# Preserving Food, Preserving Culture: A Heritage of Rajasthani Folklore and Tradition

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**Abstract.** Food constitutes a vital element in the cultural spectrum while reinforcing one's identity. Ancient Indian thought categorised the body as *annakosh* (food-sheath), highlighting the role of food in making of the human constitution. Food has long been considered as art and culinary practices are deeply regionalized in the world with communities developing peculiar food habits and incorporating these in their social and cultural structures through rituals, customs, folklore and collective tradition, having a close affinity with the environment. Thus, food acts as a cultural marker and cultural bridge. The present paper focuses on the preserved foods from Rajasthan's desert area, such as *ker, ber, sangri, kachri, mangodi, panchkuta,* and *sogra,* etc., which demonstrates the indigenous preservation techniques using natural resources, which I have named as the Sun-Salt-Sand method. Food acts as a representative of cultural heritage and tradition by being an integral part of marriage rituals, seasonal festivals, and everyday practices of the regional communities. Folk narratives and songs, like *karma Bai ro khichdo* (sung during Krishna temple rituals), further embed these culinary traditions in the community's collective cultural memory and saves them from being perished.

The present analysis is situated on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which shows how daily food preservation practices shape one's social and cultural identity. It also draws on Jan Assmann's theory of *cultural memory*, arguing that preserved foods act as mnemo-technical devices, preventing forgetfulness and building tradition through remembrance. Food extends memory beyond the individual by embedding Rajasthani cultural identity in shared rituals, customs, oral traditions, and material practices. In this sense, food preservation is not only a matter of sustenance but also become a mechanism for sustaining cultural identity across generations.

**Keywords:** cultural memory, folklore, tradition, habitus, Rajasthani identity, food preservation.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Food, Culture and Ecology

Food has always been an essential component for human sustenance and nourishment. From the earliest times, humans hunted or gathered to feed themselves, gradually learning to cook, season, preserve, and plan meals not just to survive, but also to nurture body, mind, and soul. Resonating with ancient Indian thought, the body,


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mind, and diet can be categorized into *rajasik*, *tamasik*, and *sattvik* forms in nature. It defines the body as *annakosh* (the food-sheath) bringing forth the importance of 'Food' as first step towards attaining *Nirwana* [1]. The imperative to endure prompted collection and storage of food for present and future needs, generated first for the individual and then kin. Over the time, the mere need to survive evolved into the aspiration to delight the senses and satisfy the spirit. Techniques of cooking and diverse dishes developed to meet not only physical hunger but also to satisfy emotional and aesthetic desires, reaching a state of *tripti* (contentment).

In classical Indian thought, Ayurveda also places great emphasis on *mindful eating*, food purity, on Seasonal Eating (*Ritucharya*) and the interplay of diet on body and mind. In *Taittiriya Upanishad* (3.7-3.10) [2], a conversation between a father and son has been cited here, who also happened to be *Guru* (teacher) and *shishya* (pupil):

"Rishi *Bhrigu* (the son), asks his father *Varuna* to explain the most basic element of the universe from which all creation originates. The father suggests him to perform *Tapas*, or internal research, to discover the answer for himself. The son goes into penance and returns to his father with the realization that the entire universe is made of 'Anna' (अन्न), or matter. Everything in the universe relies on Anna, and everything eventually returns to Anna. The father is pleased that his son has identified this common principle of the external universe."

The matter-based aspect of our physical being is called *Annamaya Kosha*, or food-sheath, which is sustained and nourished by our food. This highlights the importance of food for life and living.

In the study of human societies and structure, the world is often divided and analysed through multiple dimensions- political boundaries, socio-economic dimensions, ecological conditions, resource distribution, and contemporary emergence of distinction based on food cultures is growing because of globalization and a trend towards Food Tourism. India, within this global framework, is popularly represented as the "land of curries," yet such a description only hints at its extraordinary diversity. Within the Indian subcontinent, various ecological zones and agro-pastoral cultural communities have generated regionally distinct cuisines; each deeply embedded in the local environment, customs, traditions, and socio-economic fabric consists of *Habitus* in and out. These culinary practices are the strongest bond connecting people to their native places.

For instance, Bengal (having fertile deltaic ecology) has a rich tradition of rice and fish dishes while the Southern parts of India (because of the humidity) forms the basis for dishes like *dosa, idli, sambhar,* and sea-food in the coastal region. Kashmir's *kahwa* (a spiced tea with saffron) and dry fruits, shows how trade routes and climate influence local food traditions. The popular heritage cuisines like *dal-baati-churma* and *panchkuta saag* represents the desert habitus of the people of Rajasthan, because of scarcity of water, people are dependent on coarse grains like *bajra* (pearl millet) and barley as staple food crops. Different crops and dishes develop based on local conditions; rice grows well in areas with plenty of water, millet and barley thrive in dry regions, while fermented foods are common in humid climates. In this way, food acts as a significant regional and cultural marker of belongingness, reflecting on how communities have historically adapted to their environments, and over the time, woven these food habits and practices into their cultural identity, transforming and transcribing them into the psyche and aspects of folklore, rituals, traditions, and everyday customs.

Food constitutes as a vital dimension of the cultural spectrum of a group or community. Alongside apparel, rituals, religion, historical-mythology, ecology,

festivals, gatherings, music-dance, and language, food operates as a symbolic and lived expression of culture and collective identity. Each of these cultural carriers evolves through the sedimentation of practices, rituals, and shared meanings that are produced and reproduced through time and across generations, often acting as mnemonic techniques. The evidence of the diet as cultural continuum in Rajasthan may be traced back to thousands of years from Harappan civilization itself. In the age of globalization and multiculturalism where cuisines are turned into fusions, it is only Culture turned Heritage that works as modus operandi and prevents the traditional foods and cuisines from cultural dilution and cultural colonialism.

The paramount reason of this study is to explore how food preservation practices in Rajasthan functions simultaneously as strategies of survival and as carriers of cultural identity through mnemonic devices of folk practices by integrating Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* with Aleida and Jan Assmann's theory of 'cultural memory.' For that purpose, an extensive list of preserved Foods is also included, which carries the legacy imprinted on the minds of natives through *habitus*. Bourdieu [3] explains *habitus* as "the system of durable, embodied dispositions" that shape perception, taste, and practice. Within this framework, culinary habits and preservation methods in Rajasthan may be understood as embodied social expressions of historical experience embodying indigenous ecological knowledge through everyday culinary activities. Meanwhile, J. Assmann's ideas in "*Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*" [4] and "*Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*" [5], illuminates how "such practices are remembered through mnemonic devices such as rituals, oral traditions, folklores, and practices as external expressive forms of cultural codes" [5]. This study highlights the importance of documenting and understanding such traditional practices amid the pressures of globalization, climate change, and cultural homogenization simultaneously contributing to folklore, cultural memory studies, and food heritage scholarship.

