

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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1.1 Introduction

Nepal is a land of diversity in terms of ethnicity, tradition, socioculture, topography, and agroclimate. This diversity is reflected in the variety of traditional foods and beverages with respect to the methods of preparation, ethnic origination, consumption pattern, organoleptic perception, and shelf life. It has over a hundred ethnicities with each major ethnicity celebrating their own indigenous customs, beliefs, foods, and traditions. The locals live under diverse geographical and environmental orientations, from the low plains (*Terai*), northward through the middle hills and up to the high plains of the mountain region. The customs and traditions are heavily influenced by the ethnicity, climate, land, and resources of these regions. The mountain region consists of *Sherpas*, *Dolpa-pas*, and *Lopas*, where the cuisine and culture are influenced by the Tibetan culture. The hilly region consists of mixed ethnicities such as *Magars*, *Gurungs*, *Tamangs*, *Sunuwars*, *Newars*, *Thakalis*, *Chepangs*, *Brahmins*, *Kshetris*, and *Thakuris*. It is a hub of diversity rich in culture, arts, and traditions. It holds half of the population of the country including the capital, Kathmandu. The major ethnic groups found in the *Terai* regions are diverse, such as *Brahmin*, *Kshetri*, *Rajput*, *Tharus*, *Dalai*, *Kumal*, and *Majhi*. These regions, specifically the regions adjacent toward the Indian borders, follow the Indo sociocultural traditions.

With such diversity, there is an abundance of varied indigenous foods within the country. They have distinctive characteristics, unique processing techniques, and high nutritive value. These foods are the representatives of the ideas and technologies that have been passed down for generations keeping the history, culture, and traditions of the country intact.

1.2 Food habits

The Nepalese food habit has adopted rice as its staple, as it is the most widely consumed food in the country. The main course is collectively known as *Dal–Bhat–Tarkari* (rice–pulse–vegetable) with a pickle of seasonal vegetables or fruits, and meat as a non-vegetarian option is commonly consumed twice a day. *Dal–Bhat–Tarkari* is synonymous with lunch or dinner; this signifies the ingrained influence of the cuisine in society. In the high hills and mountain regions where there is an insufficiency of rice, *Dhindo* (boiled maize/millet flour) is consumed as a staple as well as *roti* made up of wheat or other grains. In the *Terai* region the people consume *Dal–Bhat–Tarkari* and/or *roti*. Most Nepali cuisines consist of dairy products (curd, whey, ghee) in their serving. Some ethnic groups also consume fermented alcoholic drinks made from millet or rice as a beverage with respect to their cultures and traditions.

The food habits of the people have been changing over the years. The consumption of indigenous foods has decreased, seemingly playing an important role only during the festive seasons or religious rituals rather than an everyday diet. Eating out has become less of a novelty and more of a necessity, and fast foods seem to have more appeal to the general consumer, especially in the urban regions. Some foods have been adapted commercially into the mainstream such as *Newari* food, which has become one of the more popular cuisines and has been gaining cross-cultural popularity over the years. Especially, *Momo* (dumpling) has been a cultural phenomenon in the country, and most other foods have been considered as a lunch staple in the city areas.

1.3 Categorization of traditional foods

Each ethnicity has its own versions of indigenous foods consisting of cereals, pseudo-cereals, pulses and legumes, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat, etc. [Table 1.1](#) categorizes some common Nepali traditional food and beverages (NTFBs) by the raw materials being used.

1.4 Challenges and opportunities

The production of NTFBs is limited to the household level and/or cottage scale. There is a lack of recorded methods of preparation and processing techniques that are verbally handed down from generations. However, these foods are now receiving renewed interest in the scientific community to respect the local wisdom, improvising the process for enhanced safety and nutritional properties. Although some of the traditional foods such as *achar*, *chiura*, *churpi*, *sukuti*, and *selroti* have been found to be commercialized, it still requires extensive research and innovation on the pre- and postharvest operations of the raw materials and postproduction storage and distribution.

Table 1.1 Nepali traditional food and beverages.

Raw materials	Traditional foods
Cereals	<i>Anarasa, Bhakka, Chatamari, Chiura, Dhido, Golphuki, Hakuwa, Jand, Kasar, Khajuri, Khapsa, Khatte, Lunghakcha, Malpuri, Phiniroti, Selroti, Yomari</i>
Pseudocereals (Beverages)	<i>Chyang, Khareng, Raksi, Sigolya, Tongba, Thon</i>
Pulses and legumes	<i>Adauri, Bara, Furaula, Kinema, Kivati, Maseura, Satu</i>
Rice-pulse	<i>Bagiya, Dal-puri, Lakhamari</i>
Vegetables	<i>Achar, Gundruk, Kalfpapro, Kumbharauri, Sinki, Titaudo</i>
Fruits	<i>Achar, Chuk, Khalpi, Mada, Nimki, Tिताura</i>
Oilseeds	<i>Chiurigheu, Mustard oil, Philinge-achar, Til ko laddu</i>
Milk	<i>Churpi, Dahi, Gheu, Gundpak, Mohi, Nauni-gheu, Pustakari</i>
Meat	<i>Choyala, Kachila, Saryangma, Sukuti, Womyuk</i>
Fish	<i>Fish cake, Sidra, Sukuti-maccha</i>
Sugar	<i>Chaaku, Sakkhari</i>
Miscellaneous	<i>Khamirmana, Manapu, Murcha, Tama (Mesu), Tadi</i>

Some efforts by the government have also been made to provide information about traditional food items and underutilized indigenous grains to improve food habits through yearly food fairs at various locations within the country. On the other hand, traditional foods can also be a source of income if used wisely among the tourists visiting the various sites. As food and tourism are two sides of a coin, there is tremendous scope for the development of tourism with traditional foods and vice versa.

1.5 Conclusion

The consumption of traditional foods has decreased immensely during the past few years, probably due to the poor perception of quality, urbanization, and acculturation, where western influences have overhauled the food culture. It is an understatement to say that Nepal is a treasure trove for diverse traditional food items. Regrettably, the pace of the development and preservation of NTFBs is lacking in many ways. There is a need for documentation and promotion of traditional foods and to improvise the production technology without obstructing the historical culture. This will promote the acceptability and longevity of traditional foods that are in essence the epitome of Nepali history, culture, and diversity.