalized group that has overcome centuries of oppression and Dalits have charted a path of empowerment, challenging existing stereotypes and reclaiming their rightful place in society. The



Dalit's culinary traditions in Fatehabad district reflect the evolution of ancient food practices as a result of social mobility, changing economic conditions, and wider cultural influences.

### **The Changing Trends of Dalit Culinary Heritage in Fatehabad District, Haryana and its contemporary perspectives.**

**1. Shifting from a subsistence diet to diverse and aspirational food choices: Traditional practices:** Historically, Dalit communities in villages like Dhani Gopal, Bhattu Kalan, and Banawali depended on coarse grains like bajra and jowar and only on green vegetables like bathua and choli for their daily food. Their diet was characterized by simplicity and frugality.

**Contemporary changes:** With improved economic conditions and greater market access, there has been a marked shift towards more varied diets that include wheat roti's, rice, and vegetables such as potatoes, onions, and tomatoes. Packaged foods, including snacks and instant noodles, have gained popularity among the younger generation. This transformation reflects a desire to overcome the traditional perception of "food of the poor".

**2. Preserving traditional dishes with modern adaptations - Examples from villages:** In localities like Jakhal Mandi and Kirmara, traditional dishes like bajra khichdi and kachri ki sabzi continue to be prepared, albeit with the inclusion of modern ingredients and cooking techniques. For example, bajra khichdi is often garnished with spices, ghee, and commercially available vegetables like carrots and peas.

**3. The evolving role of food in asserting caste and identity: Culinary resistance:** In countries like Bihar and Nadhori, Dalit communities are increasingly adopting their traditional foods as a form of cultural resistance. There is a growing recognition of the value of Indigenous foods that were previously considered "inferior". Community festivals serve to showcase these dishes, allowing Dalits to affirm their cultural identity.

**Case example:** At a recent food festival in Bhuna village, Dalit women presented dishes such as cholai saag and sattu, highlighting their nutritional benefits. This act of culinary pride challenges prevailing stereotypes that associate Dalit cuisine with poverty.

**4. Impact of economic change and migration on dietary practices: Economic mobility:** As Dalit households experience economic progress and migrate to urban areas, their dietary preferences undergo significant changes like Bhattu Mandi are introducing new flavors, resulting in a fusion of traditional and modern culinary practices. For example, traditional bajra roti's are often paired with paneer curry.

**Remittances and market impact:** Remittances from family members employed in the city have strengthened purchasing power, leading to increased consumption of processed foods. This trend reflects broader societal changes that mark a shift away from the traditional reliance on locally grown foods.

**5. Gender Dynamics and Changing Roles in Food Preparation: Women's Empowerment:** In villages like Dhani Biran and Baliar Khera, Dalit women have always been responsible for gathering and preparing food. However, advances in education and job opportunities have significantly changed this traditional dynamic. The involvement of women in self-help groups focused on food production illustrates their transition from domestic caretakers to active economic participants.

**Illustration:** In the village of Bhuna, a group of mostly Dalit women are engaged in the production of traditional items such as bajra flour and kachri chutney for commercial sale, giving them greater control over local food production.

## 6. Impact of Technology and Social Media on Culinary Culture:

**Digital Platforms:** The proliferation of smartphones and social media in countries like Tohana and Ratia affects the culinary culture of Dalit youth. French recipes posted on platforms like YouTube feature innovative dishes that combine traditional elements with modern influences, thus appealing to a younger demographic.

## 7. Health and food awareness:

**Nutritional transformations:** Dalit communities are increasingly aware of health issues, leading some families to return to a millet-based diet to recognize the benefits of their health. The article "A History of Culinary Apartheid" by Ashwaq Masoodi highlights the historical oppression of Dalits in India, who were forced to consume foods considered inferior by the upper castes, leading to the development of a unique and creative cuisine characterized by dry-based dishes. Meat and bread. Dalit Histories and Memories of Food", which aims to document and celebrate these culinary practices.

## 8. Changes in ingredients and cooking methods:

**From millet to wheat:** Historically, Dalit communities in Haryana probably relied heavily on millet due to its affordability and of the resistance. When economic conditions change, there may be a shift towards wheat, reflecting broader trends in the region.

**Increased use of processed foods:** Like many urban communities, Dalits in Fatehabad may include more processed foods in their diet due to their convenience and availability. This may have implications for food and the preservation of traditional cooking methods.

**Adaptation of recipes:** Traditional recipes can be adapted according to the availability of ingredients. For example, a traditional dish prepared with a specific type of local lentils can be modified to use a more available variety.

## 9. Incorporation of International Components:

The growing impact of globalization has brought new components to the Dalit homes of Fatehabad. Foods such as pasta, bread and different varieties of rice (e.g. basmati) are included in daily meals, alongside traditional staples such as bajra (pearl millet) and jowar (sorghum). The use of condiments and seasonings commonly found in international cuisine, such as soy sauce and ketchup, has also become more common.

## 10. Increased consumption of non-vegetarian foods:

In recent years, consumption of non-vegetarian foods such as chicken and mutton has increased among Dalit families in Fatehabad. First, due to economic constraints, many Dalit families follow a predominantly vegetarian diet based on seasonal pulses and vegetables. However, with the onset of winter, non-vegetarian foods are now more accessible and an integral part of meals, especially on festive occasions.

## 11. Decline of traditional cooking methods:

Traditional cooking methods, such as cooking over wood fires and using clay pots, are gradually being replaced by modern cooking appliances, such as stoves gas, pressure cookers and microwave ovens. While this change has made cooking easier and faster, it also leads to the gradual disappearance of specific flavors and textures associated with traditional Dalit cuisine.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BETTERMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE

**1. Documentation and preservation of traditional recipes:** it is imperative to take the initiative to document and preserve the traditional recipes of Dalit, which must include their historical context, cultural significance, and preparation methods.

**2. Promotion of Dalit cuisine:** Promotion of Dalit cuisine is essential as it is a unique and valuable aspect of India's culinary heritage. This cuisine should be noted for its cultural importance and nutritional benefits.

**3. Inclusion of Dalit cuisine in Culinary Education:** Dalit cuisine should be integrated into culinary education programs, thereby enabling future generations to experience and appreciate the rich culinary traditions of the Dalit community.

**5. Cultural exchanges and cooperation:** Fostering cultural exchanges and cooperation between Dalits and non-Dalits is essential to promote mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's culinary traditions.

By implementing these recommendations, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable culinary landscape in which Dalit cuisine is recognised in India's diverse culinary heritage.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research paper highlights the challenges faced by Dalits in asserting their culinary identity in a society dominated by upper caste norms, particularly due to the stigma of recovery and restrictions on the consumption of beef, which marginalize Dalit cuisine. Despite these obstacles, the study reveals that Dalit cuisine is evolving and adapting to changing social and economic conditions, gaining popularity among non-Dalits and benefiting from new culinary trends such as fusion cuisine. This shift indicates a growing recognition of Dalit culinary heritage and its potential contribution to India's diverse gastronomic landscape.

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