The present study examines the function of food not only as a biological necessity but also as a symbol and preserver of cultural identity, contributing to the shared collective cultural memory of the desert eco-cultural zone. The preservation practices of food thus serve as both, archives of resilience for survival and texts of cultural continuity**,** offering insight into how human creativity transforms environmental constraints into enduring heritage.

### 1.2 Food, Memory and Identity

Memory plays a pivotal role in shaping both individual and collective identity, as it acts as an anchor for communities within shared cultural codes and symbolic systems. As Jan Assmann rightly observes in his seminal text, "cultural memory is local, egocentric, and specific to a group and its values", [4]. He also emphasised that collective remembrance is inseparable from the socio-cultural contexts in which it operates implicitly and explicitly. Expanding on this, Aleida Assmann, delineated "four interrelated formats of memory: individual, social, political, and cultural" [6]. Although she had dissected the defining features of each part of collective memory but the present Study argues that these cannot be understood in isolation, since identity is always contextualized according to one's place in history, and community. This study thus adopts the term *collective cultural memory* to describe this shared symbolic spectrum of Culture through which communities remember, enact, and preserve their local customary life and identity. "Cultural memory is encoded in myths, rituals, and oral traditions that continually reinterpret the past for the present, often blurring distinctions between history and myth. It reaches into the past only in so far as that past

remains reclaimable as "ours," affirming the intimate connection between memory and belonging" [4]. Aleida Assmann also noted that for ephemeral social memory to evolve into enduring collective memory, it must be structured and developed as the "institutionalization of remembrance". It can be possible through organized practices, such as plotting and maintaining of events in an affectively charged and mobilizing narrative, organising and celebrating, "through periodical commemorative events, establishing monuments and sites of relics and ritual performances encouraging collective participation; establishment of external visual and verbal signs as aids to the memory" [6].

These mechanisms anchor collective identity by periodically reactivating memory and enabling participatory recollection. "Shared memory, in this sense, becomes the basis of shared culture, linking individuals through common mnemonics expressed through rituals, customs, symbols, festivals and food habits. Yet, at every level, memory is marked by a tension between remembering and forgetting, a structural principle intrinsic to its operation", says Aleida Assmann [6]. What societies/communities/tribes choose to remember or suppress reveals not only psychological but also cultural dynamics, particularly in literate societies that externalize memory through media, archives, and textual repositories. Unlike purely individual memory, or temporal socially active communicative memory as explained by J. Assmann, "Cultural memory possesses a triadic structure encompassing remembrance, forgetting, and latency. The last referring to knowledge preserved in archives or collective repositories, existing in a dormant yet retrievable state" [7]. It answers our question of making of a culture and its role and relation with memory and formation of the identity.

Within this conceptual framework, food preservation practices in Rajasthan offers a vivid manifestation of collective cultural memory in action. As Jan Assmann differentiates between "*communicative memory*, which encompasses short-term, everyday recollections transmitted orally within three or four generations encompassing around 80-100 years, and *cultural memory*, which endures through symbolic carriers such as rituals, performances, and artefacts, one cannot deny that Food is an integral part of rituals, offerings, celebrations and ceremonies in every Culture" [7]. In the Rajasthani context, communicative memory is evident in the stories grandmothers tell about surviving drought by eating *ker-sangri*, roasted millet, or *phogla raita* as intimate, time-bound personal memories of endurance. Over the time, however, these survival or famine foods have been transformed into ritualized and celebratory cuisines representing the heritage and legacy of its people, such as *ker-sangri* being served at weddings and festivals, thereby entering the realm of cultural memory. This transforms Jan Assmann's claim "that cultural memory stabilizes identity through the selection, ritualization, and canonization of specific practices" [5], in this case, it is food. These specific Food habits emerged as an ecological compulsion but became a symbol of pride and heritage, exemplifying how memory reconfigures necessity into cultural consciousness.

Rajasthan's dry-desert environment, shaped by drought, famine, and scarcity, has led to food practices that serve as a storehouse of shared cultural memory and ecological awareness. "The historical famines have left lasting impacts on local cuisines, pushing communities to come up with new ways to use wild edibles, such as *toos*, *phog*, *bhurat*, *ker, ber*, *sangri*, and *kachari*" [8]. These famine foods became mnemonic signs of endurance, embodying what Aleida Assmann calls, "the 'connective structure' of cultural memory, where tradition is sustained through repetitive and performative acts

rather than monumental records" [6]. Proverbs and folk sayings, such as "*kahe fogji maghji, peepal faliya joya, thoda moth ar bajra, adak naaz kachu hoya"* [9], are example of this widely known oral wisdom. It means that Fogji (name of a person) and Maghji (name of a person) are saying that *peepal*, *faliya, moth,* and *bajra* are sown through our hard labour but weeds (edible and non-editable) will also grow beside it for our uses. These local sayings serve as mnemo-historical codes that encapsulates lived experience into oral wisdom for the progeny. Through these expressive forms, consisting of proverbs, sayings and riddles, the agro-pastoral communities of Rajasthan had converted ecological hardship into simple moral and cultural narratives of resilience.

The ongoing use of famine foods also illustrates what Bourdieu [3] describes "as '*habitus'*, a set of ingrained habits shaped by material conditions but also capable of fostering creative adaptation". Cooking with minimum uses of water, collecting food and fuel, preserving food through drying or salting (especially in the nomadic tribes), and maximizing nutrition from limited desert supply are practical techniques which reflects a kind of cultural attitude rooted in self-reliance and ecological balance. These preserving and cooking methods serves as act of memory. Each food preparation helps to remember and reinterpret the past in today's context. "Recipes, songs, and oral histories related to famine and preserved foods act as memory tools, passing on historical experiences across generations in communities with little or no written documenting" [4]. An important aspect of this tradition is the community's involvement in the preservation of various foods. This includes collecting ingredients and preserving them while singing folk songs, transforming the simple acts into collective cultural ritual. This can also be traced in traditional Marwari weddings, even in modern times.

Food serves as mnemonic code for remembrance by blending taste, technique, and tradition to express belonging and continuity. It records the past and illustrates a way to show the desert's moral and ecological order. Using ideas from J. Assmann [4] and A. Assmann's [6] theory of '*cultural memory*', and '*habitus*' by P. Bourdieu [10], we can understand Rajasthani food preparations as cultural codes that shape and affect daily lives of the inhabitants. The 'act of preserving food' connects to the community's historical awareness. Thus, we can say that besides sustaining, food also acts as a living story of resilience, cultural symbol and a tangible piece of memory.

