

Tracing Gastronomic Continuities: Patterns and Frameworks in the Evolution of Indian Cuisine

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India's culinary landscape is a vibrant tapestry of flavors, techniques, and traditions deeply rooted in its diverse cultural heritage. This extraordinary tradition—pākaśāstra—is not only central to the nation's cultural identity but also a major driver of economic growth through the food services and culinary tourism sectors. Currently valued at over \$50 billion, these industries are expanding rapidly, with culinary tourism projected to grow at a 23% CAGR and food services at 11%. Together, they are expected to form a \$300 billion market by 2034, significantly contributing to the economy.[1]

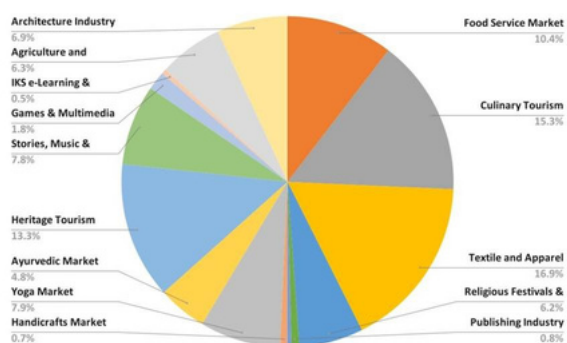


Fig 1: Indian Knowledge systems and Heritage state of the industry report [1] projects the contribution of the food service industry at 10.4% and culinary tourism at 15.3% by 2034.

Amid this rapid growth, it is vital that India's culinary heritage remains anchored in its knowledge systems. For culinary traditions to retain authenticity and serve as instruments of India's soft power, they must draw on the foundations of pākaśāstra and Ayurveda. While modern gastronomy often adopts a reductionist approach—exploring flavor molecules, ingredient interactions, or heat transformations—Indian culinary philosophy views food holistically, through the Ayurvedic systems biology framework of tridoṣa and sapta dhātu. The two approaches need not stand apart; instead, they can be synergized to enrich both tradition and modernity.

India's culinary legacy traces back to the Vedas, purāṇas, and sūtras. Seminal works like aṣṭāṅga hr̥daya and mānasollāsa (2nd century CE) laid down principles for health-centric cooking, emphasizing the systemic benefits of ingredients and their combinations. Later medieval texts such as bhojanakutūhala and kṣemakutūhala documented recipes that reflected trade and cultural influences, yet remained rooted in Ayurvedic frameworks. This structured approach balanced creativity with continuity, allowing the integration of new ingredients and techniques without compromising authenticity. Even a simple lemonade, for example, is valued not merely for taste but for its ability to alleviate vāta and stimulate agni, the digestive fire. In his Pākadarpaṇa, Nala Maharaja classifies recipes into sixteen categories based on six primary flavor profiles—

madhura, lavaṇa, kaṭu, tikta, āmla, kaṣāya—and forms or textures such as bhakṣya, bhojya, coṣya, lehya, and peya. This taxonomic tradition reflects the Ayurvedic view that true health lies in balance: “Samadoṣaḥ samāgniśca samadhātu malakriyāḥ Prasanna ātmendriya manaḥ svāstha ityabhidhiyate” (Sūruta-saṃhitā: Sūtra-sthāna, 15.10).

Where Ayurveda highlights systemic balance, modern food sciences explain cooking through molecular transformations, flavor pairings, and nutrient interactions. This contrast and complementarity are evident in contemporary gastronomy. Television shows and chefs bring forth innovations such as rasam khowsuey—layering flavors in exciting ways—while molecular gastronomy introduces foams, flash-frozen desserts, and deconstructed presentations. Computational gastronomy now enables systematic analysis of flavor pairing across global cuisines[3,4,5].

Trends like sourdough bread, celebrated today for its slow natural fermentation[6], resonate with India's age-old mastery of similar processes in idli and dosa. Regional cuisines also illustrate this continuity across cultural contexts. The steamed Siddu of Himachal Pradesh shares affinities with Tamil Nadu's uzhundu kozhukattai. Modaks of Maharashtra, patolis of Goa and Gujarat, and pithas of Assam and Bengal embody similar concepts adapted to regional flavors. Despite geographical and cultural divergences, these culinary practices are underpinned by shared flavor profiles and cooking methodologies that conform to the epistemic frameworks of the Indian knowledge traditions.

Thus, India's culinary wisdom offers not just a living legacy but also a fertile ground for interdisciplinary research. By bridging pākaśāstra and Ayurveda with modern scientific insights, we can rediscover the holistic foundations of Indian cooking, enrich global gastronomy, and redefine India's soft power on the world stage.

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- lokopākara by Chavundaraya
- mānasollāsa by someshwara
- bhojanakutūhala by Raghunathasuri
- kṣemakutūhala by Sri Kshema Sharma

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