## 2. Preservation Practices in Rajasthan

### 2.1 Eco-cultural zone of Rajasthan

The regional cuisines in India are not accidental diversities but collective embodied outcomes of ecological conditions, agro-pastoral practices, and shared histories. They reflect individual as well as collective *habitus*, through which communities sustain their distinct identity and sense of belonging to the culture different from Others. To study food in India, then, is to study the intersection of ecology, economy, history, and culture, which is an interesting blend connecting everything to food.

Here, Pierre Bourdieu's idea of habitus is particularly helpful. "Habitus describes the set of long-lasting, internalized habits that shape how individuals and communities see, act, and recreate their world" [11]. It is influenced by historical social conditions, shapes our current practices and develop 'taste'. In relation to food, *habitus* helps us understand why certain communities naturally favour specific tastes, textures, or

cooking methods. "These specific 'preferences' are not just personal choices but they are social behaviours developed over time affected by the environment, upbringing, and cultural repetition" [11]. Food choices and habits, like patterns of dress or rituals of hospitality, are inscribed within the body, becoming a naturalized expression of cultural belonging. Like the bodily dispositions of preferring *bajra* to rice, or dried *kersangri* over fresh vegetables, are manifestations of such embodied cultural dispositions. These dispositions endure even when migrants move abroad, as "habitus is durable and transposable" [11]. Yet habitus also incorporates change, like the famine foods, which was once a necessity, now celebrated as heritage food. Food thus, becomes a vehicle of cultural memory and social belonging reproduced in new contexts as *habitus* is not static but dynamic, allowing for adaptation and reconfiguration. Similarly, Assmann's theory of *cultural memory* [6], helps frame food traditions as, "mnemonic systems that preserve the community's ecological knowledge, social values, and cultural identity across generations". While *habitus* locates memory within the body as socially embedded gestures, tastes, and perception, collective cultural memory externalizes it in rituals, traditions, texts, folktales and narratives. Thus, in Rajasthan, food preparation acts as an active site of identity formation, communal support, ecological adaptation, and repository of cultural continuity in the present times.

### 2.2 Preservative foods and techniques

The eco-cultural zone of Thar Desert of Rajasthan consists of arid and semi-arid environment with scarcity of water, fewer fresh vegetables, less plantation, abundance of heat and sand, reliance on grains, pulses, millets, dairy and methods for long preservation to sustain lives as it is an agro-pastoral based community. The region is often struck by famine (*akaal*) and drought. According to the *Economic Survey of Rajasthan* [12], as many as 6,122 villages, which affected a total population of 74.28 lakh people suffered from famine and frequent droughts. These ecological constraints shaped the repertoire of Rajasthani cuisines (hailed as food of resilience or Famine Foods) which embodies the challenges and creativity of its habitants which has become integral to Rajasthani identity. Thus, the diet of Rajasthan, especially in the desert zone, becomes a kind of *terroir,* a confluence of climate, water, soil, seasonality, culture, and spiritual aspiration. The following folk saying describing the state goes as:

*"Pag pungal, sir Merta, udraj Bikaner*
*Bhoola chooka Jodhpur, thavo Jaisalmer"*

It signifies that "Famine stays, with its feet in Pungal (a location in Rajasthan), its belly in Bikaner, and its head in Merta; it occasionally visits Jodhpur but has its permanent residence in Jaisalmer (Famine prone area)" [13]. Rajasthani food and cuisine involve a minimum use of water and must use of *pholra* (dried red chilli) in its preparation, with rich cattle wealth, milk and buttermilk (*chaach*) and clarified butter (*ghee*), locally grown beans and indigenous plants, they make savoury dishes with the available resources.

There is rich wild flora that is used as famine food in the desert and the locals have developed various techniques to preserve these foods, which I have named as *Sun-Salt-Sand Method* of preservation because of the extensive use of these natural resources. The techniques of which we will discuss alongside of the foods. While it is challenging to compile a comprehensive list of edible grains and various wild foods utilized by local

communities, I have made an effort to cover the key foods and dishes along with their regional names, focusing on only those that have a basis in preservation.

## 3. Based on Ethno-botanical Foundations

Khejri (*Prosopis cineraria*)

Known as the "Kalpavriksha of the Desert," *Prosopis cineraria* (Linn.) is central to Rajasthan's ecological and cultural landscape [13]. It provides food, fodder, and shade while improving soil fertility. The tender pods, *Sangri*, is used as *saag* (vegetable) and is parboiled in salt and then sun-dried until completely dehydrated to preserve and use throughout the year, especially during droughts. The gum (*bantaka*) and bark also serve as famine food substitutes and traditional medicines. *Sangri* vegetable especially *panchkuta saag* is important in Rajasthani tradition, and customary made during the occasion of *sheetla ashtami* aka *basoda*, during marriages, and *jeeman* (food served during community gatherings). The famed *ker-sangri* combination is both a nutritional strategy and a mnemonic culinary expression of resilience, born out of famine, now celebrated as heritage cultural food. This tree is considered as sacred and worshipped, cutting it is considered as a grave sin dooming seven generations. The tree's sacred status is reflected in local proverbs like, *"Sir santey rukh rahey toh bhi sasto jaan"* [14], means to protect the khejri (*rukh*), if one has to sacrifice herself, consider it a cheap bargain. It is also associated with Bishnoi rituals of environmental protection. The khejri tree is the lifeline of the desert living beings as every part of it is used for some purpose; it also helps to bind the soil together.

Ker *(Capparis decidus)*

This hardy shrub thrives in saline soils and epitomizes desert resilience. Its unripe berries and buds are pickled and form part of *Ker-Sangri* vegetable, Rajasthan's iconic desert dish. Beyond nutrition, *ker* symbolizes endurance and adaptability, qualities venerated in desert folklore as plucking it is a tedious and hard job [15]. Gathering *keriya* is usually done by the women, they go in groups in the desert to collect them that's why many folksongs are sung during these gatherings in praise of *ker*. Fresh *ker* berries are gathered before full ripening and soaked in salted water for several days to remove their natural bitterness. They are then sun-dried, coated in ash and stored in airtight earthen containers. Typically, earthenware is used for storage and other uses in the region because of socio-economic constraints.

Kumathiya or bhatkaniya (Senegalia senegal)

Formerly classified as *Acacia senegal*, *Kumathiya* produces seeds that are vital components of the traditional dish *Panchkuta Saag*. "The tree also exudes gum arabica, used for both medicinal and culinary purposes. Its inclusion in local cuisine reveals an intimate ecological awareness and waste-minimizing ethos as its powder is also consumed mixing in the *sogra* flour" [16].

*Kumathiya* are flat, fibrous pods of the *Acacia* tree, collected at maturity, washed, and then sun-dried for several days. In some of the regions, the pods are lightly roasted or parboiled before drying, improving their digestibility and storage life. Once dried, they are stored in earthen or metal containers, sometimes layered with ash or sand to absorb residual moisture, preventing them from fungi. During scarcity, these pods are soaked overnight and cooked with spices, often paired with *ker* or *gonda* to form composite dishes.

Kachri (*Cucumis callosus / C. pubescens*)

*Kachri* (also known as *kachariya*, or *kachar*) refers to wild cucurbit species such as *Cucumis pubescens* and *Cucumis callosus* (often considered a synonym of *Cucumis melo*), native to the arid regions of Rajasthan, India. These hardy vines produce small, striped, melon-like fruits that thrive in sandy, nutrient-poor soils with minimal water, making them well suited to desert climates. It is widely used and referred in traditional Rajasthani folklores and foods. "*kachri* adds a mild tang to dishes such as *saag*, *raitas*, *kadhi*, pickles, and chutneys, while its dried powder (can be compared with dried mango powder) serves as a natural preservative, meat tenderizer and taste enhancer. Nutritionally, it is rich in water and dietary fiber, promoting hydration and digestion, and is valued in folk remedies for its cooling, digestive, and diuretic properties" [13]. As a low-maintenance, drought-tolerant crop requiring little to no chemical inputs, *kachri* supports sustainable agriculture by conserving soil moisture, preventing erosion, and thriving on marginal lands, thereby contributing to ecological stability and rural livelihoods in Rajasthan's desert ecosystem.

For storage, when the *Kachar* is sewn in a thread and dried as a whole under the sun, it is called *gotaka,* used in the *panchkuta saag* and when they are sliced in half and then sun-dried it is called *kokala*. Both have different uses in the local culinary culture.

Gonda/Gundiya or lasuda (*Cordia myxa*)

The *gonda* fruit, a *jangli fal* (wild fruit), known for its sticky pulp and mild sweetness, is commonly dried in shade rather than direct sunlight to preserve its natural sugars and nutrients. The dried wild fruits are stored in jute or cloth bags, which are then hung in cool, ventilated spaces. During lean months, *gonda* serves as food and medicine, known for its digestive benefits. It is also a key ingredient in the five dried vegetable mix *panchkuta saag*. Occasionally, *gonda* is candied in jaggery syrup or pickled with *ker*. This shows a unique blend of preservation and flavour that highlights the culinary practices of desert communities.

Bhe or kamal kakdi *(Nelumbo nucifera)*

The lotus stem, also known as *bhe* in Rajasthan, is the edible rhizome of *Nelumbo nucifera*, which is often called the Indian or sacred lotus. This aquatic plant, produces long, cylindrical rhizomes that grow horizontally under the mud in ponds and lakes. These rhizomes store nutrients and are prized cooking ingredient throughout India. In Rajasthani cuisine, sun-dried *kamal kakdi* is used in curries and pickles, particularly in *panchkuta* and *ker-sangri achaar* (pickle), where it is appreciated for its crisp texture and mildly sweet, earthy flavour. Besides its culinary uses, lotus stems have cultural and religious significance, and is an important ingredient for offerings during worshipping rituals.

Mothee (*Cyperus rotundus*)

As noted by King [15], the *Mothee* refers to the tubers of Hymenochate grossa and various Cyperus species. During times of extensive food shortages, locals often excavate these tubers to eat. Once the tough fiber and dark skin are peeled away from the tubers, the remaining solid portion is dried, ground into a powder, and then used to bake bread. Occasionally, a small amount of flour is incorporated into the mixture to create *sogra* [13].

Baru (*Sorghum halepense*)

Baru can endure long periods of drought, making it a reliable plant during famines. Its capacity to tolerate high salt levels in the soil also makes it useful during scarcity and *Akaal*. People often feed this species to cattle as fodder or for grazing [13].

Ber or Borti (*Zizyphus nummularia*)

A thorny, hairy bush is quite common in dry open plains of the desert, which thrives even during years with little rain. The fruits are round and turn scarlet red when fully ripe. It can be eaten fresh. They are also collected at the start of winter, dried, ground, and sifted. The resulting powder can be eaten on its own or mixed with jaggary or sugar, or with Bajra flour. The stone of the fruit is very hard and difficult to digest. Their persistence in oral poetry and songs associates *ber* with sweetness, endurance, and fertility; qualities reflecting the ecological ethos of the desert [17]. Considered as sacred, there are many folksongs and stories associated with it and this shrub is worshipped primarly on *jhada-jhudi vrat* (local fasting ritual), when the women worship it and adore it with cotton in accordance with local custom which in turn assures that it could be protected.

Phog (*Calligonum polygonoides*)

A very common bush that grows especially on bare sand dunes and has significant value as food and in culture. During the months from February to April when hardly anything is available, the native uses its buds called *Lassan* (local language), with buttermilk (called *Chaach*) and salt [13]. It is said to have cooling property and have cultural importance as this was used during *gangaur* festival along with another delicacy called *dhokla* made with *bajra* flour and cooked in *bur* bush (a widely grown desert bush). According to a local historical-myth, *Maa Karni* offered Raav Bika (founder of Bikaner estate) food comprised of *khichdo, imlani, phogle ro raito* and *badiya ro saag* when he came to establish his state. That is why, from that onwards people who belongs to this region celebrate *Akhateej* (akshaytritya) irrespective of where they live and make these same dishes, which was offered by goddess *Karni* to *Bika* [18]. Thus, the people have associated their sentimental and cultural value with the food and the food have managed to save the legacy of the culture.

Sevan *(Lasiurus hirsutus)*

This is one of the most valuable types of grass for livestock in the region. It often creates large areas of pasture land. It grows abundantly in the districts of Jaisalmer, Phalodi, and Bikaner. People collect the seeds, grind them, mix them with Bajra flour, and bake them into *Sogra*. Anything, which is mixed with Bajra flour for taste, necessity or cultural value purpose to make bread (Rota), is called *Sogra* [13].

Bhurat *(Cenchrus biflorus)*

Often called the “queen of Jaisalmer's desert grains,” *bhurat* has historically been a famine grain. It has served as a supplementary food there for ages. It is one of the most common grasses in the area which emerges after a few early showers. It grows throughout in the desert and is harvested in both normal and dry years. In times of hunger and shortages, this plant often flourishes when other vegetation struggles to survive. It is considered the most nutritious food to rely on during famines. *Khankhara*, a delightful dish, which can last several days, is prepared by combining *Bhurat Atta* with *Toos* seeds. The flour is mixed with ghee and sugar for children and is commonly

utilized during fasting rituals. Its ceremonial use emphasizes the link between ecology, traditions, and nourishment [19].

*Tumba or Toos* (Citrullus colocynthi)

This hardy, trailing perennial cucumber can be found growing on sandy dunes and open plains across this area. It is particularly prevalent in the Barmer, Jaisalmer, and Bikaner districts and used sometimes for medicinal purposes. The plant tends to create extensive patches on loose sand. "To make them edible, they are gathered and rinsed multiple times with salt water to eliminate the bitter compounds primarily located in the surrounding pulp then they are placed in small holes dug in the sand and covered with regular salt. After several weeks, they are then washed, dried, grounded, and are ready to be used" [13]. "The seeds of *Tumba* are incorporated with *Moth* flour (*Phaseolus aconitifolius* Jacq.) to create thick chapattis. They are also mixed with *bajra* flour to make *sogra* and *khankara*. These dishes were crucial during famine as they can fill the stomach and last for several days, highlighting how local communities transformed ecological challenges into food sources" [20]. Its uses became a part of the habitus.

Matira *(Citrullus lanatus)*

Considered as sacred fruit, this species of watermelon, originally from tropical Africa, can also be found in the Thar Desert, and is an annual vine-like plant. It is considered as a delicacy and rich water source for quenching the thirst. A single plant has the ability to spread over a substantial area and yields numerous large fruits. Each fruit can weigh anywhere between 20 and 25 kilograms. Regarding the fruit, Elphinstone commented, "In the heart of such a dry region, the watermelon, which is the most succulent of plants, flourishes abundantly. It is truly remarkable to observe melons measuring 3 to 4 feet in circumference thriving in the sandy arid conditions of the desert. Locals assert that a large melon is capable of quenching the thirst of both a camel and its rider" [13]. People consume the *Matira* while it is fresh. The seeds are dried and ground into a flour, which is subsequently blended with Bajra flour to create Sogra. When these small flat seeds are sun-dried, they are said to taste similar to almonds. In typical years, there is such a surplus of fruits that many are given to livestock. *Matira* are so important to the people of this region that without it, it is impossible to worship *Lakshmi-Ganesh* in the Diwali Pooja (worshipping ritual). It is also used in various *Poojas* and rituals, one of which is *chandani chaudash* when a hole is made in the *matira,* and left for the whole night in the direct light of the moon and eaten the next day as *Prasad* (sacred food). Small unripe *matira*, called *loya* is used for making vegetable either alone or mixed in *panchmel saag.*

Til *(Sesamum indicum)*

The seeds that remain from this species have been noted as a substitute for food. King [15] mentions, "After the oil has been extracted from *S. orientale*, the remaining seeds are not converted into bread. Instead, they are simmered with water to make soup. In *Marwar*, this product is primarily preserved by *Baniahs* (merchant-class), for times of food scarcity. It has a long shelf life, often lasting for many years without spoiling, aside from a change in colour." Additionally, it is utilized in various dishes as a seasoning.

Imli *(Tamarindus indica)*

The *Imli* is a notable evergreen tree that is believed to originate from Abyssinia and Central Africa, commonly found in centres of the village (*chauhata*) and around water wells. Its seeds have a dark reddish-brown outer layer and a creamy inner kernel. People routinely consume these seeds by grinding them into a powder and using the mixture to make bread. Those with lower incomes often roast and chew them as a substitute for betel nut, and, village women favour them as well. The pulp of the fruit has a tangy flavour and is frequently utilized in daily meals, particularly in a soup known as *amalwani* or *imlane ka pani*, which is specially prepared in the hot summer months for its refreshing qualities, made and stored in clay pots, and traditionally eaten with *khichda* or *kheech*.

Among the seasonal vegetables, which consists of a short period of rains, *khumbhi* (one of the varieties of wild mushrooms) is considered as a treat. There are five important green vegetables of the desert, consumed either separately or mixed together called *panchmel saag*. They are as follows: *Kakdiya, Faliya, Loya, Tindsi,* and *Kachar*. Interestingly, these vegetables are also dried through sun-salt-sand method and preserved for emergency use. Today, it becomes a tradition in the local households to preserve these and used as offering to the local deities. They are also used for gifting to the married daughters of the household as a token of blessing.

Kakdiya- (*Cucumis melo* subsp. *agrestis* var. *momordica*) is a wild variety of melon native to the Thar Desert, known for its remarkable tolerance to extreme heat and drought conditions. The fruit resembles a small, brownish-yellow melon that bursts open upon ripening. When unripe, *kakdiya* has a tangy flavor and is commonly used as a vegetable in local dishes. It is sliced and dried under the sun, known as *khelra*, is often incorporated into curries and chutneys. In Rajasthani cuisine, the raw and unripe fruit is especially valued for its distinct sour, melon-like taste, while its seeds are occasionally used for medicinal purposes. *Loya* is the unripened *matira, kachar* is already discussed elsewhere.

Tindsi- scientifically known as *Praecitrullus fistulosus* (Stocks) though sometimes referred to as *Benincasa fistulosa*, is a cultivated vegetable native to India, especially common in the northwestern parts of Rajasthan. Also known as the Indian round gourd or apple gourd, *tindsi* is a popular ingredient in regional cuisines. Its dried form, known as *fofaliya*, is prepared by threading the half-cut pieces and hanging them to dry in the sun for later use.

Phaliya- Gwarphali (*Cyamopsis tetragonoloba)* commonly known as cluster bean, is a hardy leguminous plant widely cultivated in arid and semi-arid regions of Rajasthan. Highly drought-tolerant, it thrives in sandy soils and extreme climatic conditions, making it a crucial crop for desert agriculture. In Rajasthan, *gwarphali saag* is a traditional delicacy often prepared with spices and sometimes combined with dried vegetables or legumes. It is also a part of ritual offerings, traditionally used in the season of winter for goddess worshipping. These are washed and sun dried for preservation.

Mothadiya- Moth Bean (*Vigna aconitifolia*) is a staple legume of Rajasthan's arid regions, valued for its exceptional resilience to heat and drought. The plant bears small pods containing brownish seeds that are used both as a pulse and as fodder for livestock,

moth beans form an essential part of the local diet, often cooked as *moth dal* or used in the famous *raab* and *panchmel dal.*

Several plant species of the Thar Desert historically served as vital famine foods, sustaining both humans and livestock during periods of extreme scarcity and drought, which then became cultural identity of the people and now preserved as a cultural legacy. *Cenchrus setigerus* (Dhaman) and *Dactyloctenium sindicum* (Tantia ghas) are grasses which provides valuable fodder for cattle, with their seeds occasionally grounded and consumed by people in times of need with *sogra*. *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* (Makara or Manchi), a widespread grass, yields rugose grains that are cooked into porridge often combined with *Phaseolus aconitifolium* to prepare *kheech*. "*Acacia jacquemontii* (Boo-banwali) produces a small quantity of gum sustaining life during famine; *Acacia leucophloea* (Arunja) provides edible bark, seeds, and pods; and *Acacia nilotica* subsp. *indica* (Banvalia) offers seeds and nutritious gum, though the seeds are potentially harmful if consumed excessively. *Tribulus terrestris* (Kanti), an annual herb, yields hard, spiny fruits whose powdered seeds are baked into *sogra. Salvadora oleoides* (Jal), an evergreen shrub thriving in saline soils, bears sweet fruits eaten fresh or dried, though excessive consumption may cause mouth irritation" [21]. *Eleusine coracana* (Madua) is a hardy cereal grown in less water, which is valued for its high nutritional content and commonly prepared with *rabri*, *ghat*, or *dalia*. Collectively, these wild natural produces exemplify the adaptive food practices and ecological resilience of desert communities of Rajasthan.

Composite Dishes: *Panchmel* and *Panchkuta Saag*

The popular *panchmel* and *Panchkuta saag* (vegetables) shows Rajasthani's understanding of the ecological knowledge and culinary skills creating edible dishes from wild plants. *Panchkuta* combines *ker, sangri, kumathiya, gonda*, and *kachri*. Sometimes, *pholra* and *bhe,* too are added. Traditionally, they are eaten with *sogra* or *bajra rota* (chapatti). It is a custom to prepare *panchkuta* during *Sheetla Ashtami* and is made during every communal gathering as it reflects one's sincerity in sharing of the food. Once a famine food, it now holds the status of heritage food representing Rajasthani cuisine on the global platform [22].

The other dish is *panchmel saag*, made from five types of green vegetables. It is prepared only during the season and preserved for use in times of need. The vegetables used are *kakdiya, loya, tindsi, kachar, and faliya* (Santosh Devi, personal communication, October 2025). A variety of pickles, such as *ker-gunda achar, sangri-ker*, and *pholra* (red-chili), are also made. Oil and spices serve as preservatives, and the airtight containers of pickles are then placed under the sun. These dishes are living records of desert ecology, highlighting culinary expressions of shared adaptations and cultural continuity. Additionally, chutney made from *lassan* (garlic)*, pholra* (dried red chilli), and *kachri* is popular among the people. It stands as one of the heritage foods of Rajasthan.

Millet and Legume Based Preparations

Millets and legumes form the backbone of Rajasthan's traditional diet. Crops like *bajra* (pearl millet), *makai* (maize), *jowar* (sorghum), and *barley* adapt well to arid soils and erratic rainfall [23]. The scarcity of fresh vegetables led to innovations of using pulses and gram flour (*besan*).

Major Staple dishes include:

- Raab- A probiotic-rich porridge made from *bajra atta* (flour) and buttermilk. When *bajra atta* and *moth atta* are mixed, fermented, and eaten cold it is called *dowa.*
- Ghaat- A fermented millet dish consumed during winters.
- Bajra Kheech or *kheechda*- A mixture of millets and lentils, symbolizing frugality and health. It is made up of whole grains. Traditionally made during *akhateej* festival and other festivity.
- Baati- usually made from bajra flour and somewhat hard. The small round balls are cooked in *chulha* and coated in ashes for longer uses. When it is mixed with *dal* and *ghee* it becomes softer to eat. Earlier, these were carried by the nomadic communities, and cooked in times of war, because they can last for several days. Later, these batis became the cultural symbol of the desert cuisine.
- Sirawadi / Rabodi ro Saag- Sun-dried millet *papads* cooked in yogurt gravy and then sun-dried, embodying techniques of preservation and reuse.
- Mangodi/ badi ro Saag- Made from ground lentils (usually moong or moth dal), the paste is seasoned with salt and spices, then shaped into small pellets and sun-dried on clean cloth or woven mats. Once dried, *badiya* can be stored for months in earthen pots. They are later fried or cooked with vegetables and curd-based gravies. It is an important part of the marriage rituals.
- Gatte ro saag (royal variant is *govind gatte)* - made with *besan* and spices, *gatte* can be fried and stored for later use [24].
- Papad ro saag- *Papads* are snacks made from lentil flour, typically using *Moth* flour. They are prepared with spices, seasonings, and other components such as onions and *mangodi* to create dishes like *papad-kanda ro saag,* and *Papad-badi ro saag*, or they can be enjoyed roasted.
- Bakar ke dhokle- A round cake that is steamed and made from flours such as chickpea, millet, and wheat, among others. The *bajra* dough is cooked in *bur* shrub and then crushed and mixed with ghee and jaggery to make *churma*.

Rajasthan's historical famines (e.g., 1899-1900, 1918-19, 1960s) cultivated a repertoire of emergency foods such as *Tumba*, *Bhurat*, *Phog, sangri*, *ker*, and *Andijaro*, etc. [13]. These are not merely subsistence items but "memory foods" that encode ecological resilience and ancestral wisdom. Their presence in oral traditions and proverbs ensures the transmission of environmental knowledge, traditions and cultural knowledge through rituals, customs and collective cultural memory.

## 4. Food and Folklore

Memory, here, collective cultural memory involves forgetting as much as remembering. Historical amnesia in Rajasthan is visible in the near-erasure of famine trauma from public discourse, despite recurrent droughts in the region. Instead of memorializing scarcity directly, the region encodes resilience into songs, proverbs, and food rituals and customs. For example, *sogra* with onion, *chaach* (buttermilk) and *lassan chutney* was once a famine food but now it is remembered nostalgically as the taste of the desert. There are many local proverbs or saying associated with the attributes of the food such as *"achar ro ghado" (interesting things), "ker ro khunto"*

*(resilient person), "kachar ro beej" (quarrelsome man), "burodo matiro" (virtuous person), "bur ra ladoo" (bland thing), "firaans ri baad" (light or shallow foundation), "chhatiparlo bor" (lazy)* [9, 25]. There is popular folk song, in which the woman is singing, remembering her lover who went abroad called '*Aave hichki'* (hiccups). According to local myth, when somebody is remembering you, you will get hiccups. Here, in the song, the lover is using simile of bajra. One of the lines goes as:

*"…nainna kann ro baajaro mhari chidiya chug chug jaaye,*
*bhanwar sa chidiya chug chug jaaye…* [26],*"*

It means that although she is seeing ample amount of bajra in the fields (which is a rare sight) but still she is not feeling happy because she is not able to see her lover.

In Rajasthan's oral traditions, folk ballads and valour stories are sung by *bhopa* (folk singers), *bhaat* (genealogists), *raav* (epic narrators), and local performers with *iktara* (musical instrument), through *fads* (scroll narratives), *nautanki* and other means, sometimes with musical accompaniment which functions as cultural codes that transmit memory. Informally though, women at all the occasions like while gatherings, collecting fuel and food or cooking food sing these folk songs and transform the daily practice into a ritual and custom. Food frequently figures in their performances or acts as metaphor and marker of identity. For instance, wedding songs often provides references of serving *dal-bati-churma*, *bajre ka dhokla, badiya ro saag* and *imlane ko pani*, or the mention of *rabri* and *chhachh* in lullabies, embedding food at the heart of communal identity and remembrance.

Rajasthani marriages have a tradition to invite all the women of the community 10-20 days prior the wedding to make *mangodiya*, the women then gather and sing songs related with the making of *badiya* and praising the delicacy, which is liked by even lord Ganesh. One such song goes like, *"Chokha chokha byaanv ra chudla molave, chokhi chokhi badiya dirawa, chalo binani aap joshi ghar haat, bindayakji bulawa…"* (Bhanwari Devi, personal communication, October 2025). It means that the women are gathered and planning to buy wedding bangles and make *badiya* and invite lord Ganesha from temple to come in the wedding. These *badiya* with *lapsi* then cooked for the marriage, to serve as a meal to the groom/bride and their close kin. Although, people now have ample food options for marriage feast but *mangodi* and *gatte ka saag* is still stuck in the memory of people, which cannot be forgotten so easily. There is one more ritual called *baan,* three or five days before marriage, in which little girls (*kunwari kanya*) have to make *mangodiya* for Ganapati. On every auspicious occasion like on birth, marriage, local festivals and annual festivals of Holi and Diwali too, Rajasthanis make vegetables of *ker-sangri,* or *badiya* with *lapsi* following the tradition. Making chutneys and pickles have become part of the collective conscious of the natives here because of the historical consciousness. Then there are folk songs related with pregnancy in which a pregnant woman is craving for different foods, excerpts of which goes as:

"*…chautho maas je jaccha rani ne lagiyo,*
*mharo khichadali mann raliyo raj,*
*mharo mann harkhyo ghewar me…*" [9],

It means that in the fourth month, the pregnant lady is craving for *kheech* and she likes *ghewar* (traditional sweet cuisine) too. Another excerpt is:

*"…bhave dhan ne fina roti dal, keriya to bhave*
*o jaccha rani ne chaapar wale taal ra…"* [9],

The meaning goes that the husband likes lentil and chapatti but the expecting mother likes *ker* from a place near pond. Likewise, there are folk songs related to *ker, ber,*

*faliya, matira, etc*. Below is another *lokgeet* (folk song) titled, "*Matire ki huns"* means, in craving/desire for *matira:*

*"…susaraji aage vinau, mhane bhave o susaraji hariyo re matiro,*
*laal matiro gulaab giri ro, bhave o mhane susaraji hariyo re matiro,*
*sal sal karta siro the khavo, mhari kul bau kaai khasyo o sarad matiro…*[9]*"*

Here, the daughter-in-law is demanding *matira* and requesting her father-in-law that she likes the green coloured *matira* whose pulp is rose-like and sweet. She is then reproaching him saying that you are eating *seera* (sweet made from flour and *ghee*) yet not giving your daughter-in-law *sarad* (sweet) *matira.*

Folk song telling about the craving for *ber/ boriya:*

*"…Laal pilangado pachhokade,*
*suti, je koi bujhe baat*
*bhanwar mhane boriya bhave…"* [9]

Here, the lady is asking from her husband red-coloured *ber* through the medium of a riddle. Another song singing of the craving for *faliya*:

*"…unche dhore chanwala baanya, ugya gol-mathol*
*hari hari faliya bhave o raj*
*hari hari faliya ghee me taliyan*
*faliya badi suwad o raj, gori ne faliya bhave…"*

Here, the woman is saying that she likes the green-coloured *faliya*, which is sown in the sand and now has been ripened; she wants to fry them in ghee as it will enhance its flavour, which she likes so much.

There are some folksongs sung in the temples for *bhog* (offering food to deity), which includes local cuisine too. Here, for the reference, we have taken one excerpt each from Krishna temple and Karni Mata temple *Bhog Arti*:

*"Thali bhar ke lyayi re khichdo uper ghee ki batiki, jeemo mhara shyam dhani*
*jeemave beti jat ki…Aj jimau tane re kheechdo ghaal rabdi chacch ri…"* [27]

Karma Baai is a local saint and devotee of Krishna, whose tale of praise is sung in the Marwar region. She belonged from a *jat* (local community) family and here, is offering *khichda* topped with lots of *ghee* (offering lots of *ghee* is a cultural trait which signifies as offering lots of love) to lord Krishna. She is feeding *khichda* with *raabdi* made from *chaach*.

*"…ghewar pudi pakwan meethai khatras is thali,*
*aap arogyo mat ishwari chandi chirtali…"*

This is an offering song sung in Karni Mata temple, offering various foods like *ghewar, puri* (fried chapatti), sweets and *khatras* [28].

Cultural memory often integrates myths into formation of identity. Historical knowledge is generalized knowledge without any affinity but historical myths are defining principles of the culture where people epitomize and honours the acts, deeds, social life and *habitus* of their local heroes and deities. One such folk ballad is associated with Maharana Pratap of Mewar, it is said that in times of struggle, he used to eat chapattis (*sogra*) made from the grass in the desert and songs were sung remembering his patriotism. In Rajasthan, droughts and scarcity are transformed into symbolic capital for resilience and community cohesion.

A popular Rajasthani folk tale recounts that when Rao Jodha, the founder of Jodhpur, lost control of his fort and sought to reclaim it, he once took shelter in a humble *dhani* (hamlet). Hungry and weary, he requested food from an elderly woman living there. That old lady served him hot *kheech* (a porridge like dish made from bajra) in a

*thali* pouring ghee above it. Impatient and unaware of the heat, Rao Jodha attempted to eat it by placing his hand directly into the centre of the *kheech*, as a result, he burnt himself. Watching it, "the old lady advised him with simple yet profound wisdom: "Don't be foolish like Jodha, when you eat *kheech*, you should begin from the sides, not from the middle." This metaphorical lesson reportedly inspired Rao Jodha, who realized that just as one must approach the hot *kheech* from the periphery, he should also reclaim his lost territory gradually from the surroundings" [29]. This tale thus conveys a moral about strategy, patience, and foresight, reflecting the didactic nature of Rajasthani oral traditions.

There was a historical battle fought between the Rajput princely states of Bikaner and Naguar in 1644 AD, popularly known as '*Matire ri Raad'* (Quarrel over a Watermelon) which was ignited by a dispute over a *matira,* which grew on a vine on Bikaner's side but whose fruit dangled into Nagaur's territory. The quarrel escalated into a devastating war costing thousands of lives, which signifies the importance of the green sacred fruit of the desert. The result came in favour of Bikaner state as the vine roots were in their territory, which became a legendary reference in the justice system. Sher Shah Suri almost losing the battle against Rana Sanga, once remarked, "I would have lost the throne of Hindustan for a handful of bajra (millet)." This kind of oral narratives captures the food practices and imprint it in the cultural memory [29].

Folklore functions as a living archive of food memory, transmitting ecological ethics through living acts and performances. The legends of the local deities like *tejaji, gogaji, pabuji, ramdevji, karni mata, etc.,* with their affinity and preferences of food helps significantly in achieving it. This memory serves as a medium to re-live the historical moment and establish the kinship with the deity. Like, there is a folktale that goddess *karni mata* on the occasion of *akhateej* (local festival) served food to the ruler of Bikaner, that's why from then on, on every *akhateej* the same food *of kheechda, amalvani, badiya ro saag* and *bajra rot* are made on this occasion in remembrance of that memory and as a blessing of the goddess. Food traditions anchor identity by binding past experiences into current practices too. As Assmann [5] also notes, "diaspora communities often elevate cultural memory into identity markers, treating them as sacred inheritance". This is a main reason behind associating foods with rituals and customs. The taste of *bajra khichdi* with *imlane ka pani* may evoke for an emigrant Rajasthani the intimate sense of home, even if they had forgotten the ritual context. Folklore preserves food memory by embedding it in songs, proverbs, and festivals. As Assmann notes, rituals stabilize memory through repetition and symbolic encoding. The orality of Rajasthan's culture reinforces these codes which Assmann [6] argues, serve as "mnemotechniques," ensuring the continuity of memory across generations without reliance on writing.

The local fasting practices and festivities such as *teej, chauth vrat, gangour, goga navmi, teja dashmi, bhog* (food offering) with a culture of listening and telling folktales associated with the local deities and plants and animals, preserves these foods and techniques through the medium of folklores. It also became necessary to complete the rituals by offering the particular sacred foods to receives their blessings.

## 5. Conclusion

Food acts as a strong mnemonic device of collective cultural memory, establishing and maintaining the coherence between ecology, humans, culture and identity. The

harsh and arid desert ecology with agro-pastoral societies has historically influenced food practices in the region. Living and adapting in harsh ecological conditions while showing such resilience in keeping with the nature is truly, can be seen in the food preparations of the region. In today's modern global world when transportation made easy to access green and fresh food items to be delivered at the doorstep, people are still clinging to their traditional food practices, and desert produces are still cherished because of their cultural significance. This also helps in protecting the environment from exploitation. Bourdieu's idea of *habitus,* helps significantly in explaining how these food gatherings and practices developed as social habits, became part of the lives and became irreplaceable means in fulfilling certain rituals, customs, following the local traditions. These habits over the time deeply influenced and shaped one's personal 'taste' while reinforcing the cultural legacy in everyday cooking. Like the giving of food items such as *mangodia, papad, gatte,* dried *panchkutta* to the daughters in their marriages is still followed (although there is no need now). Cravings for simple *sogra* and *chutney,* instead of multiple cuisines satisfies the regional people. The association of local food items for the offerings of local deities and providing the sacred status to all the plants and animals, which satisfies our hunger, is a means to protect them and the culture. According to Assmann's theory of cultural memory, which I have mentioned here as collective cultural memory since culture cannot exist in isolation, shows that these food traditions do more than just filling the bellies after becoming meaningful actions that helps in sustaining the shared identity across generations. *Matira* is still preferred and cherished instead of an imported avocado because it has cultural meaning and sacred status. A notable example of it is also the transformation of the famine foods into heritage foods, which now works as identity marker of a culture. People revere these foods to the extent that many villages in the region are named after plants producing foods like *sangaria, khejarili, kumathia, keriya,* etc. The association of these food items with the social and religious ceremonies, in folktales and folksongs, in everyday customs make them inseparable from the cultural memory. The taste and smell are the best trigger to awaken the dormant memory; thus, we can say that food prevents forgetting and helps reminiscence the past. Cuisines like *panchkuta saag, sogra, dal-bati-churma, bajra rota*, and *pholra chutney*, once associated with scarcity, are now seen as symbols of Rajasthan's cultural and regional identity. Their presence in elite spaces as exotic dishes is significant, which helps incredibly in preserving the ancient authentic preservation techniques. The commercialization of these preserved foods has also provided livelihoods to many. These desert foods are more than just regional specialities, as it became the defining factor of culture after the trend of food tourism. People started to participate in the whole cultural process from preparations to eating habits and religious significance. In short, experiencing food became synonym for experiencing culture. With its local ingredients, cooking methods, preservation techniques, and shared rituals, it conveys not only survival strategies but also the human ability to turn memory into meaning through Oral Traditions.

This also reinforces Assmann's view that cultural memory is a dynamic process. It constantly reshapes itself to include historical trauma in modern celebrations and senses of belonging [4]. With changed settings and conditions, with better food availability, one cannot change the 'taste' which was developed by the culture. The desert produce still attracts the people and gives the joy of 'homecoming' and 'cultural identity' to those who have left the place to settle elsewhere which is truly incredible.

However, because of globalization and multiculturalism in the food trends, there is a risk of cultural colonialism where dominant food cultures can overshadow local traditions can alter the taste and preference. It can create anxiety and loss of interest in traditional foods, which is not a thing to fret but increases the need for preservation through modern innovative methods of preserving the culture from destruction. Like the branding of 'heritage' and 'exotic' to the local cuisines surely, attract interest and need to preserve. Commercialization, authenticity and innovation yet traditional and cultural is the new recipe from being perished and still being relevant. This shift from famine to festivity, from scarcity to heritage, local to global, demonstrates how cultural memory in Rajasthan balances forgetting and awareness turning endurance into identity and sustenance into narrative. We can say that culture preserved the food and food preserved the culture.

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